



Technical Brief:

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

IYF creates programming by, for, and with young people that connects them with opportunities to transform their lives. At IYF, we believe young people everywhere possess dreams, ambitions, skills, experience, and the potential to develop themselves and their surrounding world.

We focus our work in three strategic areas to help further our mission: increasing young people's agency, expanding young people's access to economic opportunities, and transforming systems to become more responsive to—and inclusive of—young people.

IYF partners with young people and organizations globally to design and implement holistic youth development programming shaped by the principles of Positive Youth Development (PYD) including the importance of youth engagement. We strengthen the capacity of other institutions—from training centers to service providers—so that they can better serve the needs of young people.

WHY DOES YOUTH ENGAGEMENT MATTER?

When those most impacted by a challenge become part of solution-building, solutions are more likely to meet needs in a sustainable way. In the context of youth development, programs benefit from young people's involvement throughout the project cycle.

Indeed, the first guiding principal in USAID's Youth in Development Policy is to "recognize that youth participation is vital for effective programs." After all, young people possess the greatest understanding of their own needs and the creativity and energy to see old problems in new ways. Youth participation in project design and delivery can drive innovation, increase retention of participants, lead to better socio-emotional outcomes for those engaged, and positively impact surrounding systems.













WHAT IS “MEANINGFUL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT?”

Meaningful youth engagement is both a process of approaching programming and a goal in and of itself. It is a core tenet of PYD that recognizes and values young people’s inherent expertise in relation to their own lives and communities. Engaging meaningfully with young people means viewing them as assets to be tapped, not “problems to be solved.” When we recognize that young people must be the primary drivers of their own development, with adults and systems playing a supporting role, we understand that anything done for youth without youth runs the risk of failure.

By emphasizing meaningful youth engagement, we acknowledge the potential to cause harm if young people are simply “invited to the table” with little or no influence on activities. Hart’s Ladder of Participation offers a useful framework for understanding the varying degrees to which young people can be engaged in activities, from the lowest rung of manipulation to the highest where young people lead initiatives.

- **Avoid tokenism.** “Youth” is not a monolithic term; young people have different needs at each stage of their development, and their perspectives and priorities are shaped by diverse factors such as geography, ethnicity, religion, gender identity, ability status, migration status, socioeconomic background, parental status and more. Strategies to engage young people must seek out and integrate diverse and representative perspectives.

TYPES & DEGREES OF PARTICIPATION

<p>III</p>	<p>YOUNG PEOPLE AS PARTNERS</p> <p>Young people are leaders, owners, and agents of change. They lead programs and make decisions.</p>	 <p>Joint decision making. Youth partner with adults to make key decisions in programs.</p>	 <p>Youth leadership. Youth are able to begin their own initiatives.</p>	 <p>Codified partnership. The partnership itself is in a charter or written agreement—beyond verbal agreements.</p>	 <p>Meaningful impact. Youth are given meaningful control over various parts of the program.</p>
<p>II</p>	<p>YOUNG PEOPLE AS PARTICIPANTS</p> <p>Young people are consulted, informed, and assigned. They are active participants but not leaders.</p>	 <p>Consulted. Youth may be brought in during the design phase of a program.</p>	 <p>Assigned. Youth may play a niche role within a program.</p>	 <p>Informed. Youth may be informed quickly and early about decisions made, but do not have control over them.</p>	 <p>Educated / Tutored. Youth are taught or receive a service from a more professional or experienced partner.</p>
<p>I</p>	<p>YOUNG PEOPLE AS OBJECTS</p> <p>Young people are tokenized, manipulated, and treated as objects. They participate in a symbolic or ineffective manner.</p>	 <p>Simplistic involvement. Youth are involved in a limited way.</p>	 <p>Symbolic positions. Youth may be given leadership titles, but for symbolic purposes.</p>	 <p>No real decisions. Youth do not have the power to initiate or steer the direction of a program.</p>	 <p>Short term. Usually, projects that treat youth as objects are short-term and financially driven.</p>

Adapted from Hart’s Ladder of Participation

- **Consider various roles for young people across the project lifecycle.** Young people can provide critical information and partnership during project design, budgeting, set-up, planning, implementation, communications, and evaluation. Data providers, data collectors, contractors, full-time staff members, and volunteers should explore ways to solicit and amplify youth voices, including various power-sharing and decision-making models.
- **Compensate young people for their effort.** Appropriate compensation may depend on the level of effort and types of work contributed, but the starting assumption should be to value and recognize young people's time and expertise. It may not be possible to offer financial compensation, but there are other ways to value young people's contributions such as mentorship, professional development, school credit, reference letters, etc.
- **Provide sufficient orientation and support.** Young people should fully understand the context of the program design process and the roles they are being asked to play. Moreover, they should be fully equipped to perform those roles. Supports may include basic provisions or accommodations to promote equal access to opportunities or task-specific knowledge and skills development.

Case Study

KIONGOZI FELLOWSHIP

IYF's Youth Lead initiative in Tanzania included a youth-led research fellowship model that centered youth engagement in both process and outcomes. Young professionals participated in the recruitment and selection of nine young Tanzanians for the six-month Kiongozi Fellowship program, which included training, mentoring, research, writing, and learning events.

The nine Fellows actively informed their learning journeys through needs assessments, goal setting, peer-to-peer learning activities, and regular formal and informal feedback loops built into training workshops. They partnered with field researchers to develop survey instruments used for data collection in three regions of Tanzania and designed their own research instruments to conduct primary research. Each Fellow used their primary and secondary research to develop a livelihoods-focused case study on a topic of their own choosing. As a final program activity, Fellows led both the agenda planning and execution of a youth dialogue event, where they acted as facilitators and speakers to engage a multi-generational and multi-stakeholder audience.



HOW DOES IYF ENGAGE YOUNG PEOPLE?

We incorporate a variety of youth engagement strategies, including:

Youth-oriented problem identification: We work to increase our understanding of communities and systems by actively listening to young people's self-reported needs and constraints. We invite young people to participate in mapping, surveys, and listening tours and use their input to guide us in identifying problems and solutions.

Youth perspectives in project design, planning, and implementation: We collect input from target audiences using surveys, key informant interviews, and focus groups, as well as user testing for new products. In some programs, we establish Youth Advisory Committees to provide ongoing guidance and direction through multiple stages of the program life cycle.

Youth-driven communications: We create platforms and channels—online and in person—for young people to drive conversations. Youth voices are front and center in our conferences and workshops, videos and webinars, blog posts and annual reports.

Youth-centered learning environments: We take the needs and perspectives of young people seriously in any curriculum we create, using pedagogical approaches that center on the learner. In our capacity strengthening of education systems and training of trainers, we emphasize the creation of safe spaces where young people can learn from each other while developing healthy relationships with adults.



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IYF'S GROUNDING PRINCIPLES



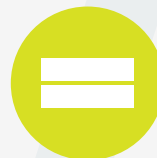
We engage young people as integral partners in program design and implementation from the outset. We support employees and employers to ensure the jobs young people secure are safe, productive, and pay a fair income.



We partner for success at scale. Playing the role of ecosystem connector and convener, IYF ensures that goals of corporations, foundations, multilateral organizations, local leaders, communities, and young people are aligned.



We work with and through local actors, supporting on-the-ground partners who are uniquely equipped to respond to local challenges, while strengthening national workforce development systems.



We advance Gender Equity and Social Inclusion. IYF takes concrete measures to counteract youth marginalization. We work to promote personal agency, economic opportunity, and the ability to participate fully in society.



We measure impact and share what we learn. Our work is rooted in measurement, evaluation, research, and learning (MERL). We use data to assess progress, to inform adjustments, and to maximize impact. We share learnings.

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