

Engaging Youth to Improve Substance Misuse Prevention:  
**Information Guide Series**



**Wake Forest University**  
**School of Medicine**

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The purpose of this document is to guide members of the substance misuse prevention workforce through decisions about whether, and how, to incorporate Youth Engagement (YE) into their prevention work. This document outlines how members of the prevention workforce can implement a youth engagement approach to improve prevention and includes information specific to incorporating youth engagement within the prevention portion of the North Carolina Substance Abuse Block Grant (SABG) system. Specifically, this document explains different models of YE, provides a decision-making tool for organizations to determine the optimal YE model, gives examples of how YE can be incorporated into existing preapproved prevention strategies, and offers organizations further resources specific to different YE models.

### Comments and Suggestions:

Do you have a comment or suggestion? We'd like to hear from you! Please send comments and suggestions on the information and guidance provided in this document to:

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# Overview

The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services is expanding opportunities for the prevention provider workforce in North Carolina to use youth engagement within the Substance Abuse Prevention Block Grant (SABG). The purpose of these changes is to broaden the opportunities to engage youth in planning, tailoring, implementing, and/or evaluating prevention programming. Ultimately, this will increase the responsiveness of prevention to the needs of young people across NC and improve the reach and effectiveness of prevention programming.

The purpose of this document is to guide members of the substance misuse prevention workforce through decisions about whether, and how, to incorporate Youth Engagement (YE) into their prevention programming.

**Youth Engagement (YE)** is an approach to prevention. It refers to prevention organizations effectively engaging youth as leaders or partners in planning, tailoring, implementing, or evaluating prevention programming.

YE can be used alongside numerous prevention strategies (see Table 1 on page 18 for examples of how YE can be incorporated into various strategies from the NC preapproved strategies list). YE is optional, prevention organizations may choose if, when, and how to incorporate YE into their programming. YE is meant to improve prevention and must be done thoughtfully to be effective. This guide describes different YE models and outlines considerations for organizations, describes specific examples, and offers further resources specific to different YE approaches.

**Note:** The brief examples provided in the following “What might this look like” sections for each of the four YE models highlight some ways that YE can be incorporated into existing preapproved strategies in NC. The examples do not summarize all required best practice steps; prevention organizations must follow best practices steps detailed in NC strategy guidance documents.

# Definitions

In the context of the SABG, **Youth Engagement (YE)** refers to prevention organizations effectively engaging youth as leaders or partners in planning, tailoring, implementing, or evaluating prevention programming. The goal of YE is to improve the quality, reach, and effectiveness of prevention efforts meant for youth.

Youth can refer to young people between the ages of 11-14 (typically middle school students), 15-18 (typically high school students), or 19-25 (often referred to as “emerging adults” or “young adults”). (See Appendices A and B on page 23 for considerations about what age group to engage with in your prevention efforts.)

YE is not itself a “strategy” for prevention; rather, it is an approach that can be used alongside numerous prevention strategies (see below for examples of how YE can be incorporated into various strategies from the NC preapproved strategies list). Importantly, YE is optional within the NC Prevention system. This guide supports prevention organizations in expanding opportunities to meaningfully engage with young people in their work. Ultimately, YE is meant to improve how prevention organizations select, implement, and evaluate prevention programming for young people.

To be considered YE, youth must have **a meaningful role** in prevention programming. A meaningful role is when youth provide input to inform prevention efforts through a structured process. There are different models for structured processes to incorporate YE (see page 5), that range in the level of involvement for meaningful youth roles (see page 6).

YE *does not* describe prevention efforts that are simply delivered to youth (those efforts will continue to fall under Youth Prevention Education or Alternative Activities; see Table 1 for definitions and examples).

**Note:** YE is not itself a “strategy” for prevention; rather, it is an approach that can be used alongside numerous prevention strategies. Importantly, YE is optional within the NC Prevention system.

# Considerations for Choosing a Youth Engagement Model

This guide is a starting point for prevention organizations who wish to engage with youth in a meaningful way to improve their prevention efforts aimed at young people in their communities. Prevention organizations have different levels of interest, experience, and comfort engaging youth, and this guide has been created with this in mind. On page 5, we present a decision tool to point prevention organizations toward different YE models depending on their experiences. The pages after the tool provide additional information about YE models.

First, here are **three important things** to consider when thinking about incorporating YE into prevention efforts.

## 1 Consider organizational capacity

One key point for prevention organizations to consider is what **organizational capacity** they have available for engaging youth in prevention. Organizational capacity includes the resources, infrastructure, knowledge and skills, and culture that exist within the organization.

- *Resources* for YE include a convenient space for youth to have meetings; technology to connect youth with the organization; transportation to support youth attending meetings; and funding for stipends
- *Infrastructure* for YE include a dedicated staff person who will work with youth; a clear vision for YE; and process for engaging youth
- *Knowledge and skills* for YE include one or more staff members who have: experience effectively working alongside youth; undergone training in YE; content knowledge in community engagement; and content knowledge in youth development
- *Culture* for YE include the organization having: respect for young people and their ideas; a history of engaging with communities; an emphasis on learning and growing; and a commitment to sharing power and resources to serve communities

## 2 Consider youth capacity

Another key point for prevention organizations to consider is what current **youth capacity** they have access to.

- In this context, *youth capacity* refers to existing relationships or experience. This might include young people that an organization has previously worked with; relationships with young people in a community (e.g., through networks or through schools or after-school programs); or relationships with adults who work with young people and have their trust (e.g., teachers or local leaders)
- *Youth capacity* also refers to the knowledge and skills of youth themselves. Young people who have leadership experience; have undergone training to develop leadership skills; have undergone training in substance misuse prevention; who have expertise from their own lived experiences and communities; or who are interested in strengthening prevention

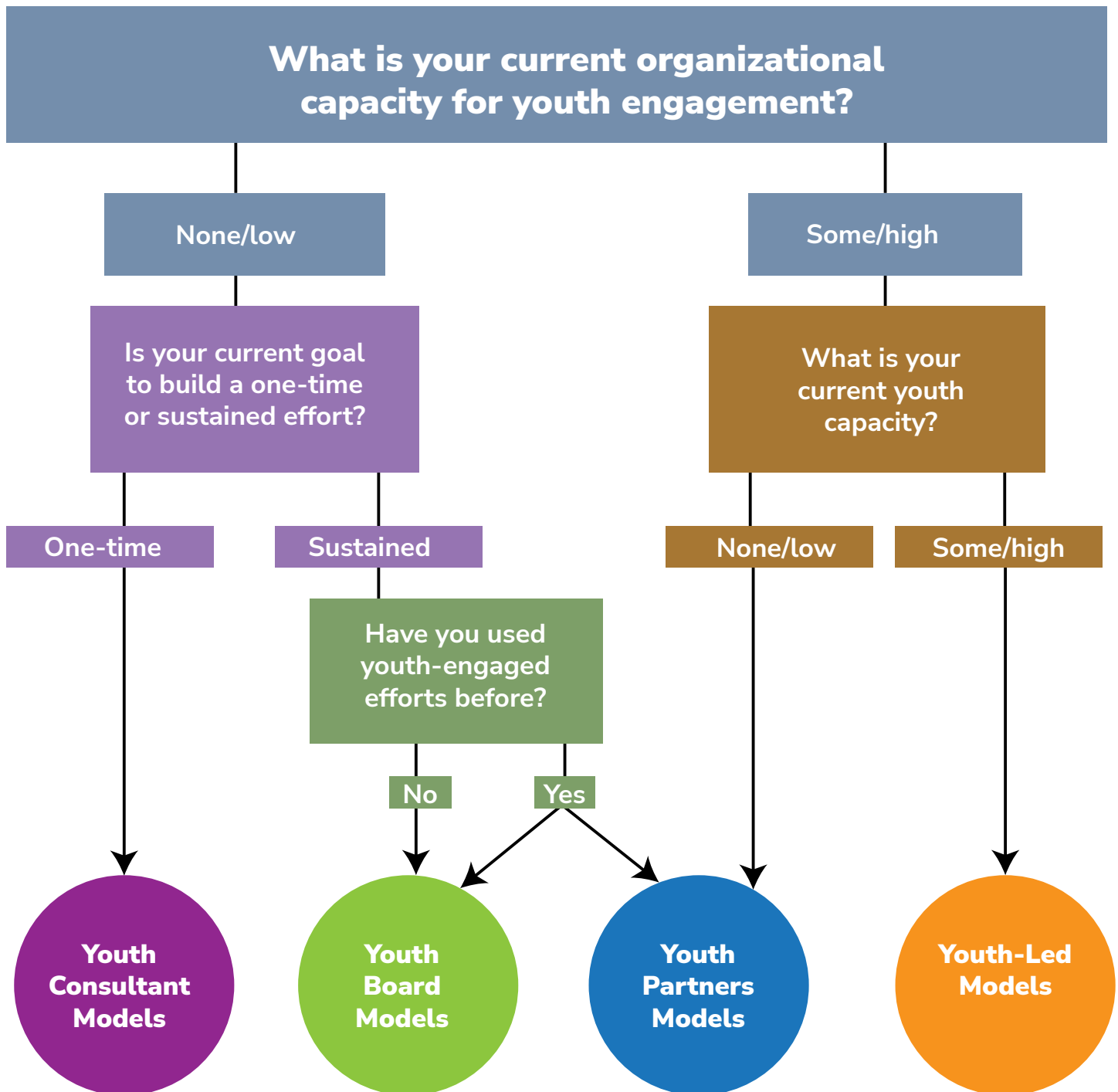
## 3 Consider the goal of youth engagement in prevention work

A third key point for prevention organizations to consider is their **goal** of engaging youth in their prevention work. It is especially important to determine whether the goal of YE is to get youth input on a one-time project or develop a sustained YE approach.



# How Do I Get Started With Youth Engagement?

The goal of YE is to improve the quality, reach, and effectiveness of prevention efforts meant for youth. There are multiple ways to engage youth, and the model and level of youth engagement depends on many factors. This decision tree tool is meant to guide substance misuse prevention provider organizations in thinking through different models of YE to consider incorporating into their work. Once an organization has a sense of what model might suit them, they can find further details, examples, and resources on the following pages of this guide.

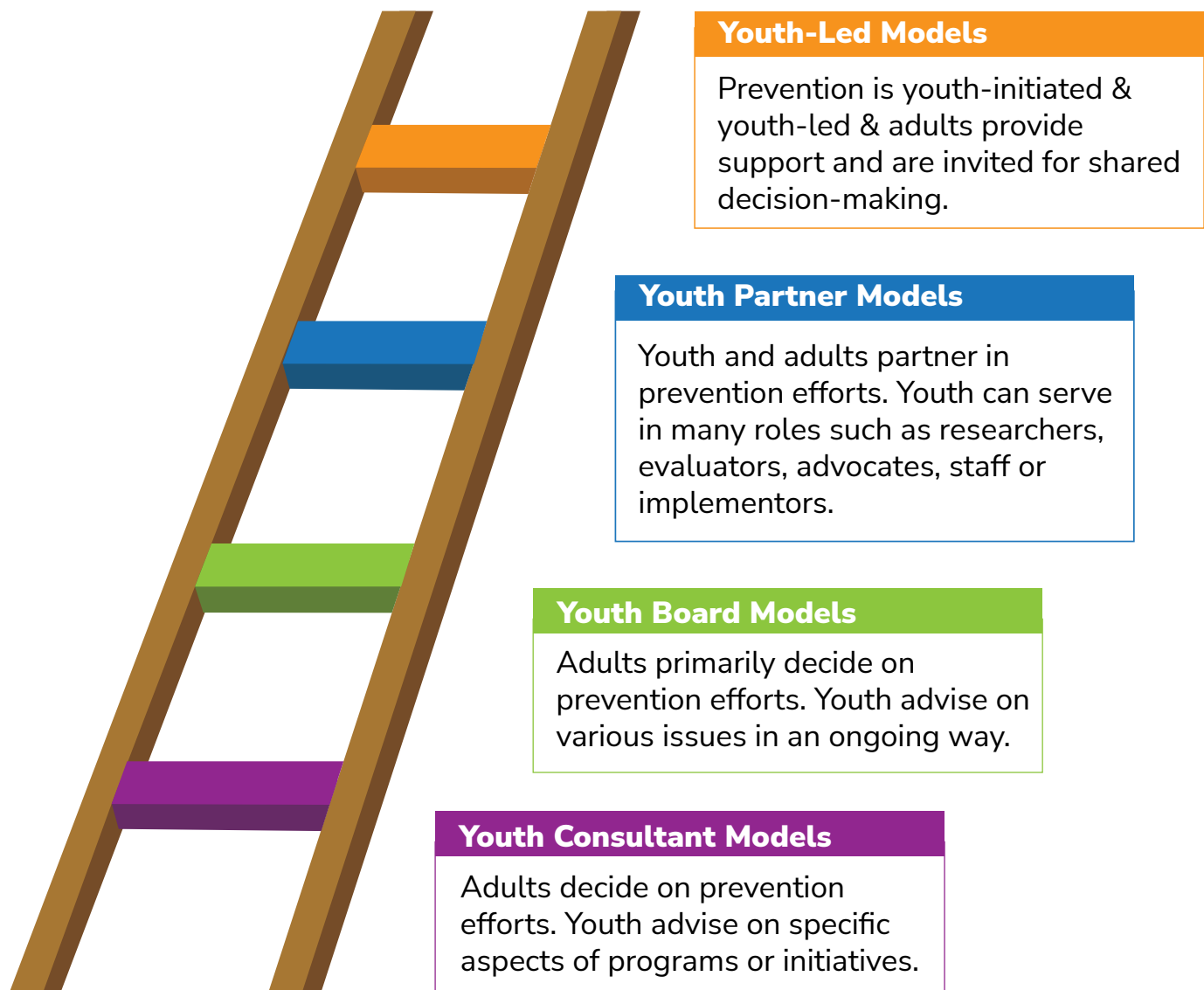




# Levels of Youth Engagement

This graphic depicts how youth can be engaged at different levels – from roles with less involvement/ leadership depicted at the bottom to roles with high involvement/leadership depicted at the top-through these four models. At the bottom of the ladder, youth are engaged at a relatively low level whereas at the top of the ladder, youth initiate and lead prevention projects with adult support. Importantly, prevention programs delivered to youth without meaningful input *from youth* (e.g. prevention education curricula) may be valuable, but are not considered YE and are not depicted on this ladder graphic.

The best model and level of YE for a given organization at a given time will depend on many factors. This heuristic is adapted from Hart (1992; 2008) and can be used as a tool to reflect on the right model of YE for an organization at a given time. YE can improve prevention but must be done thoughtfully to be effective. The goal for every organization does not need to be to “climb” the ladder to Youth-led Models. Rather, the goal should be to assess different YE models and to incorporate youth into prevention efforts in a way that makes sense for the organization, prevention initiatives, and youth in order to improve prevention efforts.



# Youth Consultant Models

In this model, organizations recruit young people to provide input about a specific issue or initiative. Youth can consult on one project or can be invited to consult on an “as needed” basis.

This model is especially useful for organizations just starting out with youth engagement because it requires a lower level of organizational and youth capacity. Small groups of youth can serve as consultants and the groups may change depending on the initiative or program needs.



## Considerations

To be successful, organizations will want to consider several things.

- Which youth will provide the best input? Think about age/developmental stage as well as the context that youth should come from (Schools? Afterschool programs?)
- What existing relationships can be leveraged to recruit youth consultants? If starting from scratch, recruiting young people through organizational networks might be an effective strategy.
- Why would youth want to serve as consultants? Incentives are important. Financial compensation (aligned with the appropriate funding source) communicates the value of youth input, reduces some barriers, and increases equity of opportunity. Some youth might be incentivized by gaining skills, making an important contribution, or building relationships.
- What is the “ask”? What is the expected time commitment for youth? Is there a specific deliverable? Is there an exit plan for when this commitment is over? Are there future opportunities?
- What format will be used to gather youth input?
- How will youth input be incorporated? Will youth input be one of many pieces of information used to inform prevention strategies or initiative?
- How will your organization keep in touch with youth? How will youth be kept updated/informed?



## What might this look like?

**Example 1)** After completing initial best practice planning steps, a prevention organization has decided to implement a communication campaign about misperceptions of the prevalence of vaping. Their target audience is high school students. They are not sure how best to reach high schoolers or where to display messages. They work with 2 youth consultants for the duration of planning, implementing, and evaluating the campaign to improve the effectiveness and reach of their campaign. In this instance, the youth might provide suggestions for where to display the messages. This is an example of incorporating YE into the preapproved strategy “communication campaign – social norms.”



**Example 2)** A prevention organization is considering changing their prevention curricula for the next school year and they want to get youth input to inform their selection. They recruit youth to participate in a focus group on youth curricula suggestions. To prepare, staff from the prevention organization identified similarities and differences across three preapproved curricula and identified questions to get feedback on from youth. These included questions on the substantive content, as well as audio visual materials. The prevention organization staff analyzed the feedback to identify the curricula they felt was the most relevant and engaging to youth. This is an example incorporating YE into the preapproved strategy of “Youth Prevention Education Planning.”



## Steps for getting started

1. Assess organizational capacity. Identify individuals who will build capacity for YE. Get those people training in YE and youth-adult partnerships.
2. Define the goals and objectives for consulting with youth and determine who the right youth will be age (age, stage, backgrounds). Write a job description and determine the selection process and project timeline.
3. Identify young people with interest and skills to consult. Generate a list of local individuals and youth organizations. Reach out to understand interest.



## Resources

Preparing youth to engage in meetings or other one-time adult-led events:

[store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/SAMHSA\\_Digital\\_Download/sma16-4985.pdf](https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/SAMHSA_Digital_Download/sma16-4985.pdf)

Youth Empowered Solutions

[yes.sph.umich.edu](https://yes.sph.umich.edu)

# Youth Advisory Board Models

In youth advisory board models, a body of young people provides on-going input and insight on organizational policies, procedures, and activities. The youth advisory board could provide input on selecting, implementing, and evaluating prevention programs and strategies.

This model is especially useful for organizations who wish to build a sustainable infrastructure for gathering youth input and who have some existing capacity and some youth relationships in place. In this model, youth typically receive higher levels of training, for example about effective meetings, decision-making processes, and/or organizational operations (Suleiman and Center on the Developing Adolescent, 2021). A larger group of youth may serve for longer pre-specified terms, ideally with overlap when youth advisory board members turnover.



## Considerations

**In addition to the considerations listed above, organizations will want to consider things such as:**

- What is the goal of your youth advisory board? What will a youth advisory board add to your organization's prevention efforts?
- Who should be on your youth advisory board? How old should they be? How many people should there be?
- How will you recruit youth advisory board members?
- How will you select youth advisory board members?
- What resources (see page 3) do you have to support a successful youth advisory board? What do you need?
- What support will be provided so youth can contribute to prevention efforts in a meaningful way?
- What is the commitment for youth? How much time will they be expected to contribute? How long will their term be?
- What are the incentives?



## What might this look like?

**Example 1)** A prevention organization has heard from community partners that prescription medication misuse has increased among high school students locally. They are considering many different strategies and decide that they need youth input. They decided to convene a youth advisory board including three young people from four different local high schools. The board will meet six times per year for two years to advise the prevention organization on where the needs are and what prevention strategies might be most effective. This is an example of incorporating YE into the preapproved strategy "System needs assessment and strategic planning." If the board ends up helping plan specific initiatives, such as disseminating chemical medication disposal kits or doing a "Lock Your Meds" campaign, this also counts as YE in those specific preapproved strategies.



**Example 2)** A prevention organization was concerned about youth access to alcohol. They convened a youth advisory board to advise on strategies to reduce youth access to alcohol. The board met once a month, during the school day for the nine months of the school year. At the first session the youth advisory board received an orientation on decreasing youth access to alcohol. They reviewed prevention survey data and discussed strategies to reduce youth access to alcohol, including both retail (alcohol outlets, bars and restaurants, festivals and events) and social access options (e.g., free, purchased). The youth advisory board selected which types of access to focus on, reviewed available information about access, collected more information when needed, and made specific recommendations for decreasing youth access to alcohol. At the end of the year, they reviewed prevention survey data to measure their successes and opportunities. This is an example of incorporating YE into the preapproved strategy “Systems needs assessment and strategic planning.”



## Steps for getting started

1. Define the goals and objectives and the roles and expectations for the youth advisory board.
2. Assess existing relationships with individual youth or with organizations that might be good places to recruit youth to form an advisory board. Determine how to recruit members.
3. Convene the youth advisory board and jointly schedule meetings and create work plans.



## Resources

### Game Changers: Establishing a Youth Advisory Council

[www.youthpower.org/sites/default/files/YouthPower/resources/game\\_changers\\_yac\\_toolkit.pdf](http://www.youthpower.org/sites/default/files/YouthPower/resources/game_changers_yac_toolkit.pdf)

### A Toolkit for Creating a Diverse and Inclusive Youth Advisory Council

[www.michiganfoundations.org/resources/toolkit-creating-diverse-and-inclusive-yac](http://www.michiganfoundations.org/resources/toolkit-creating-diverse-and-inclusive-yac)

### Creating & Sustaining a Thriving Youth Advisory Council: Resources

[umhs-adolescenthealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/yac\\_manual\\_appendix\\_nocrops.pdf](http://umhs-adolescenthealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/yac_manual_appendix_nocrops.pdf)

## Youth Partner Models

In youth partner models, organizations partner with young people to select, implement, and/or evaluate prevention programs and strategies. This involves a higher level of youth involvement and youth-adult partnership compared to youth consultant and youth advisory board models.

Youth partners should have training and experience; they will have more involved roles because they will co-lead programs or initiatives. In this model, youth can have a variety of roles and responsibilities and can be involved in one-time or sustained efforts. This model may include individual youth (e.g., a young person who has served on an advisory board might decide to partner on a specific prevention initiative) or existing groups (e.g., an organization might partner with a school club or hire a young person part-time to lead specific efforts).

This model is especially useful for organizations with existing organizational capacity (e.g., previous training and experience with YE), as well as those that have youth partnerships already in place or relationships with youth organizations where there is potential to develop partnerships.

In this YE model, the key is that young people are engaged as partners who co-lead prevention efforts. Youth can be engaged as partners in many ways, including as researchers, evaluators, organizers or advocates, interns or staff, and program implementers. The nature of YE depends on the needs of the organization and the skills and goals of youth partners. Prevention organizations should start with an idea of how to partner with youth and then work with the youth to co-develop the exact goals and nature of the partnership. Youth may partner in a specific aspect of prevention efforts, but typically their involvement will be more comprehensive and will involve partnering in multiple aspects of prevention. See brief descriptions of these and further resources in the following pages.



### Types of Youth Partner Models

- Youth researchers
- Youth evaluators
- Youth organizers or advocates
- Youth interns or staff
- Youth program implementors



## Youth researchers

**Youth researchers** are young people who have, or wish to gain, training in conducting research. Youth-led Participatory Action Research and other youth-led approaches can be used to understand substance misuse needs in a particular community, or to help research what effective options might be for a particular issue or prevention approach.



### What might this look like?

**Example 1)** A prevention organization is working with a high school that is experiencing high rates of binge drinking. They want to understand the culture around drinking among students from the school. They decided to partner with a group of students from the school to collect data about student perceptions of drinking and understanding of local school board policies around alcohol. The organization and high school partners implement a research project (such as a survey or series of interviews) and present this data to the school board to review and improve existing alcohol policies. This is an example of incorporating YE into the preapproved strategy “Establishing, reviewing, or changing ATOD policies.”



### Resources

Youth-led research YPAR Hub | YPAR Hub (berkeley.edu)  
[yparhub.berkeley.edu/home](http://yparhub.berkeley.edu/home)

Tips for Facilitating Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) Remotely  
CFCL - Our Approach | The Stepping Stones YPAR Toolkit (ucdavis.edu)  
[regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/sites/g/files/dgvnsk986/files/inline-files/CFCL%20Remote%20YPAR%20Tips.pdf](http://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/sites/g/files/dgvnsk986/files/inline-files/CFCL%20Remote%20YPAR%20Tips.pdf)

## Youth evaluators

**Youth evaluators** are young people who are involved in all aspects of prevention program evaluation. Youth may partner on evaluating community needs and assets to understand populations and to make decisions about prevention initiatives. Or, youth may be involved in evaluating specific prevention initiatives to determine their fit with youth populations or their efficacy.



**Example 2)** A prevention organization learned that it was easy for youth to purchase alcohol underage in their community. They contracted with youth to conduct environmental scans of retail alcohol outlets. The organization's YE lead trained and supervised youth in completing a structured observation at each retail alcohol outlet in their community. They specified alcohol location within the store, proximity to products that encourage binge drinking, age of sale signage, and age of sale verification methods. Youth compiled the data and identified retail alcohol outlets with an elevated risk of underage alcohol sales. They shared this information with law enforcement to encourage targeted age of sale compliance checks. They repeated their structured observation a year later to monitor changes in age of sales compliance. This is an example of incorporating YE into the assessment process for the preapproved strategy of "Retailer alcohol compliance checks."



### Resources

#### Reflect and Improve

[www.yacwa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Reflect-and-Improve\\_Toolkit.pdf](http://www.yacwa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Reflect-and-Improve_Toolkit.pdf)

#### Youth-Adult Partnerships in Evaluation (Y-AP/E)

[youthrex.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/YAP-Resource-Guide-1.pdf](http://youthrex.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/YAP-Resource-Guide-1.pdf)

#### Youth Leading Community Change: An Evaluation Toolkit

[4-h.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Rural-Youth-Development-Youth-Leading-Community-Change-Evaluation-Toolkit-Color.pdf](http://4-h.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Rural-Youth-Development-Youth-Leading-Community-Change-Evaluation-Toolkit-Color.pdf)

#### Youth Engagement in Evaluation: A guide for youth-serving organizations

[developingadolescent.semel.ucla.edu/assets/uploads/research/resources/CDAYouthEngagementGuide\\_Practitioners\\_2023\\_2.pdf](http://developingadolescent.semel.ucla.edu/assets/uploads/research/resources/CDAYouthEngagementGuide_Practitioners_2023_2.pdf)

## Youth organizers or advocates

**Youth organizers or advocates** are young people who use their voices to amplify findings or stories related to substance misuse prevention.





**Example 3)** An organization partners with youth to develop a radio series about topics related to substance misuse in their community. They also help publicize the stories and advocate for solutions. This is an example of incorporating YE into the preapproved strategy “Radio & TV public service announcements.”



## Resources

### Youth Empowerment Solutions for Peaceful Communities

[yes.sph.umich.edu/programs/yes-peaceful-communities](https://yes.sph.umich.edu/programs/yes-peaceful-communities)

### Teen Action Toolkit: Building a Youth-led Response to Teen Victimization

[blackchildlegacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Teen-TOOLKIT.pdf](https://blackchildlegacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Teen-TOOLKIT.pdf)

### Youth-Activist-Toolkit

[advocatesforyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Youth-Activist-Toolkit.pdf](https://advocatesforyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Youth-Activist-Toolkit.pdf)



## Youth interns or staff

**Youth interns or staff** are young people who are hired (or otherwise compensated) to partner in specific roles related to substance misuse prevention.



**Example 4)** An organization is preparing to launch a new prevention initiative focused on opioid misuse among adolescents and young adults. They decide to work with 4 high school students to partner on efforts related to the opioid misuse through leading needs assessment, advising on prevention program selection, and evaluating the program. This is an example of incorporating YE across various preapproved strategies such as “Systems needs assessment and strategic planning” and “YPE planning.”



## Resources

### Youth Engaged in Leadership and Learning (YELL)

[gardnercenter.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj11216/f/YELL%20Handbook.pdf](https://gardnercenter.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj11216/f/YELL%20Handbook.pdf)

### Promoting Youth Employment Through Internships: A Guide to Best Practices

[iyfglobal.org/library/promoting-youth-employment-through-internships-guide-best-practices](https://iyfglobal.org/library/promoting-youth-employment-through-internships-guide-best-practices)

### Employer Guide: Creating a Meaningful Learning Experience for Students

[www.bristolri.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Employer-Guide.pdf](https://www.bristolri.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Employer-Guide.pdf)

**Youth program implementors** are young people who partner on the planning and implementation of specific initiatives. Rather than simply implementing a program, they would provide input on aspects of the program such as when/where/how/to whom it would be implemented. Youth would be involved in implementing evidence-based programs only if that is a pre-approved component of the program.



**Example 5)** A prevention organization identified that easy access to alcohol was a problem in their community. They identified two strategies to address this problem, including alcohol compliance checks. The organization worked with youth and young adults in multiple ways. First they trained and supervised youth to conduct education on age of sales laws with retail alcohol outlets in their communities. Second working in pairs (young adult/adult organizational member), they conducted alcohol purchase surveys. Third, they shared information about which retailers did not pass the alcohol purchase surveys (i.e., did not appropriately ask for ID) with law enforcement. They then forwarded names of all outlets that failed to check ID of underage appearing person two or more times to law enforcement requesting alcohol compliance checks. This is an example of incorporating YE to support the preapproved strategy “Retailer alcohol compliance checks.”



## Considerations

**In addition to the considerations listed above, organizations will want to consider things such as:**

- What are the goals of the partnership?
- Which adults in your organization will be the primary point of contact? What training do they have in youth-adult partnerships?
- Which youth will partner with your organization? What training do they have in youth-adult partnerships?
- What are the roles and responsibilities of your prevention organization? Of the youth partners?
- How can incentives for organizations and youth be aligned?
- What does success look like for the partnership and for each partner?
- In what cases, and how, will parents be informed of activities their child may participate in?



## Steps for getting started

1. Identify the youth and organizational partners. Have partners attend training in youth-adult partnerships together.
2. Define the goals and objectives and the roles and expectations for each partner.
3. Take the time to build trust and the infrastructure for successful partnership.



## Resources

### Youth-Adult Partnerships

**Youth Engagement in Development: Effective Approaches and Action-Oriented Recommendations for the Field**

[pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PA00JP6S.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00JP6S.pdf)

**Adolescent and Youth Engagement Strategic Framework**

[childhub.org/sites/default/files/library/attachments/adolescent\\_and\\_youth\\_engagement\\_en.pdf](https://childhub.org/sites/default/files/library/attachments/adolescent_and_youth_engagement_en.pdf)

**Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health: Youth Engagement toolkit**

[www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/eecd\\_YETOOL\\_E.pdf](http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/eecd_YETOOL_E.pdf)

**Toolkit for Adolescent and Youth Engagement (alnap.org)**

[www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/aye\\_mena-toolkit.pdf](http://www.alnap.org/system/files/content/resource/files/main/aye_mena-toolkit.pdf)

### Team Building and Facilitation

**UNICEF Programme Guidance for the Second Decade: Programming with and for Adolescents**

[www.unicef.org/media/57336/file](http://www.unicef.org/media/57336/file)

**Youth and Adult Leaders for Program Excellence (YALPE): A Practical Guide for Program**

[actforyouth.net/resources/n/n\\_yalpe-workbook.pdf](http://actforyouth.net/resources/n/n_yalpe-workbook.pdf)

**Youth-Collaboration-Toolkit.pdf (truecolorsunited.org)**

[truecolorsunited.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/08/Youth-Collaboration-Toolkit.pdf](http://truecolorsunited.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/08/Youth-Collaboration-Toolkit.pdf)

## Youth-Led Models

This model involves a very high level of youth engagement. Trained and experienced youth lead projects with support from prevention organizations.

This model is especially useful for organizations who have longstanding partnerships with youth in place. For example, an organization that has worked effectively with a YAB might have skilled young people from the YAB propose an idea for a prevention initiative. Or, a prevention organization might be partnering with a school club and be approached by youth from a different school wanting to start a prevention-related club or initiative. Importantly, the youth drive the idea, development, implementation, scaling, or evaluation (as relevant) with the support of the prevention organization.



### Considerations

**In addition to many of the considerations listed above, organizations will want to consider things such as:**

- What support will the youth need from your organization to complete the project?
- Is your organization prepared to follow the lead of the youth? What plan is in place for when the organizational staff do not agree with a decision of the youth leaders?
- What is the sustainability or transition plan when this youth-led project ends? Will the initiative conclude or continue under different leadership?

### What might this look like?



**Example 1)** A youth coalition has had an advisory board for many years. The youth, with the support of adult allies, decided to create a podcast and newsletter series in many topics relevant to local youth, including substance use in their community. With support to acquire equipment, resources, and training, the youth develop a podcast series. This is an example of incorporating YE into the preapproved strategy “Information dissemination - Prevention focused websites, email blasts, and newsletters.” (For an example of such an initiative see [www.cadca.org/resources/coalitions-action-steppin-it-coalition-pickens-county-youth-board-prevention-podcast-teens](http://www.cadca.org/resources/coalitions-action-steppin-it-coalition-pickens-county-youth-board-prevention-podcast-teens)).



## Steps for getting started

1. Identify the primary person or people within the organization who will support the youth-led project. Define roles and responsibilities.
2. Identify what training is needed; have partners attend relevant training (e.g. youth-adult partnerships, team-building, power-sharing).



## Resources

### Youth-Adult Power Sharing

[www.schoolhealthcenters.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Power-Continuum-Table.pdf](http://www.schoolhealthcenters.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Power-Continuum-Table.pdf)

### Dover Youth 2 Youth

[dovery2y.org](http://dovery2y.org)

**Table 1 (continues on following page):** Examples of what Youth Engagement can look like within North Carolina Substance Abuse Prevention Block Grant Approved Strategies

CSAP Strategy	Pre-approved strategy (“Intervention name”)	What is the role of youth?	Example
<b>Community Based Process</b>	Coalition/ Task Force/ Collaborative/ Meetings	Ongoing meeting participation; participate as active members parallel to other coalition members	One or more youth participate in ongoing coalition work; attend meetings and provide input ( <b>Youth Consultant Model</b> ); may collaborate or lead initiatives relevant to youth ( <b>Youth Partner Model, Youth-Led Model</b> ); or a youth coalition may lead and inform local efforts ( <b>Youth-Led Model</b> )

Continued Table 1

CSAP Strategy	Pre-approved strategy (“Intervention name”)	What is the role of youth?	Example
Environmental Strategies	Communication Campaigns: Social Norms	Develop or advise on messages and materials; advise on implementation	One or more youth partners with or leads development and implementation of communication campaigns (Youth Partner Model, Youth-Led Model); or advise on messages and audience (Youth Consultant Model)
	Talk it up, Lock it up. Lock Your Meds	Plan; help develop messages and/or advocate and/or publicize	A group of youth help with planning when/where/how to implement; help develop messages, advocate and/or publicize
	Policy work (e.g., alcohol purchase surveys, Synar, merchant education, sobriety check points, party patrols, etc.)	Help with data collection and analyses, plan strategies, and help carryout implementation activities.	A group of youth helps with Synar (Youth Partner Model - Youth as Implementers), completing merchant education sessions, conducting tobacco purchase surveys (Youth Partner Model – Youth Evaluators), and publicizing stores that upheld tobacco age of sales laws (Youth Consultant Model or Youth Partner Model).
Youth Prevention Education	YPE Planning	Consult on curricula choice; advise on implementation	A group of youth advise providers deciding on an evidence-based curricula for a given youth population (Youth Consultant Model)
Information Dissemination	Speaking engagements/ community presentations	Planning; publicizing	One or more youth might be on a planning committee; recommend speakers (Youth Partner Model); advise on youth-friendly format/venue/location/time; help publicize for the event via social media or other outlets (Youth Consultant Model)
Alternative Activities	Recreation Activities	Planning; publicizing	One or more youth might be on a planning committee (Youth Partner Model); advise on youth-friendly format/venue/location/time; help publicize and recruit for the activities or program via social media or other outlets (Youth Consultant Model)

# Evaluating Youth Engagement

**Prevention organizations should evaluate their YE through reflection from the perspective of both prevention provider organizational staff and the youth they work with.** Meaningful YE should have multi-level benefits: for youth, for the specific prevention initiatives targeting youth, and for the prevention organizations. Prevention organizations incorporating YE into their strategies should reflect on:

- How have the youth involved in the prevention initiative benefited from this work?
- How has the prevention initiative/effort benefited from the youth engagement?
- How has the prevention provider organization benefited from the youth engagement?

**Engaging youth in a meaningful way in prevention efforts is challenging.** Prevention organizations and youth should be encouraged to reflect critically on the challenges they experience and identify potential solutions through questions such as:

- What were the challenges for youth involved in the prevention effort? What might help address these challenges?
- What were the challenges to developing and implementing ideas generated by youth partners for the prevention initiative/effort? What might help address these challenges?
- What were the challenges of engaging with youth for the prevention provider organizations? What might help address these challenges?

## Quick List: DOs and Don'ts of YE

### DOs

- Start small and build slowly
- Think about long-term plans and goals
- Seek support from others to trouble-shoot when challenges arise
- Ensure that youth are supported, prepared, and put in developmentally appropriate roles
- Consider how to communicate appropriately with parents/caregivers depending on youth age/stage and the nature of the youth engagement
- Consider rapport with youth when identifying adult leaders/facilitators.
- Be youth-friendly: think about the structure of the school year, school day, and youth activities in planning youth-engaged activities
- Seek youth with diverse backgrounds and perspectives

### DON'Ts

- Be overly ambitious
- Hold youth to higher standards compared to other community partners
- Put youth in roles they are not prepared for
- Recruit a specific “type” (e.g., only high achievers or popular youth)



# General Resources

## **SAMHSA YE guidance**

[store.samhsa.gov/product/The-Substance-Abuse-and-Mental-Health-Services-Administration-s-SAMHSA-Youth-Engagement-Guidance/SMA16-4985](https://store.samhsa.gov/product/The-Substance-Abuse-and-Mental-Health-Services-Administration-s-SAMHSA-Youth-Engagement-Guidance/SMA16-4985)

## **School-based Health Alliance Youth Health Hub**

[www.sbh4all.org/what-we-do/services/training/youth-development/youth-engagement-toolkit/youth-participation-models/](http://www.sbh4all.org/what-we-do/services/training/youth-development/youth-engagement-toolkit/youth-participation-models/)

## **UCLA Report**

[developingadolescent.semel.ucla.edu/assets/uploads/research/resources/YPAR\\_Guide\\_2021\\_FINAL.pdf](https://developingadolescent.semel.ucla.edu/assets/uploads/research/resources/YPAR_Guide_2021_FINAL.pdf)

## **CADCA Rural Youth Engagement**

[www.cadca.org/sites/default/files/rural\\_youth\\_engagement\\_toolkit.pdf](http://www.cadca.org/sites/default/files/rural_youth_engagement_toolkit.pdf)

# Appendix A

**Table 2:** Summary of opportunities and challenges of action research to youth and projects for youth at various developmental periods

	Developmental opportunities (how youth benefit)	Programmatic opportunities (how programs benefit)	Challenges
<b>Very young adolescents</b> (11–14 year-olds)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increased motivation for self-direction and goal-setting</li> <li>▪ Increased neural sensitivity to social and emotional information</li> <li>▪ Enhanced awareness of self-identity</li> <li>▪ Increased need for autonomy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Diversity in developmental trajectories can add variety to projects</li> <li>▪ Developmental mismatch between rigid school structure and adolescent needs for flexibility can be reduced in non-school programs</li> <li>▪ Garnering attention to make policy change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Diversity in developmental trajectories requires skilled facilitators</li> <li>▪ Adult views of young adolescents can be protective or dismissive</li> </ul>
<b>Middle Adolescents</b> (15–18 year-olds)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Stronger sense of self-identity</li> <li>▪ Passions about specific causes</li> <li>▪ Self-regulation skills increasing</li> <li>▪ Increased independence, autonomy, mobility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Enhanced identity clarity can enhance motivation</li> <li>▪ Ability to leverage insights from early adolescent experiences</li> <li>▪ Increased mobility and freedom</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sensitivity to power dynamics, youth/adult power sharing can be complex</li> <li>▪ Less flexibility to explore new ideas as interests become fomented</li> <li>▪ Amplification of gender roles</li> <li>▪ Decreases in motivation for scholarly activities</li> </ul>
<b>Young adults</b> (19–25 year-olds)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increased social rights and responsibilities</li> <li>▪ Identity development in political and religious</li> <li>▪ Continued neural flexibility</li> <li>▪ High cognitive capacity</li> <li>▪ Adult-like behaviors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Less tailoring of community engagement strategies required</li> <li>▪ More seamless integration of youth with adult partners</li> <li>▪ Fewer resources needed for supervision; youth more independent and effective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Less inclined to challenge ideas and assumptions of adult partners</li> <li>▪ Social transitions and mobility challenge sustained commitment</li> <li>▪ Less novel to include in public advocacy</li> </ul>

**Note:** This table is based on Ballard’s (2020) PTTC Webinar titled The Benefits of Engaging Youth in Communities: Insights and Evidence from Development Science. It was adapted from Table 1 in Ballonoff Suleiman et al. (2021) Applying a developmental lens to youth-led participatory action research: A critical examination and integration of existing evidence.

# Appendix B

**Table 3:** Key questions to consider when Engaging with Youth

1. What is the goal of engaging the youth in this project at this time?
2. How are “youth” being defined for this project? What age or stage of youth is most relevant?
3. What experiences, expertise, and perspectives do you want youth to bring to the project? What experiences, skills and/or exposure will youth have as a result of this project?
4. Who are the adults that the youth will be working with? What experiences and expertise do they have in engaging with the developmental stage of the young people in this project? What type of capacity building will be done with adult allies?
5. What will be the scope of the youth-adult partnership in this project? What types of things will youth be doing autonomously? What types of adult support will the youth have?
6. What is the duration of youth engagement? What is the succession plan if youth age/develop out of the target range?
7. How will the input provided by youth shape the direction of the project?
8. How is success defined and measured for this project?

**Note:** This table is adapted from Table 2 in Ballonoff Suleiman, A., Ballard, P. J., Hoyt, L. T., & Ozer, E. J. (2021). Applying a developmental lens to youth-led participatory action research: A critical examination and integration of existing evidence. *Youth & society*, 53(1), 26-53.

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