



*Technical Brief:*

# YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

**The International Youth Foundation (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. Meaningful youth engagement (MYE) is foundational to achieving results and therefore crosscuts each strategic area.

## WHAT IS MYE AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

MYE is a process of achieving desired outcomes and is a goal in and of itself. A core tenet of both positive youth development (PYD) and systems approaches, MYE recognizes young people's inherent expertise in relation to their own lives as well as their rights and roles in creating sustainable, youth-responsive infrastructure within existing local and global systems. IYF is passionate about promoting MYE because our experience, and a growing body of evidence, shows that engaging young people in meaningful ways leads to increased academic achievement, civic engagement, economic opportunity, healthy behaviors and more. Just as important are the project-, community-, and system-level changes that MYE inspires, such as more effective policies and programs, increased access to and uptake of services, and enhanced social cohesion and market competitiveness.

An **inclusive, intentional, mutually-respectful and –beneficial partnership** between youth and adults, whereby **power is shared**, respective **contributions are valued**, and young people's ideas, perspectives, experiences, skills and strengths are **integrated into the design and delivery of programs, strategies, policies, funding mechanisms and organizations** that affect their lives and their **communities, countries and globally**.

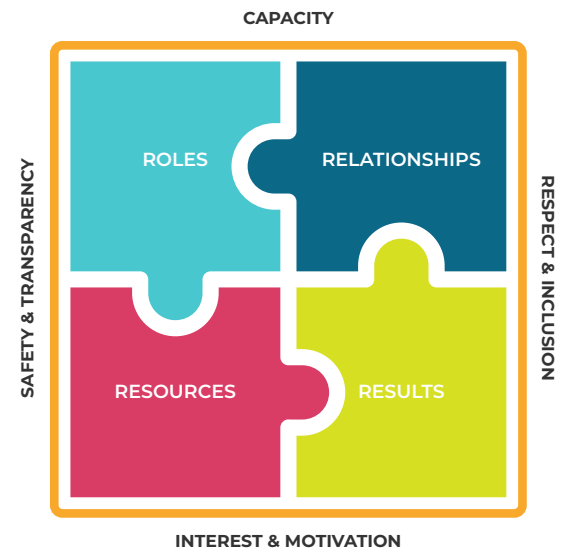
— Global Consensus Statement on Meaningful Adolescent & Youth Engagement



# IYF'S FRAMEWORK: SOLVING THE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT PUZZLE

IYF's MYE programming takes place in many different contexts and ways, with a diverse group of stakeholders, and for a variety of purposes. We facilitate MYE in projects, communities, and systems and use an array of participatory mechanisms. IYF's framework and approach to MYE is designed to account for this complexity and be as useful to educators and employers as it is for health workers, policymakers, extension agents, caretakers, and young people themselves.

The framework recognizes that youth engagement is not linear and that a "one size fits all" approach does not capture the importance of different types and degrees of engagement. From young people accessing services to support their personal development, to youth organizing and leading social change, each strategy along the youth engagement continuum adds value in its own way. Therefore, IYF considers the design of culturally and contextually relevant youth engagement strategies as a puzzle to be solved. MYE, like a puzzle, requires perspective on the big picture and experimentation with the individual pieces. In the same way that puzzles are best solved in collaboration with others, IYF uses our sector-agnostic and systems-conversant framework to engage partners, including youth partners, in the design, implementation, and assessment of MYE strategies.



## GETTING THE EDGES IN PLACE FIRST

Every MYE puzzle should consider certain pre-conditions first:

- » **SAFETY & TRANSPARENCY**—the participation of young people should be voluntary and based on receiving necessary and age-appropriate information about their rights, role, expected contributions, and desired results. Those working with youth should be accountable for minimizing the risk of violence, exploitation, tokenism, and other potential negative consequences.
- » **CAPACITY**—both young people and partner organizations or adults should have the necessary skills, attitudes, and experience required to enter into and sustain partnership. Read [here](#) to learn more about how IYF strengthens relevant capacities through our youth agency work.
- » **RESPECT & INCLUSION**—engagement should be accessible to and culturally sensitive for youth of various abilities and identities. Youth engagement plans should intentionally elevate diversity, facilitate inclusion, and avoid tokenism.
- » **INTEREST & MOTIVATION**—young people's willingness to participate, partner, and lead should not be assumed. Those providing opportunities, for example donors, project staff, politicians, educators, or community leaders, should communicate how engagement is one's right and choice and how opting in might contribute to personal or professional goals. Similarly, power holders and institutions should understand relevant mandates and believe in the importance and value of youth engagement before committing to it. Youth-adult partnerships should align incentives in the same way any public or private sector partnership would.

## ASSEMBLING THE INNER PIECES

Once the appropriate structures are in place, there are four pieces that are integral to every MYE puzzle:



**ROLES**—what young people are responsible for, and the degree of decision-making power they have, should be clear. From grantees to peer educators, mentors, researchers, interns, advisors, and more there are many options for young people to participate in, partner on, and lead initiatives across the project life cycle and in their homes, communities, countries, and globally.



**RESOURCES**—young people should receive the necessary financial and non-financial supports and services to facilitate and reward their engagement. Institutions engaging young people should have the time and human and financial resources to execute the desired engagement strategy. This will help ensure the engagement is non-extractive, mutually beneficial, and feasible for participating parties.



**RELATIONSHIPS**—whether close connections with adults, near-peers, or peers, trust and partnership are key to making an engagement meaningful. Facilitators should be mindful of designing processes and activities that cultivate authentic decision-making, natural mentorship, reciprocity, and community connectedness.



**RESULTS**—selecting relevant success metrics and monitoring and measuring performance can promote quality, assess mutual satisfaction with the engagement, and capture the impact of the engagement at the youth, institution, and system levels.

## HOW DOES IYF FACILITATE MEANINGFUL YOUTH ENGAGEMENT?



1.

We **DESIGN** project- and context-specific youth engagement strategies



2.

We **IDENTIFY** and **SUPPORT** youth partners in the design, implementation, and evaluation of development solutions



3.

We **BUILD** organizational capacity for MYE



4.

We **ELEVATE** MYE in measurement, evaluation, research, and learning (MERL)

## IYF SPOTLIGHTS

Whether at the project, organization, community, or system level, IYF's strategies thoughtfully consider and assemble the requisite pieces of a given MYE puzzle to elevate the role and influence of youth in:

- » **ORGANIZATIONAL GOVERNANCE**—one third of IYF's [Board of Directors](#) are youth members. They have the same roles, rights, and responsibilities as other members.
- » **CROSS-SECTORAL, YOUTH-RELEVANT ACTIVITIES**—IYF is facilitating youth clubs, engaging youth participants in monitoring and evaluation, and providing leadership training to young people in asset management committees to increase young peoples' participation in and benefit from the [Takunda](#) project, a resilience and food security activity (RFSA).
- » **AGRICULTURAL MARKET SYSTEMS**—Through the [Via: Pathways to Work](#) program, IYF expanded young people's interest and participation in horticulture production by introducing new production technologies and strengthening relationships between young people and relevant market actors.
- » **PHILANTHROPY AND GRANTMAKING**—with support from the Oak Foundation, [IYF is partnering with young people](#) to design, implement, and learn from a grant fund that will increase awareness and adoption of best practices in providing accessible and inclusive programming for youth with learning differences.
- » **CROSS-SECTORAL, YOUTH-FOCUSED ACTIVITIES**—IYF is recruiting and training 100 youth facilitators to be peer educators and mentors and establishing a project-level youth advisory council (YAC) to inform the adaptive management of the [Positive Youth Engagement \(PYE\)](#) project in Palestine.



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## IYF'S GROUNDING PRINCIPLES

Regardless of where or in which sector we are working, IYF's grounding principles underpin everything we do to connect young people with opportunities to transform their lives:



**We engage young people as integral partners** in program design and implementation, incorporating their input and ideas 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.** As an ecosystem connector and convenor, IYF ensures the goals of corporations, foundations, multilateral organizations, local leaders, communities, and young people are aligned and that solutions address the real needs of youth.



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



**We advance Gender Equity and Social Inclusion.** IYF takes concrete measures to counteract youth marginalization. We promote personal agency and economic opportunity. We work to elevate the voices of all young people and ensure young people can be active, engaged members of society.



**We measure impact and share what we learn with organizations worldwide.** Our work is rooted in effective performance measurement, evaluation, research, and learning (MERL). We use data to assess progress, to inform course adjustments, and to maximize project impact.

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[WWW.IYFGLOBAL.ORG](http://WWW.IYFGLOBAL.ORG)