

Youth Engagement Blueprint Series: Introduction

Improving Organizational Capacity to Support Youth and Young Adults Currently and Formerly in Foster Care

Youth engagement in the foster care system empowers young people to have a significant voice in decisions that affect their lives, as well as develop key skills and relationships. Improving organizational capacity to support youth engagement practices means putting in place resources and infrastructure that lead to meaningful youth engagement and creating a culture and climate that promote youth engagement at all levels of an organization. Using information gathered from experts in the field and current research, the Capacity Building Center for States (the Center) works to develop child welfare agencies' and other organizations' ability to partner successfully with youth and young adults currently and formerly in foster care to improve their lives and communities.

In February 2016, the Center and the Children's Bureau hosted a meeting of child welfare experts, including young adults formerly in foster care, child welfare professionals, and Federal grantees to discuss an organizational framework for youth engagement. The Youth Engagement Blueprint Series emerged from that meeting. This series aims to build an understanding of the four essential elements for organizational capacity to sustain youth engagement. Each element is discussed below.



Viewing Young People as Organizational Assets

means respecting the values and opinions of the youth and young adults involved in an organization and reflecting a positive youth development approach. Organizations should look for opportunities to involve youth and young adults in decision-making, program improvement, policy development, and other important areas.

Youth and young adults:

- Contribute knowledge, skills, and insights based on their lived experience to policy, program, and practice development
- Serve as a source of organizational expertise when included as consultants, trainers, or workforce members and contribute to policy and training curriculum development
- Receive recognition and compensation for their services because they play an important role in determining an organization's successful outcomes



Using Science and Technology Effectively

means applying current, research-based knowledge of adolescent brain development, trauma-informed care, and other relevant areas to policies, programs, and practices. Organizations should build capacity to translate that knowledge into practice using current technologies, such as social media.

Effective use of science and technology:

- Engages young people and increases the likelihood of providing young people with healthy and age-relevant experiences
- Is developmentally appropriate, current with technological trends, and reflective of the experiences of youth and young adults who are not in foster care
- Includes use of mobile technology and social media to engage and communicate with youth and young adults currently and formerly in foster care



Having the Right People

means building a shared commitment to working with and developing youth and young adults as a daily practice at all levels of an organization. The organization's recruitment and development strategies reflect this commitment, as does the support of its leadership, staff, and community partners.

The right people:

- Are accessible, connected to youth and young adults, and eager to learn about and understand youth culture
- Receive appropriate training and agency support to work with youth and young adults as equal partners in crafting a program of care
- Collaborate with community organizations, media outlets, advocates, and other stakeholders to build a supportive environment for youth and young people currently and formerly in foster care



Implementing Flexible and Innovative Programs and Practices

means taking a risk-tolerant, creative approach to organizational decision-making, program development, funding, and daily practice.

Flexible and innovative programs and practices:

- Promote creative ways to help youth and young adults feel engaged and included in decision-making that affects their lives and communities
- Allow young people to make mistakes without punishment and learn from their mistakes
- Are holistic and include multiple stakeholders, not just youth and young adults

For more information, visit

<https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/focus-areas/youth-development/>