



Co-create with Youth in the Workplace Knowledge Sheet

Purpose: This knowledge sheet is for practitioners and employers to understand trends in engaging and designing with youth in the workforce development sector.



The Evolution of Youth Engagement

Youth engagement as a field is continually evolving to better center the youth experience. There are core frameworks that help define what makes for effective youth engagement that practitioners should consider. These include:

Hart's Ladder of Youth Engagement

(1992) – This framework places youth engagement on an 8-rung ladder. The bottom three levels of *manipulation, decoration, and tokenism* are pitfall areas for youth engagement. Instead, consider how your program can elevate youth's agency from simply *informing* to *youth-initiated, shared decisions* with adults.¹

Sheir's Pathways to Participation

Model (2001) – Building off Hart's Ladder, this model frames participation for youth in relation to

your organization's capacity. Levels of participation start at *listening to youth* up to the highest level of *sharing power and decision making with youth*. In this model, consider the openings, opportunities, and obligations in your organization – specifically the capacity, policies and supports that exist to do youth engagement work.²

TYPE Pyramid (2010) – This model categorizes youth and adult participation into three spaces – *adult control, youth control, and shared control*, offering a way to understand adult-youth partnership. In *adult control*, youth lack voice and agency. Under *youth control*, youth have total control and active voice and participation. In the centre is *shared control*, a positive form of partnership between adult and youth.³



Youth Engagement Program Types

Youth engagement programs take many forms, such as:

Youth advisory councils – Youth are brought in to share their ideas, perspectives, and experiences to guide the policies and initiatives of an, often, adult-led organization.⁴

Youth-led participatory action research – Youth lead consultation and data collection with other youth, through surveys, interviews, observations and other data collection methods.⁵

Youth organizing – Youth advocate and make changes for themselves through formal and informal processes in their community. An example of this is youth climate movements.⁶

Human centered design – Youth users provide their viewpoint and create solutions during a design process for a program or product. This can look like a youth lab or community action program.⁷



Pushing beyond the Youth Advisory Council

Youth advisory councils are one of the most common youth experiences we see as practitioners in the space –we know, we have one too! We are here to tell you that youth councils are not the be-all and end-all, often generating advice but not always action. Pushing your program to a *youth as co-creators* model can deepen results.



So, what is Co-Creation?

Co-creation is a popular term in innovation. Simply put, it brings a wide range of voices, who typically would not be involved, into a design process.⁸ Stakeholders align and offer diverse insights on a core problem, usually in facilitated workshops.⁹

In youth engagement, co-creation is both a mindset and a process. It requires allocating resources, space, and decision-making power to youth to design, test and implement within your organization.¹⁰



Our Youth as Co-Creators Model

At CCYP, our *youth as co-creators* model is based on core pillars of system change, mutually beneficial relationships, creating safe spaces and bringing diverse lived experiences together.¹¹ For us, co-creation looks like having youth staff and experts, having youth-led research and programs and being open to youth feedback. Youth as co-creators means giving youth an opportunity to share their voices and amplify their insight and expertise. As stakeholders, it also encompasses building opportunities for implementation and action of co-designed ideas.

“Youth resonated and felt validated with what they were saying – they realized they weren’t alone [in their experience].”

“For many youth, it was their first time bringing their ideas.”

–CCYP facilitators on co-creating with youth



References

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- ³ "Typology of Youth Participation and Empowerment Pyramid." *Organizing Engagement*, 2023, <https://organizingengagement.org/models/typology-of-youth-participation-and-empowerment-pyramid/>
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- ⁷ Ozer, Emily et al. "Youth Participatory Approaches and Health Equity: Conceptualization and Integrative Review." *American Journal of Community Psychology*, Dec 2020, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/10KnGfodjR5y3nXvNoc0USg6la56DvFDA/view>
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