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## Youth Involvement

### 3.1 Meaningful Roles for Young People\*

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**Objective:** Participants will understand the concept of youth involvement and will identify a range of opportunities for young people to become engaged

**Material:** Newsprint, sheets of colored paper, tape, markers, sticky wall or two sheets of newsprint sprayed with temporary adhesive spray

Handouts: 3.1.A. Meaningful Roles for Young People,

3.1.B. Examples of Youth Involvement

3.1.C. Legal and Other Consideration for Youth on Non for Profit Boards in New York State

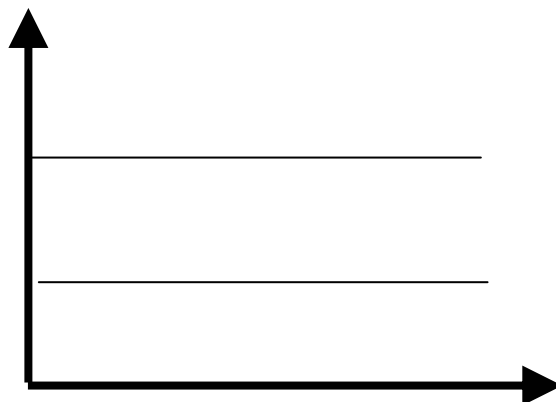
**Time:** 40 minutes

**Audience:** General

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#### Lesson Plan

**Prepare in advance:** *Take two large newsprint sheets and tape them together making one large sheet. Tape it on the wall. Draw a large x/y graph on it. With a different marker divide the graph into three segments as shown:*



*Have sheets of colored paper and tape available.*

**Step 1> Team Activity (30 min)**

One key principle of youth development is youth voice or youth involvement. Young people participate in many ways in a range of youth programs. Most of the time adults design the activities and interactions with the assumption that it will benefit the young person, and often it does. Youth involvement takes participation a step further. It invites young people to bring forward their perceptions, perspectives, ideas and talents. We adults are asked to listen to what they have to say about their own goals, and beyond that, what they have to say about programs and activities and the agency as a whole. We are challenged to change our thinking from young people as recipients to young people as resources and partners. Young people can have many meaningful roles in organizations.

With that in mind, I would like you to think about the roles young people have played in your organization. How have you involved young people in planning, decision making, evaluating? Go beyond participating in programs. How have they influenced in any way what is happening in your organization? Think about it for a minute, then team up with a neighbor and share your experiences (5 minutes).

**Process.** Who wants to give me an example? What role have young people played in your organization? **Take an example and write it down on a colored sheet of paper and post it at the appropriate level on the sticky wall/graph. Use the handout 3.1.A for guidance. Ask for more examples.**

**When participants have no more ideas, label the three different layers: Bottom layer: Tasks/Projects/Community Service; Middle layer: Input and Consultation; Top layer: Shared Leadership**

Let me explain this graph. It is a way to organize what types of roles young people can have in an organization. Starting with the bottom layer, young people are involved in planning, facilitating, mentoring, implementing projects or tasks. They make decision and have input but adults set the boundaries and frame. There is some input on the organization but usually not much. There are lots of opportunities and many young people can get involved. This is a good level to get young people involved in. Projects are time limited and concrete; you see results fairly quickly.

At the next level, input and consultation, young people give their opinion, their perspective on issues. They take a position. This can be on program and organizational level through focus groups, speak outs, or on a more ongoing basis through youth advisory groups. On the community level, young people are involved in media work – they run TV programs, newspaper columns or radio programs to express their view and opinion on issues in the community.

On the third level we have young people involved in shared leadership positions – on boards as voting members, hiring committees. Here they have more influence on the organization.

The graph suggests that it does not make sense to start with placing young people on boards if your agency is trying to increase youth involvement. There are more opportunities for young people in the bottom category. And more young people can get involved. In this category they are learning to plan, make decisions, implement and evaluate but it is very action oriented and concrete. They might learn skills here that enable them to move onto another level such as the second layer that highlights youth opinions, positions, and perspective. It requires different skills.

The third layer, shared leadership, requires many skills and motivation. It is more abstract, not action oriented, and results might be long-term. Fewer young people are likely to be interested and skilled enough to move into these positions. The same is true for adults - fewer adults have the motivation and

skills to be in leadership positions. Looking at a range of opportunities makes it easier to really implement youth participation. Too often we try to go right for the top and place young people on boards – without spending the resources and time to prepare both young people and adults to make it work.

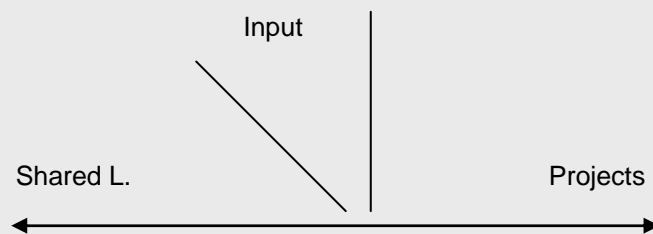
*Ask participants if they have questions or comments. Facilitate brief discussion. What do participants take away from this exercise?*

*Handouts: 3.1.B. Examples of Youth Involvement, 3.1.C Legal and Other Consideration for Youth on Non for Profit Boards in New York State*

*\* This exercise was inspired and adapted from a workshop presented by the Hampton Youth Commission.*

### Facilitation Tips

1. Practice working with the prepared newsprint or sticky wall. Take possible roles of young people and organize them according to the three layers of involvement. Working with a large display or poster can be confusing; several practice runs will be helpful
2. Some roles of young people might fit into several categories such as youth as philanthropists. This could fit into all three layers depending on the decision power and range of responsibilities defined by the project. That is fine. Categorization of each comment is not the most important aspect of this exercise. The key issue is to broaden participants' understanding of the roles and responsibilities young peoples can have in an organization.
3. It is important to remind participants to think about influence on the organization or the community initiative. It is not about programming. If young people have decision power in programs, then they most likely will fall into the first category of projects and tasks. The other important issue is that they have influence and input affecting other people. It is not just about personal choice.
4. Alternative visual representations can be used. An x/y graph or a pyramid can lead to the false assumption that the top layer is better or more worthy than the bottom layer. Here is an alternative graphic:



5. The activity can be combined with any other activity in this section. It can be used in combination with a resiliency activity (Section 4) or an activity on positive outcomes (Section 2)