



FACTSHEET

10 WAYS TO MEANINGFULLY ENGAGE UNDERREPRESENTED YOUTH: Organizational & Adult Readiness in Fostering Youth Leadership Development

Developed by Amy Hosotsuji, Duane Hall and Jasmine Mwanaisha for YouthREX

Who is an underrepresented youth?

Someone who is not represented or treated fairly by government or policies and laws, mainstream media, education etc. Groups today include people of colour, immigrants, those living with physical and mental disability, low-income, unemployed, LBTTQ, homeless etc.

1. Let Youth Self-Identify

Labels such as 'at-risk,' 'marginalized' or even 'youth' are strong words to use that have repercussions around how you treat youth and how they see themselves. While there may be contexts where these labels are appropriate or necessary, take time to consider how your organization embodies these labels internally and externally.

2. One-Off Consultations Don't Create Leaders

Focus groups and consultations perpetuate marginalization. Embed youth in advising, brainstorming and decision making – try to create space for them to grow in your organization.

3. Create the Sandbox from the Get-Go

Share parameters and project goals early on so that youth can exercise creative freedom while understanding boundaries and expectations.

4. Recognize Your Power and Their Power

Global: male, heterosexual, English-speaking w/political and economical power

Local: Power within a specific context/room/situation

Personal: One's self-esteem, skills, decisions they can make and what they can control within themselves

It's about having power with youth vs. over youth and creating a dynamic that allows youth to contribute their personal power to the local context of your organization.

5. Experience is NOT a Form of Payment

Youth engagement is not just about validating their contributions but also compensating them for time, effort and value added. Be realistic and upfront about the potential for pay and what you can offer monetarily and in-kind.

6. Make All Resources Known

It may be harder for marginalized youth to feel safe in seemingly safe spaces due to forms of violence they've experience, whether micro-aggressive, physical or institutional. Make them aware of resources before they have to ask: i.e. lunch is covered, transit fare, ability to re-arrange office space (some may not want to sit with their back to the door).

7. Silence is a Part of the Conversation

Give time for youth to respond or ask questions, especially about sector jargon that may need explanation. Explicitly inviting youth to contribute helps them feel like their ideas matter and that you're curious to hear from them.

8. Get to Know their Interests and Goals

This helps to ensure their role and responsibilities align with what they want to do – youth will be able to offer more to your organization and you will be able to support them in growing professionally.

9. Provide a Job Title

A job title helps clarify responsibilities, validate youth roles and adds to their resume

10. Appreciate and Foster their Intangibles

Marginalization prompts particular skills and perspectives that may not be tangible – different worldviews, neighbourhood experience, creativity, resourcefulness, artistry etc. Harnessing these intangibles may benefit your organization in innovative, unexpected ways while fostering self-confidence.

