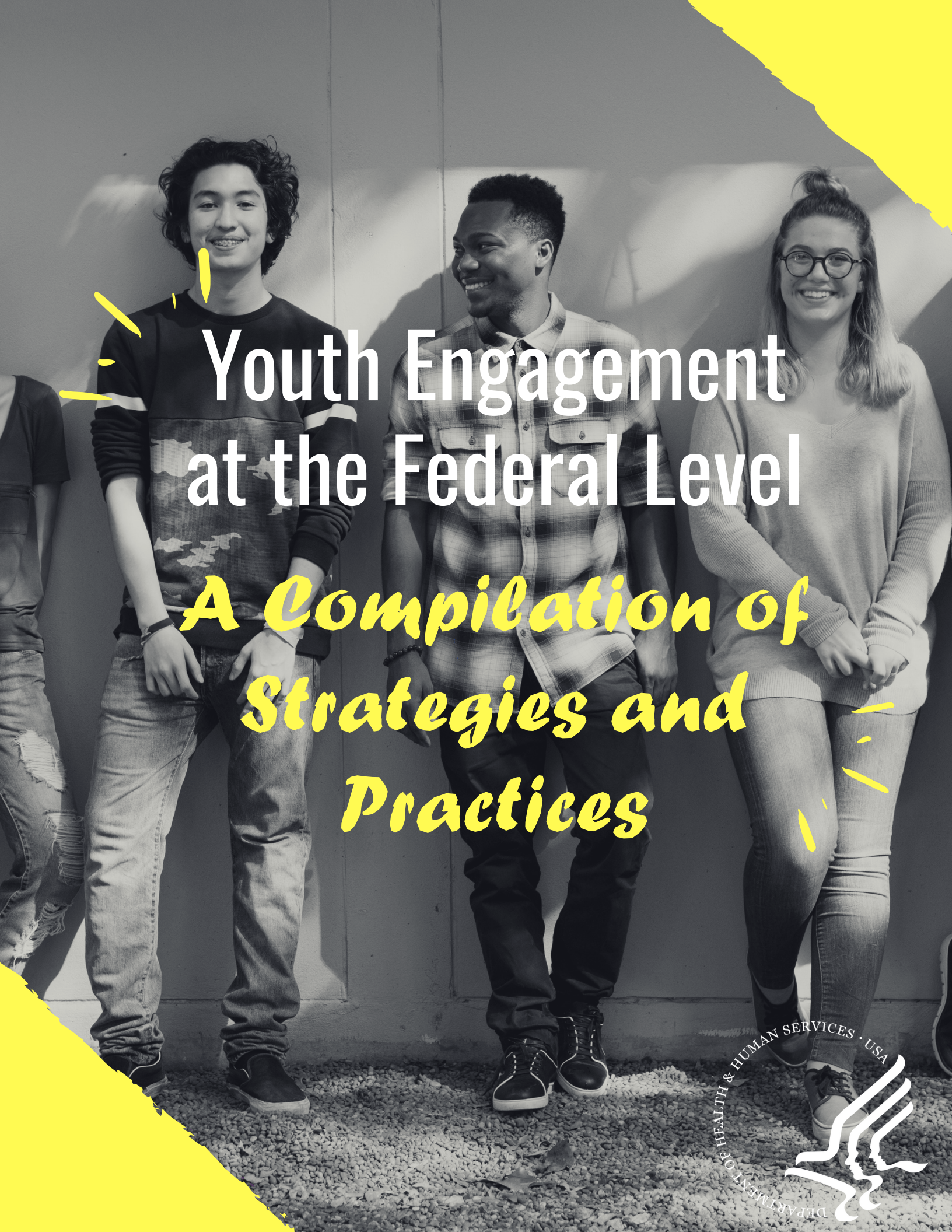


A black and white photograph of three young people standing against a light-colored wall. On the left is a young man with dark, curly hair, wearing a dark long-sleeved shirt with a camouflage pattern and jeans. In the center is a young man with short dark hair, wearing a plaid button-down shirt and dark pants. On the right is a young woman with long hair tied in a bun, wearing glasses, a light-colored sweater, and jeans. They are all smiling and looking towards the camera. The image is framed by yellow torn-edge graphics in the top right and bottom left corners.

Youth Engagement at the Federal Level

A Compilation of Strategies and Practices

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Disclaimer

The views, opinions, and content of this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of ASPE or HHS.

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Introduction

For over a year, ASPE's Youth Engagement Strategies Project has explored youth engagement among the federal government and federally funded programs to understand how agencies and departments are integrating youth engagement practices directly into their work and the work of their grantees. For the purposes of this document and project, we have adopted the following USAID definition of youth engagement:

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

In June 2018, ASPE convened a 1.5 day meeting of 27 youth engagement subject matter experts representing policymakers, young adults, practitioners, and researchers and scholars. Convening participants considered the opportunities and challenges for creating opportunities for youth engagement at the federal level and among federally funded programs, as well as specific topics such as building buy-in, capacity, and competence, and identifying a youth engagement research agenda.

As federal subject matter experts shared their youth engagement strategies and practices, the need to record and share this information became clear. This compilation of briefs on the youth engagement efforts of 12 agencies and departments describes the accomplishments and basic mechanisms of these strategies while also noting barriers, challenges, and vision for the future. The conversations that informed this report consistently clarified that federal policymakers engaging young adults do so with two clear goals in mind: 1) to better support completion of their agencies' missions, and 2) to support the development of young adults.

While the document is meant to be useful to agencies at all stages of youth engagement implementation it is not meant to be an exhaustive explanation of the youth engagement strategies used by federal policymakers. The document is also meant to serve as a starting point for the compilation of youth engagement resources produced by federal agencies for use by their colleagues and the field in general.

How to Use this Document

To simplify navigation of the report, the highlighted youth engagement strategies used by each agency is clarified in the table of contents. For example, individuals interested in learning about ways young adults can effectively serve as grant application reviewers should begin with the brief on the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Since agencies often use more than one strategy and have information to offer on a range of relevant topics such as building buy-in and sustaining their work, the matrix below has been designed to list strategies and practices covered in the briefs. As an example, readers needing information on building buy-in should read the briefs on the U.S. Department of Homeland Security’s Federal Emergency Management Agency, HUD, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture.

Regarding terminology, for clarity and consistency, the authors of this document use young adults as a term inclusive of those typically considered “youth,” “adolescents,” and “young adults” and is inclusive of individuals between the ages of 10 and 24. The term “youth” is used as an adjective, such as in “youth engagement” or “youth-led research.”

Readers new to youth engagement or those who want to review basic information on the topic should review the descriptions of common youth engagement practices on page 3 and the Youth Engagement 101 resources highlighted in the appendix.

	Building Buy-In	Building Collaborations	Civic Engagement	Conferences and Summits	Incentives	Listening Sessions	Supporting Grantees	Supporting the Field	Sustainability	Workforce Development	Training and Technical Assistance	Young Adult Consultants	Youth Councils	Vulnerable Populations
CB				X	X			X	X	X	X	X		X
CNCS		X	X		X		X			X				X
FEMA	X	X		X									X	
HUD		X					X				X	X		
NIFA		X	X	X	X			X						
NHTSA				X			X							
OAH	X	X			X	X	X		X		X		X	X
OASPE					X	X								
ODEP			X		X					X				X
OBMT								X		X				
USAID	X	X	X				X	X	X	X			X	
VSFS	X		X							X				

Common Youth Engagement Practices

By its nature, youth engagement involves few hard-and-fast rules, but instead relies on practices that effectively support engaged youth and provide the resources for sustaining their work and organizational supports. The practices described below commonly appeared as recommended practices in youth engagement guidance documents at the federal, state, and local levels, and are categorized in as youth support practices or operational practices.

YOUTH SUPPORT PRACTICES

Youth-Adult Partnerships

Supportive and collaborative relationships between adults and young adults in which leadership responsibilities, such as decision-making and project design are shared. Such partnerships allow both adults and engaged young adults to build on individual strengths while mitigating individual weaknesses.

Peer Support

The delivery of services by individuals who have similar life experiences to their service recipients. Commonly associated with the mental health field, peer support models are used in substance use recovery and many other systems.

Clear Roles and Expectations

Young adult and adult partners have a clear understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and expectations for everyone at the table.

Training and Support for Young Adults

Young adults receive the proper training and preparation to participate as full-partners and make leadership decisions. Young adults also have access to the same work supports as other team members including desk space, office equipment, computers, and telephones.

Understanding the Developmental Needs of Various Age Groups

Programs work to best meet the needs of their target age population and operate with appropriate expectations for young adults within that age group

Understanding the Relevance to Young Adults' Cultural Needs

Organizations understand that culture and background can have a large impact on how young adults perceive their power individually and as a group, and how they interact with the adults around them. In response to this understanding, organizations offer effective and appropriate support that enables youth to reach their full potential as partners and leaders.

Understanding the Relevance to Youth with Lived Experience

Organizations have a clear understanding that young adults currently or formerly involved in systems of care and custody may have unique and potentially complicated relationships with those systems. In response to this understanding, organizations work to create dynamics between young adults and adults that better shape working relationships and the partnership structure.

OPERATIONAL PRACTICES

Engaging Agency “Champions”

A small group of support staff members that can coordinate the integration of youth engagement strategies, ensure that goals are met, troubleshoot issues, and support adults in the change.

Training and Support for Adults

Adult staff and volunteers receive training on working within a youth engagement model and serving as effective colleagues within youth-adult partnerships.

Youth Engagement Activities Inventory

Inventory that enables the agency to identify where it is on Hart’s Ladder of Youth Participation, assess its readiness for change, and to identify where additional capacity building is needed.

Ensure Sufficient Human and Financial Resources

Organizations ensure that it has appropriate staffing levels to support its youth engagement work and the financial support to enable youth and staff preparation and mission success.

Children's Bureau: Young Adult Consultant Program

Agency and Contractor Representatives:

- Catherine Heath, Youth Specialist; Children's Bureau
- Jeremy Long, formerly, Senior Associate, ICF and currently the Advisor to the Associate Commissioner of the Children's Bureau;
- Lupe Tovar-Ortiz, NYTD Manager, JBS International, Inc.

"Youth engagement causes you to examine every aspect of your organization, for better or worse, really exposing the greatest capacity we have as a human services field." Catherine Heath

The Children's Bureau (CB) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Children, Youth, and Families (ACYF), focuses on child welfare-related matters including foster care, family preservation and support, child abuse and neglect, and preparing young people for a successful transition to adulthood. The CB views involving youth voice as critical to the improvement of services provided to youth and overall to the child welfare system. In addition to this clear vision, the CB's youth engagement work is unique in that there are federal requirements as part of the Title IV-E program (federal foster care funds) that require states to engage young people in foster care in their case and transition planning. As such, CB has developed two programs to support young adults in providing technical assistance [Young Adult Consultants (YACs)], and in monitoring efforts related to data collection about youth in foster care (NYTD Reviewers program).

The Young Adult Consultant Program for the Provision of Technical Assistance

The Young Adult Consultant (YAC) program was initially launched in 2006 through the CB-funded, University of Oklahoma-operated National Resource Center for Youth Development.¹ The National Resource Center involved young adults in all CB meetings and activities often as staff, interns, meeting planners, presenters, panelists, and facilitators. When CB transitioned from resource centers to a single provider of technical assistance in 2013, the YAC program continued. Individuals between the ages of 18 and 26 with foster care experience are eligible to apply for a position as a Young Adult Consultant. YACs are part of the Capacity Building Center for States,² CB's technical assistance provider.

YACs working with the Capacity Building Center for States (the Center) support the efforts of public child welfare agencies to effectively implement child welfare practices that improve outcomes for children, youth, and families. YACs work with states on everything from prevention to adoption, not just on topics directly related to youth. YACs are

1 The NYTD Reviewers program was also part of the work with the National Resource Center for Youth Development but was later moved to a separate contract.

2 The Capacity Building Center for States is currently operated under contract with ICF International.

assigned to technical assistance projects based on alignments between their expertise and the states' identified needs.

This matching work is completed by the Center's YAC Coordinator who then connects the YAC with the Center's liaison staff in the appropriate region (and based on the consultant's availability). The YACs assigned by the Center to the state projects are not intended to replace engagement of young adults in the states, but instead as a model and as a facilitator for the state's own efforts.

The number of active YACs varies based on the states' needs and areas of expertise required. The CB and the Center are constantly recruiting consultants for the pool and advise that it takes between five and seven years to develop a core group of outreach partners to ensure a steady stream of applicants.³ When selecting YACs the Center weighs a variety of factors and takes into account that there may be different expectations for applicants who are 18 versus those in their mid-20s who may already be in professional careers. Because young adults are expected to transition out of the Young Adult Consultant role, there is always a need to recruit and train new YACs.

Training YACs

The Center has shifted away from annual trainings to trainings that focus on the skill sets responsive to the current needs of state child welfare agencies. For example, if the YACs need training on providing tailored services to the states, the Center can arrange for a training by a tailored services manager or other subject matter expert. The Center also has strategic partnerships with organizations to deliver professional development and leadership trainings.

National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) Reviewers

The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) is a federal reporting system that collects information on youth transitioning out of foster care. States administering the John H. Chafee Foster Care for Successful Transition to Adulthood must report on the services provided to young people and also conduct a survey in a cohort methodology at ages 17, 19, and 21. The resulting data is used as part of the assessment of state-level operation of services that support the successful transition to adulthood. Recognizing the integral role of young adults in successfully designing services and implementing a survey for young people, the NYTD work at CB has always engaged groups of youth and young professionals at the national level to guide the work.⁴

The CB involved youth and young adults to test a monitoring protocol for the NYTD data collection system. In December 2017 CB formally implemented the NYTD Assessment Review process. As part of the Federal Monitoring Team there are three to four NYTD Reviewers who participate as members.

Training NYTD Reviewers

Given the highly technical nature of the NYTD Review process, the contractor hosts an annual, in-person 2.5 days, weekend training. The training is split into activities and scenarios that simulate multiple aspects of a real NYTD Review. The training structure is based on a "show, practice, do" model. During the training, the activity is "explained." Then young adults see trainers or other young professionals demonstrate or "show" the skills or activity. Then there is opportunity for them to "practice" in a supportive

³ The historical information is also true of the NYTD Reviewer program.

⁴ The NYTD Reviewers program is currently operated under contract with JBS International, Inc.

environment. Finally, young adults “do” the activity independently. The training also focuses on developing “critical thinking” skills that are important during the NYTD Review.

Trainees conduct real-life tasks such as reviewing a case, practice conducting stakeholders interviews, practice taking stakeholder interview notes and reporting out on case record reviews—all activities Federal NYTD team members are expected to participate in. Trainees receive real-time feedback throughout the training and an assessment of their work after each NYTD Review to set high expectations and to inform ongoing coaching. The program manager also coordinates regular virtual trainings and has shorter YouTube-style videos readily available for ongoing refresher trainings. Program management writes quarterly newsletters that cover aspects of the review process which NYTD Reviewers, federal partners or project staff identify as areas that require additional support or training. As the expertise of NYTD Reviewers evolve, training opportunities are developed to provide information to continue to expand the technical knowledge of Reviewers.

The annual NYTD Reviewer Training is led by two experienced former or current NYTD Reviewers. Trainers are compensated for their preparatory work and are involved in developing training updates that reflect ongoing improvements made to the NYTD Reviews or emerging training needs. Preparation typically begins three to four months in advance of the training. The NYTD Reviewers program utilizes a training model that has one of the NYTD Reviewer co-trainers return the next year and help prepare and train a new co-trainer, as a peer-to-peer learning strategy.

Coaching NYTD Reviewers

The NYTD Support Coach role is a unique opportunity offered to the more experienced NYTD Reviewers who are transitioning out of the NYTD Reviewer pool (due to the age requirement or professional growth). Each team of NYTD Reviewers has a “NYTD Support Coach” for each review. This role supports the NYTD Reviewers through the NYTD Review planning phase, including preparation and participation in all planning calls; on site by preparing for roles during the review and providing debriefing opportunities as needed; and post-review in cleaning up stakeholder interview notes, and preparation and participation in calls if needed. Coaches attend the annual NYTD Training to practice and develop “coaching” skills and knowledge. They play a critical role during the training in modeling what the coaching relationship will be like onsite.

It should also be noted that coaches ensure young people are professionally dressed, on time, and prepared for the day’s activities. They provide additional information on expectations of changing roles during the review, answer questions they may have about NYTD, and help Reviewers practice asking questions or preparing remarks for debriefs and formal exit conferences. Finally, coaches can help Young Adult Reviewers manage bias (assumptions regarding youth in foster care), trauma (from case record reviews), and assist to resolve issues that arise during the review (e.g., travel or management of issues at home/work/school).

Key Youth Engagement Practices

Compensation for YACs and NYTD Reviewers

In alignment with the Children’s Bureau’s belief that fair compensation is a hallmark signal to young adults that they are valued as professionals,⁵ both contracts provide monetary

⁵ Many young adults also have part-time jobs they depend on for income.

compensation (pay rate) along with covering lodging and travel for the consultants. Both organizations have developed internal processes to determine the rate of pay. Both contracts pay for as many items in advance as possible to limit upfront costs to young adults.

Ensuring Sufficient Human and Financial Resources

Financial constraints for young adults, especially those who are in foster care and may not receive financial support from their families, can be difficult when it comes to things like credit card deposits required for hotels and per diem. The Young Adult Consultant and NYTD Reviewer programs have developed processes to address these constraints (e.g., working with hotels and providing per diem in advance) to ensure that finances do not preclude or impact the young adult's participation. The program coordinators warn against underestimating the importance of smooth travel, hotel check-in, ease and accessibility of getting materials and documents, per diem, and payment in supporting participation of young people. Career professionals have access to work email, company credit cards, printers, office supplies, and the internet. Young professionals may not have the same level of access and these items should not create barriers. Coordinators and coaches provide all the communication or facilitate communication on behalf of the work. For example, a young adult may not respond to an individual they do not know.

Peer Leadership

The Young Adult Consultant and NYTD Reviewer programs emphasize peer-to-peer, peer-led, and near-peer support as a key strategy for training, coaching, and support. Usually, three to four NYTD Reviewers and one Support Coach participate on each of the NYTD Reviews. One NYTD Reviewer will be attending their first review, another will have moderate experience (two to three reviews completed) and another will be a skilled Reviewer (four-plus reviews completed). This model builds the capacity within a young leader pool, and supports the development of a consultant pool full of well-trained, competent, and professional young adults with various experience.

With the YAC program, the same strategy is employed to ensure young adults are given opportunity to support their skill development with the coordinator offering multiple opportunities and levels of engagement. For example, on a webinar, one YAC may be a co-presenter and another YAC may give a short presentation of information.

Training, Coaching, and Support

As described above, both consultant pools receive significant amounts of training over their time in the programs to continue to allow them to grow and develop as young professionals. In addition to training, the YAC coordinators/coaches provide professional development, supervision, support and also advocate. Coordinators and coaches work to support youth and young adults in an age-appropriate way to continue to develop their skills and professionalism. They also work to ensure young adults have a support system and provide concrete support to help them be successful and thrive in the program.

Supporting Young Adults with Lived Experience

A unique requirement of the YACs and NYTD Reviewers is their lived experience in foster care. Given the sensitivity that comes with that, each individual decides if and when they share about this experience as they work with the states. Consultants are highly trained and bring their trained and personal expertise to this work. They receive specific

training on “[Strategic Sharing](#)” (or other similar training) as a foundation to their role as consultants or Reviewers.

For many YACs, their roles on these projects empower them to utilize their experiences to improve services for others experiencing foster care today. Given the complex dynamics that can emerge when young adults with lived experience partner with systems stakeholders, the YAC and NYTD Reviewer programs, along with coaches, ensure that the young adults have clear support before, during, and after their consultant work.

Contracting for Youth Engagement

Selecting the appropriate vendor to support YACs and NYTD Reviewers requires agencies, contractors, and organizations that can be a model to states in their youth engagement work. Supporting young adults requires some work outside of the range of work to which many organizations are accustomed. Contractors must embrace youth engagement strategies and commit to supporting the professional development of the young adults with which they work.

Creating Career Pathways

YACs and NYTD Reviewers can remain consultants for the duration of their age eligibility (18 to 26). However, it is often the case that life, school, or other professional responsibilities reduce their participation in the program. Both programs’ staff work with their respective young professionals to prevent over-commitment, identify appropriately timed and matched projects, and continuously build their skill sets. As young professionals reach the end of their age eligibility, the CB and both program coordinators work with consultants to honor their service in this role and to transition them toward next-level professional or career opportunities in relevant fields. This is also an important aspect of building opportunities for other young adults. Because this is uncharted territory, the CB and others think through new opportunities to capitalize on the investment that was made in the skills and knowledge of young professionals. For example, some experienced NYTD Reviewers are now part of a very select group of national professionals with expert knowledge of NYTD.

Vision for the Future

The CB would like to support the forward movement of youth engagement as an evidence-based and evidence-informed practice. Agency staff would like to collect and assess data on the effectiveness of the YAC or NYTD Reviewer program; however, at this time there are evaluation constraints. They currently receive evaluations and feedback from consultants but recognize that this does not translate into data that can be shared on a global scale.

Resources

Youth Engagement Blueprint Series

The Youth Engagement Blueprint Series is comprised of several documents describing how to build capacity in four component areas: viewing young people as organizational assets, having the right people engaging young adults, implementing flexible and innovative programs and practices, and using science and technology effectively.

Engaging Youth in Foster Care Podcast

In this podcast for child welfare caseworkers, a YAC with the Capacity Building Center for States shares his perspectives on using social media to support youth in care and ways to help youth in foster care recognize and build relationships with supportive adults in their lives.

Introduction to the NYTD Video Series

This six part video series provides an overview of the National Youth in Transition Database and the NYTD Review process.

Federal NYTD Reviewer Opportunity

This webpage includes resources for recruiting and training young people to serve as Reviewers on the Federal Review Team for the NYTD Reviews.

State NYTD Reviewer Opportunity

This webpage includes information to help the state identify, recruit, engage, and support youth and young adults (ages 18–25) to participate in their NYTD Review, CQI process, and capacity building within their state, and to remain involved in ongoing NYTD efforts.

Corporation for National and Community Service: National Service Leadership

Agency Representatives:

- Linda Cook, Senior Program Officer
- Oksana Jensen, National Program Officer
- Jacob Sgambati, Director of Operations

In operation since 1993, the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) houses the AmeriCorps Programs, which create service and civic engagement opportunities for thousands of individuals annually. Through its internally operated projects and partnerships with other federal agencies, CNCS creates multiple pathways for young adults to participate in its programs with time commitments ranging from 300 hours (minimum time) to 1,700 hours (full-time). Full-time corps members receive modest living stipends, and work toward a monetary post-secondary education award. One of these pathways, AmeriCorps NCCC, specifically supports and engages young adults between the ages of 18 and 24.

AmeriCorps NCCC

AmeriCorps NCCC (NCCC) was initially developed by the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) in 1992 and transferred to CNCS when that agency was created. Reflective of its DOD origins, NCCC's design is built on military structures and values (e.g., uniforms, units, and physical fitness) and also the team and service components of the Civilian Conservation Corps that operated in the U.S. in the 1920s and 1930s. NCCC considers itself a short-term direct engagement mechanism that helps move communities over particular obstacles. However, some of NCCC's efforts to support communities to recover from natural disasters can last for several years.

Two Corps Pathways

Over the course of ten months, corps members work in teams of eight to ten young adults and often complete three or four service projects at sponsoring sites in their region. Each group operates under the guidance of a team leader (who may be any age). NCCC offers two branches: the Traditional Corps and the FEMA Corps.

The Traditional Corps' approximately 1,400 annual members work on infrastructure improvement projects, environmental conservation, energy conservation, urban and rural development, and veterans' services. They complete projects in partnership with other federal partners, national and community-based non-profits, and local governments. The FEMA Corps maintains the same structures as the Traditional program; however, the 700 annual members are funded by FEMA and focus on disaster response and preparedness.

Incentives

NCCC covers all living and transportation costs for the service period and a modest monthly living stipend. Members successfully completing the program are eligible to receive the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award, which amounted to \$6,095 in 2018. Through a college credit program, members can elect to complete independent study work that is eligible for college credit at some colleges and universities. Members

can also earn certifications or preliminary qualifications for work in certain fields, such as tax preparation and wildland firefighting.

Recruitment and Training

The program's eligibility requirements are minimal: participants must be between the ages of 18 and 24, U.S. citizens, and able to pass a criminal history background check. NCCC's mission and training focus on a service leadership model. All corps members participate in an initial 3.5 week Corps Member Training Institute (CTI). Each region conducts and designs its own CTI based on a set range of topic areas that include leadership competencies, team work, life skills, professional skills such as embracing diversity, learning how to be flexible, and cultural entry into new communities. As the number of young adults with mental and behavioral health needs rises among its corps members, NCCC is strategizing around training adjustments that will increase the competency of its staff and members to support members with behavioral health needs.

The agency is currently shifting its recruitment strategies. In previous years, current corps members were directly involved in recruiting other corps members. Now, the agency is separating the two functions and embracing the idea of "ten months of meaningful service and a lifetime to recruit." In this shift, the agency has also intensified its social media (primarily through Instagram) and online presence. NCCC has also contracted with a national recruiting organization that generates 75,000 leads each year, which NCCC then cultivates.

NCCC Mechanics

As the only AmeriCorps program wholly owned and operated by CNCS, NCCC recruits, selects, pays, houses, trains, and has full accountability for its approximately 2,000 members annually for the entirety of their 10-month service period. The program has approximately 120 staff members split between the agency's national and regional levels. The 30-plus staff members at the national headquarters oversee higher level policy development, strategy development, budget and finance, recruitment, corps member selection and placement, and medical screening. NCCC's approximately 90 regional staff operate in four regions and focus on mission delivery, outreach and project development, member support, unit leadership, and operational functions such as managing the organization's vehicle fleet and coordinating the residential program.

Sponsoring Site Selection

Sponsoring sites are chosen through a multi-step application process. Potential sponsors submit project concept forms to NCCC. NCCC staff then work with those organizations to refine their concepts and bring them into alignment with agency requirements and state-level priorities. Once a concept form is acceptable, the agency may then be invited to submit a full application.

Selected sponsors typically underestimate all that the corps teams can accomplish so NCCC invests significant time collaborating with potential sites to refine their scope of work. NCCC's regional staff does substantial preparatory work with the organizations from selection to the arrival of the AmeriCorps team that includes housing evaluation, work site and safety measures, and community impact assessments. This pre-work does not necessarily include direct youth engagement training for sponsors. Some sponsors do bring those skills to the projects.

Measuring Outcomes

NCCC measures its effectiveness by its activities and outputs such as tons of debris moved, numbers of veterans served, or houses built. In 2018 the program launched a three-year longitudinal study to track NCCC's impact on the leadership competencies of individuals who complete the program, drop out of the program, or never engage. The study will also measure the short-term and long-term impact that NCCC teams have on the communities they serve.

Key Youth Engagement Strategy

Youth-Adult Partnerships

An adult team leader supervises and supports each team of corps members. In contrast to corps members who must be between the ages of 18 and 24, team leaders can be any age. In addition to the standard corps member training, the team leader training adds a significant focus on supervisory skills, leadership development, policies, conflict resolution, team building, and incident response. Team leaders also help facilitate the Corps Member Training Institute. While on service projects, team leaders engage their groups in team-building activities and conflict resolution with the goal of building a cohesive and high-performing team.

Collaboration with CNCS

CNCS's AmeriCorps programs are eager to build new youth engagement collaborations with other federal policymakers. Since its inception, AmeriCorps has successfully partnered with several federal departments and agencies, including the U.S. Departments of Justice, Education, Veteran Affairs, and the Office of Refugee Resettlement within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. As an example, in 2014, CNCS and the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention launched Youth Opportunity AmeriCorps, a three-year program that enrolled up to 300 formerly incarcerated young adults in national service projects. The program was designed as a response to the barriers that justice-involved young adults may face due to their systems experience. Agencies interested in exploring collaborations can reach out to CNCS's CEO's office or NCCC's leadership.

Vision for the Future

In ten years, Jacob Sgambati would like for AmeriCorps to be more widely recognized. In that timeframe, many of its oldest alumni will be reaching senior positions in their careers. A continued partnership between NCCC and an active alumni base would powerfully support the agency's mission.

Federal Emergency Management Agency: National Youth Preparedness Council

Agency Representatives:

- Allison Carlock, Partnership and Engagement Branch Chief (A) and National Youth Preparedness Lead
- Lauralee Koziol, FEMA's National Advisor on Children and Disasters
- Gretchen Wesche, Emergency Management Specialist

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) describes its mission in simple terms: “Helping people before, during, and after disasters.” Through the efforts of the national headquarters and ten regional offices, the Agency plans and implements emergency responses during community crises. While first responders are typically assumed to be adults, over the past several years FEMA staff have begun to concretize a role for young adults in disaster preparedness.



The National Youth Preparedness Council

Recognizing the historical silence of youth voice in federal disaster prevention and response planning, FEMA launched a national Youth Preparedness Council (YPC) in 2012. The YPC is comprised of fifteen members, typically between the ages of 13 and 19, and acts as a point of contact between young people and the Agency's headquarters and regional offices. The group regularly provides feedback to FEMA staff and partners, and YPC members speak as FEMA affiliates at national conferences and community events.

How the YPC Works

Selected via a national application process, YPC members volunteer to participate for two-year terms. The YPC meets virtually bi-monthly with FEMA staff to provide feedback on their on-going yearly projects, and provide feedback on FEMA's messaging, programs, content, and public service announcements to ensure that these efforts will resonate

with young people. YPC members also collaborate on various projects throughout their term and attend an annual two-day YPC Summit in Washington, D.C. for face-to-face engagement, relationship building, and training.

Initially, the members worked on individual projects in their local communities. To increase the YPC's national impact, members have worked on rotating projects for the past two years. The current topics are: financial preparedness, youth preparedness, and citizen responder programs, which include life-saving skills. This shift to group projects has resulted in increased member engagement, enabled FEMA staff to streamline their support of the members' work, and also aligned the YPC's projects more closely with Agency and Administrator priorities. For example, financial preparedness has become a key component of FEMA's work. The assigned YPC project group has designed activities for young adults during the month of April, Financial Capability Month, and contributed to the planning of FEMA's activities for that month. To track their progress and accomplishments, YPC members regularly submit status reports on their projects, individual member service hours, events attended, community members reached, and resources shared.

While the YPC members do not receive monetary compensation, FEMA pays for their travel and lodging expenses to attend the annual YPC Summit. Agency staff also connect the members with stakeholders for mentorship and assistance accessing the tools and resources necessary to carry out their council member responsibilities.

Key Youth Engagement Practices

Mentorship

Mentorship is a key component of the YPC's youth engagement strategies. A FEMA staff member with the appropriate subject matter expertise serves as a mentor to each of the project groups. Each YPC member also develops a mentorship relationship with a Regional FEMA staff member.

Peer Leadership

The YPC creates significant youth leadership development and peer-to-peer opportunities for its members. YPC members serve as the Co-Chairs. The group projects create a dynamic in which members are accountable and responsive to each other. Upon completion of their terms, members can return in an YPC alumni role and support and advise current members on projects or individual challenges.

"Sometimes the students are more willing to talk to their peers because they don't want to disappoint us, or they feel an age gap. Having the alumni members goes a long way." Allison Carlock

Training and Support

During the annual YPC Summit, FEMA provides training and support to help council members build skills and navigate situations they may encounter in their communities. Training topics include public speaking, project planning, developing elevator pitches regarding their projects, and social media and media engagement training. The latter trainings help young adults navigate the complexities of being affiliated with FEMA but not an actual FEMA staff member, when approached by the media in their local communities.

Regional Youth Preparedness Councils

The national YPC has sparked increased interest in youth engagement among FEMA's Regional offices. In 2014, Region 6 (Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas), launched the first regional YPC. The resulting snowball effect has led to the creation of YPCs in nine of FEMA's ten Regions. Each Region currently uses individualized youth engagement approaches (e.g., working groups or team projects) that are based on what works best for the needs of their community.

Recommendations for Successful Youth Engagement at the Federal Level

Build Relationships with Engaged Youth

Because YPC members live across the United States, it can be difficult to maintain the same level of engagement as is common with face-to-face interactions. The in-person annual YPC Summit has been an effective tool for maintaining engagement and creating space for relationship building. Connecting national and regional YPC members to FEMA staff for mentorships in their Region has also helped sustain engagement and ensure that YPC members feel completely supported.

Get Leadership Buy-in

FEMA staff credit their leadership for supporting and shepherding the Agency's efforts to start the national Youth Preparedness Council. In addition to reporting on youth engagement metrics and outcomes to gain and retain leadership buy-in, FEMA staff also recommended arranging for direct interactions between agency leadership and engaged youth.

"It's hard to communicate [youth engagement's] energy and value, but through interactions leaders can see it and feel it." Allison Carlock

Build Partnerships with Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations

In 2009, the National Commission on Children and Disasters required federal agencies including FEMA, HHS, DOJ, and ED to work on cross-cutting regulations affecting children and disasters. FEMA then collaborated with ED and the Red Cross to write the National Strategy for Youth Preparedness Education. The publication of this document led to the creation of a body of 65 National Strategy Affirmers, consisting of governmental and nongovernmental organizations that collaborate to move forward youth engagement efforts in preparedness-related areas. Affirmers share and learn from each other's youth engagement work, give visibility to the stakeholders' annual priorities, and also create opportunities for cross-sector partnership.

Vision for the Future

FEMA staff are working toward Youth Preparedness Councils in every state. This would then allow for the creation of a robust, standardized process by which local issues are fed vertically up through each level, ultimately to the national level YPC. The addition of state YPCs would also allow for collaboration between key state-level stakeholders and the various YPCs. FEMA staff would also like to see more opportunities for interaction between the state, regional, and national YPCs.

Resources

National Strategy for Youth Preparedness Education

This document lays out the importance of educating young leaders on emergency preparedness, a vision for the National Strategy, and priority steps.

FEMA Region VI Youth Preparedness Councils

Agency Representative:

- Bill Bischof, Community Preparedness Officer, FEMA Region VI

In 2012, Bill Bischof, FEMA's Region VI Community Preparedness Officer attended the inaugural National Youth Preparedness Council (YPC) annual meeting. He left the event with a plan. As the person charged with coordinating community preparedness with state and tribal emergency management partners throughout Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Texas, he wanted to create more opportunities for preparedness leadership among the region's diverse youth population.

In 2014, the Region VI Youth Preparedness Council held its first meeting and over the next three years Arkansas, New Mexico, and Texas each launched their own state-level councils. The young adult chairs of those councils then joined the regional YPC. In 2017, the Otoe-Missouria tribe in Oklahoma launched the first ever tribal YPC. Then, in 2018, Saline County, Arkansas began the first local YPC in the United States and has since been joined by 29 other local councils in Arkansas and one in Clovis, New Mexico.

Building on a Texas-Based Youth Engagement Model

Many of the Region VI YPCs have embraced Teen CERT (Community Emergency Response Training) Camps as a key component of their youth preparedness engagement work. Based on the model developed by the Texas School Safety Center (TSSC), the weeklong camps train council members between the ages of 13 and 16 in leadership skills; community action planning; and in emergency response tactics including first aid, search and rescue, and disaster psychology. Once trained, participants are tested through an intense disaster simulation in which they must complete necessary emergency response tasks. Bill describes the change in the participants' demeanor and confidence as striking and inspiring. He explained, "In the beginning, all the kids were shy and clinging to the walls. By the end of the exercise, because of their training, the kids were off the walls and had the same confidence and swagger you've seen in other emergency professionals. They were extremely competent and focused."

As of 2017, the Arkansas Departments of Emergency Management and Higher Education have coordinated three Teen CERT Camps with four more slated for summer 2019. The Otoe Missouri Tribe is currently leading preparations for a tribal Teen CERT Camp conducted in partnership with the Choctaw Nation and Inter Tribal Emergency Management Coalition of Oklahoma. Tribal young adults in Region VI and beyond will be invited to attend the event, which will likely be the largest Teen CERT camp ever held in the region. Through consultations with FEMA Region VI staff and/or cross-agency collaboration, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Tunica Biloxi Tribe in Louisiana are also planning Teen CERT camps.

Once fully trained, the youth leaders return to their home communities with new skills and community preparedness action plans they'll execute throughout the year. Many YPC members also teach emergency preparedness skills to students in 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades. To conduct these trainings, members have access to FEMA products and tools for free through the FEMA publications warehouse.

Funding the State and Local Youth Councils

The Teen CERT camps are funded through a mix of invitational travel funds, special projects money available through national preparedness at FEMA's headquarters and regional money allocated for exercises. Some of the partners at the state and local levels also receive support from local partners including other governmental agencies (e.g., FBI offices, bomb squads, and fire departments as well as volunteers willing to donate time and resources). Bill Bischof advises federal policymakers interested in spreading youth engagement efforts to the state and local levels to be mindful of the limitations imposed by their role. Federal staff can only help by sharing knowledge and resources and must be ready to compromise as local communities build programs and models that fit them.

Assessing Impact on Mission Delivery

The regional, state, and local YPC's impact on FEMA's mission is difficult to measure within the short timeframe. However, throughout Region VI, young adults trained through the Teen CERT camps have put their training to use in local emergencies and are increasingly being integrated in the local communities' emergency response resources (e.g., as designated First Aid providers at community events), especially in rural areas without local emergency medical response services.

Vision for the Future

Bill Bischof envisions a future in which FEMA's youth engagement work has help changed the culture of preparedness for the better everywhere. This includes increased local access to training on first aid, search and rescue, incident command, leadership, and team member skills. He says it is all built on the relationships Region VI has with its state and tribal partners. Each success is shaped by sharing strategies between partners. "It's as if," he explained, "we are all sitting at one big regional table with each person sharing their last win with the next person. FEMA Region VI supplies the table and the time while Texas tells Arkansas how to start a youth camp. Arkansas then tells Oklahoma who tells its Otoe-Missouria and Choctaw tribal partners and soon we have a region dotted with youth preparedness camps and councils at the state, tribal and local levels."

Resources

Teen Community Emergency Response Team (CERT): Launching and Maintaining the Training

This guide is developed for individuals who want to start Teen CERT training in their local high schools. The guide covers building support, establishing and maintaining the training, and training resources.

Housing and Urban Development: Youth Grant Reviewers and Supporting Grantees

Agency Representatives:

- Caroline Crouse, Special Needs Assistance Programs (SNAP) Specialist
- April J. Mitchell, Special Needs Assistance Programs (SNAP) Specialist

“Through the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program, communities are able to involve youth, house youth, and explore options they wouldn’t be able to explore without this program.” April J. Mitchell

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) implements programs, policies, and funding responsive to the nation’s housing needs. The agency’s work directly impacts young adults experiencing vulnerable living situations and homelessness—issues often necessitating complex interventions and solutions. In 2016, HUD announced the first round of awardees under its Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP). The YHDP’s mission is to reduce the number of young adults experiencing homelessness through increased collaboration between local stakeholders, attention to special populations of youth at higher risk of experiencing homelessness, and the development of coordinated community action plans.

HUD envisions the YHDP as a way for the agency and its partners to explore innovative responses to young adult homelessness. Through the use of waivers and intensive technical assistance, the program affords local communities the opportunity to work outside of the agency’s traditional stipulations. The program has also enabled HUD to integrate young adults into all stages of its work including the development of HUD’s Notice of Funding Availability (NOFA) for the YHDP, the application review process, and as technical assistance providers to awardees.

Engaging Young Adults in the Demonstration Project

At the inception of the YHDP, HUD began collaborating with the True Colors United’s National Youth Forum on Homelessness (the Forum). The Forum is a youth-driven organization comprised of young adults who have personally experienced homelessness and have extensive training in systems work and technical assistance delivery.

Application Reviews

In 2016, HUD convened Forum members in Washington D.C. for a one-day, in-person training on reviewing applications submitted in response to the NOFA. The training agenda included a young adult-led team building exercise, training on federal application processes and requirements, and norming activities that used a mock application to clarify how federal reviewers align their thoughts about questions and answers.

Once the NOFA application period closed, the young adults reviewed and scored their assigned applications. HUD communicated with them throughout the scoring process through conference calls. HUD staff was able to create access for the young adults to input their scores into the same database system used by HUD employees.

Youth Listening Sessions

HUD also provides funding for Forum members to attend the twice-yearly National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH) Conference. HUD coordinates with NAEH to arrange Forum-led sessions at the conferences. Forum members also participate in listening sessions with HUD staff at many NAEH conferences, in which they provide input on ways HUD can improve capacity.

Supporting Grantees: Coordinating Youth Engagement Technical Assistance

Multi-Focus Technical Assistance

Recognizing that their grantees come into the YHDP with a range of youth engagement skills, Forum members provide youth engagement technical assistance to YHDP grantees. The Forum members are subcontracted through the Corporation for Supportive Housing, an organization that provides training and technical assistance on supportive housing issues. In their technical assistance provider role, Forum members partner with the local Continuums of Care and work with each grantee's Youth Action Board to build their capacities.

In addition to the youth engagement technical assistance provided by Forum members, all YHDP awardees also receive technical assistance to support the educational needs of their clients and operational technical assistance focusing on organizational structure, completion of a needs assessment, capacity building, and project design. HUD staff pointed to this arrangement as one of the trickier components to coordinate – to ensure that the technical assistance providers are communicating and working together effectively where necessary. Communities receive this intensive technical assistance for two years. Once they cycle out of the demonstration program, they may renew their HUD grants under the Continuum of Care program.

To monitor and assess the effectiveness of the technical assistance and grantee implementation, HUD staff conduct monthly joint calls between the individual awardees and technical assistance providers. Occasionally, HUD staff speaks solely with the awardees to hear their thoughts on the technical assistance provision. HUD staff also conducts frequent calls with the technical assistance providers to receive updates on the communities' implementation processes and any challenges.

“We emphasize that [the Youth Action Boards] are really not just someone sitting on the sidelines and advising, it is a group of youth driving the process... We are looking to model what we want communities to be doing and that is having the youth drive the systems they need, not having adults determine what should be done for them.” Caroline Crouse

Key Youth Engagement Practices

Training and Support for Young Adults

As discussed above, HUD staff host an in-person training with the Forum members participating in the NOFA review process. In addition to teaching the nuts-and-bolts of the review process, HUD staff balanced the need to give young adults space to express what they thought should be funded and why, while also clarifying the regulatory limitations on the funding and providing historical context as necessary. HUD staff asserted that the young adults were responsive to the boundaries and rationales and worked well within them.

Ensuring Sufficient Human and Financial Resources

The 2016 YHDP NOFA repeatedly emphasized that youth engagement should be a key component of applicants' planning and work. The NOFA required that all applicants have a functioning Youth Action Board and for that group to sign off on the organization's application. HUD staff works with communities on their coordinated action plans prior to the submission of the application and provides intensive layers of assistance throughout time spent in the YHDP to raise the communities' service and youth engagement capacities, and then provides the funds and technical assistance for the implementation of the grantees youth engagement work.

"The communities we have chosen want youth involved, they really are trying to figure out how do we get out there, how do we get in there and really understand what is going on with this population ... the communities are hungry for it ..." April J. Mitchell

Vision for the Future

The youth engagement components of the YHDP are contingent upon continued funding which is annually uncertain given the program's status as a demonstration project. However, young adults are engaged in other aspects of the agency's work such as the HUD-sponsored 100-Day Challenge to End Youth Homelessness which happens in communities around the country with the assistance of young adults affiliated with True Colors United. HUD staff is hoping to grow youth engagement in its other SNAP work and has created a Consumer Engagement Team among its staff.

Resources

HUD's Guide for Engaging Youth in Decision Making and Planning

Designed as a guide for local Continuums of Care working to prevent and end youth homelessness, the document suggests steps for effectively engaging young adults in project development processes.

YHDP Community Resources

The HUD Exchange's YHDP Community Resources page offers Lessons Learned from the YHDP, a youth collaboration webinar, the grantees' Coordinated Community Plans, and information on HUD's 100-Day Challenge to End Homelessness.

True Colors Fund Youth Collaboration Toolkit

Developed by the National Youth Forum on Homelessness and the True Colors Fund, the toolkit is a primer on effectively engaging youth in the work to end homelessness. Topics covered include creating authentic youth-adult partnerships, identifying barriers, undoing adultism, and guiding principles.

More on Funding Youth Engagement

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) – Youth Engagement Cooperative Agreements

Agency Representative:

- Devin Burke, Highway Safety Specialist

The U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) funds youth-serving organizations that focus on traffic safety; conducts research on teen driving behavior; and develops research-based youth-focused web and social media content. The agency funds cooperative agreements which include youth engagement around traffic safety. Cooperative agreement partners include Family and Career Community Leaders of America (FCCLA), the National Organizations for Youth Safety (NOYS), and Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD). These agreements enable the grantee organizations to use NHTSA money to fund safety-related activities, materials, and projects that ultimately belong to the grantee and can be used by young people, parents, and educators across the country. This allows the grantees to continue the programs they create even after the cooperative agreements end while allowing NHTSA to partner with these organizations in their efforts to improve teen driving safety. In addition, the agency has committed to providing internships each year to the Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) National Student of the Year. This internship brings a student to Washington, D.C. every summer and engages them in developing traffic safety programming for their peers. In addition to youth-led peer education and social media efforts, the organizations organize student-led opportunities to address youth safety. NHTSA supports the work that young people identify as most necessary and relevant, such as upcoming projects focusing on the safety of drivers and pedestrians on and around college campuses and using geo-coded social media to target areas with traffic safety issues.

Division of Youth & 4-H; National Institute of Food and Agriculture; USDA: Youth Conferences

Agency Representative:

- Douglas Swanson, National Program Leader, 4-H Professional and Volunteer Development

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) funds programs that advance agriculture-related research and innovations and influences decision making in science policy. Positive Youth Development (PYD) is a key component of the agency's work. Through the well-known, national 4-H program, the agency supports PYD programming for approximately six million young people between the ages of five and nineteen. The program operates as a partnership between the nation's land-grant universities and the U.S. Department of Agriculture and focuses on three primary missions: civic engagement, healthy living, and science. In addition to opportunities in their local communities, NIFA's 4-H staff create opportunities for direct engagement at the federal level via a National 4-H Conference.

National 4-H Conference - A Youth Engagement Experience

Since 1927, NIFA has hosted an annual National 4-H Conference in Washington D.C. For its first 80 years, the conference mostly consisted of workshops. In 2011, NIFA shifted the purpose to creating authentic civic engagement experiences for young adults at the federal level. The conference hosts about 250 high school students and 16 college-level facilitators from across 42 states.

For the 2018 Conference, young adult participants were grouped into 16 teams with each team responding to a challenge question submitted by one of 16 federal agencies. Working in conjunction with their assigned facilitator, the participants completed four weeks of preparative web research and reading in response to the question from their assigned federal agency. The Conference itself is the culmination of this preparation. When the participants arrived in D.C. they spent three to four days working as part of a roundtable with their team members to complete and deliver a 30-minute Youth Perspective Briefing to staff representing their agency. The presentations were often followed by conversations between the teams and policymakers.

The work accomplished by the teams has been so successful that multiple agencies have extended their working relationships with their teams. For example, after receiving its youth perspective briefing, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration met virtually for a year with the young adults through a feedback group. After its 2018 briefing, ASPE's staff worked with one of the Conference participants on a podcast for youth.gov and other enhancements for the site. Both agencies coordinated the follow-up collaboration with NIFA and provided a written document through which youth could agree to the terms, duration, and intensity of the additional contact. The 4-H Youth Conference experience has also encouraged other agencies to more directly engage with youth and young adults as part of their policymaking process.

"We feel like we are teaching other agencies how to engage with youth through real-life examples." Douglas Swanson

Participant Selection

Young adult participants are selected by their respective states through a formal application process which may include interviews, portfolio reviews, or an awards process. Leadership qualities tend to be the common eligibility requirement, but NIFA also strongly encourages the selection of young adults who demonstrate tremendous leadership potential. If necessary, NIFA provides students with letters to their schools explaining the experiential and learning opportunities.

Conference Logistics

The National 4-H Council takes fiduciary responsibility for the conference and hires a contracted meeting planner. Three NIFA staff provide the programming and logistical work on the conference in addition to three staff from affiliated land-grant universities that rotate through in three-year terms. The 4-H National Program leader noted that fully supporting the young adult participants frequently requires that staff participate in evening and weekend calls. Once the participants arrive in Washington, D.C., a very limited contingent of NIFA staff coordinates the roundtable days, tours, and transportation for the participants to their agencies for the delivery of the youth perspective briefings.

Building Partnerships with Other Agencies

To identify potential federal partnerships for the Conference, the 4-H staff surveys the young adult participants about topics of interest. The staff also asks participating agencies to identify topics that are relevant to their agency for which a young adult perspective would be helpful. Once a list is compiled, 4-H staff sends it to agencies who have hosted teams in the past while also reaching out to new agencies that may be interested in one of the topics. 4-H staff emphasize that it is a mutually-beneficial event with limited commitment that includes only minor preparation and having the teams visit the agency for one afternoon.

Bureaucratic Challenges

Federal funding is no longer available for the conference. The Conference is now completely funded through registration fees that are accepted through the National 4-H Council and meeting planner. Fees currently total around \$915 and cover lodging, meals, transportation around D.C. (not airfare), a monument tour, and the keynote speaker. Chaperones, commonly faculty from affiliated universities, must also pay the registration. For many participants and chaperones, their costs are covered partially or completely by their state's 4-H foundation. The switch to registration-based funding is a cause for concern for NIFA. As expenses rise, at some point the conference may outprice itself.

Key Youth Engagement Strategies

Peer Leadership

To provide additional support to the 4-H participants as they prepare for and attend the conference, NIFA recruits college students that serve as volunteer facilitators. Facilitators are selected through a competitive application process promoted primarily through land-grant universities with some outreach to other colleges and universities. Selected facilitators must participate in nine months of training that covers topics like facilitation, team work, team building, decision-making, and conflict management. Some facilitators are able to receive college credit from their university as an independent study program.

NIFA provides a syllabus describing the learning accomplished and lived experience for colleges to review.

Supporting the Field: 4-H E-Academies

With the exception of 2018, Doug Swanson has hosted annual e-academies structured as ten one-hour webinars delivered in a month on a single topic. Topics have ranged from volunteerism to STEM programs to civic engagement. The 2017 series had an average of 400 to 500 participants per session. The Teen Opportunities in Civic Engagement series taught county 4-H agents how to involve teens in 4-H programs at the local level. Sessions topics included youth engagement research and theory, replicable models of youth engagement, and county-level planning to involve youth in leadership and engagement opportunities.

Vision for the Future

Youth engagement continues to be at the forefront of what 4-H offers to both youth and communities. NIFA emphasizes offering real civic engagement experiences. They want the 4-H conferences to continue to engage on important issues and ensure that federal partners understand that youth are leaders now and not just in the future.

Resources

4-H Civic Engagement Logic Model

The logic model summarizes 4-H inputs, outputs, outcomes, and impacts related to its members' civic engagement efforts.

Civic Engagement: After-School Activities for Citizenship, Leadership and Service

This resource guides supports educators and other adults interested in teaching youth and young adults about civic engagement.

Office of Adolescent Health: Youth Listening Sessions and Centering Youth Voice in Grant Programs

Agency Representatives:

- Armin Aflaki, ORISE Fellow
- Nicole Bennett, Health Scientist Administrator
- Elizabeth Laferriere, ORISE Fellow
- Jamie Kim, Health Scientist
- Emily Novick, Team Lead, Division of Strategic Communications
- LCDR Jaclyn Ruiz, Public Health Advisor

“It really helps to see things firsthand, what it looks like, to drive home why it matters. You hear things from the youth that are really important and pivotal in shaping your program that you wouldn’t get otherwise.” Jaclyn Ruiz

The Office of Adolescent Health (OAH), located within the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, is dedicated to improving the health and healthy development of adolescents. OAH leads by promoting strengths-based approaches and bolstering multi-sector stakeholder engagement. Authorized by the Public Health Service Act, OAH supports research, prevention and health promotion activities, training, partnership engagement, and education activities. OAH currently funds two major, national grant programs –the Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) Program and the Pregnancy Assistance Fund (PAF) Program. The TPP Program works to prevent unintended teen pregnancy by funding implementation of evidence-based TPP programs, and by funding efforts to develop and evaluate new and innovative approaches. The PAF program is a competitive grant program that funds states and tribal entities so they can provide a seamless network of support services to expectant and parenting teens, women, fathers, and their families. OAH also sponsors **Adolescent Health: Think, Act, Grow® (TAG)**, a national call to action to promote adolescent health grounded in positive youth development principles.

Aware of the growing recognition of positive youth development, its impact on adolescent outcomes, and the need to identify best practices for engaging youth in programming, in 2013 OAH began exploring ways to integrate youth engagement in its planning for TAG, and in its grant work via its Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOA). The Youth Listening Sessions, TAG, and Adolescent Health Workshops discussed below presented opportunities for OAH to work directly with grantees and providers on youth engagement and learn from and support their strategies for getting direct input from youth to improve their programs and services.

Implementing Youth Listening Sessions

OAH participates annually in USDA-NIFA’s 4-H National Youth Conference (see description on page 24) and collaborated with national organizations that serve adolescents in the development of TAG. OAH also regularly designates space for youth speakers in program-related convenings, panels, and webinars. In order to ensure programs and strategies for

grantee projects were relevant to youth and a good fit for the needs of their community, OAH also set expectations that its FY2015 TPP grantees obtain youth input on the planning of their programs prior to implementing. For grantees implementing evidence-based programs to scale, the expectation went further to ensure ongoing meaningful youth input in the form of youth leadership councils. OAH developed guidance, training, and technical assistance on this approach.

The youth listening sessions (YLS) marked OAH's first project dedicated to soliciting youth input for the purpose of improving programming at both the grantee and federal level, as well as for learning more about different strategies for capturing and integrating youth feedback. In late 2017, with OAH leadership support, staff began designing the first iteration of the YLS. The project was structured so that grantees led their own sessions with OAH guidance and support, thereby allowing grantees ultimate creativity and flexibility with regard to the session format, youth participants, facilitators, and questions. OAH partnered with three grantee organizations to conduct youth listening sessions in Baltimore, MD; New York, NY; and San Luis Obispo, CA. The three sessions included between 30 and 40 youth total. OAH staff attended the Baltimore and New York City sessions in person and virtually observed the San Luis Obispo session. The project aimed to:

1. Directly engage youth through collaboration with OAH grantees;
2. Create mutually beneficial opportunities for OAH and its grantees to improve the quality of the programs offered and ensure responsiveness to youth needs;
3. Document the planning process and process-based lessons learned to inform recommendations for future OAH youth engagement

Design Process

OAH provided grantees with sample questions designed to help them get started on the development of their youth listening sessions. Questions sought to solicit both contextual information from youth as well as feedback on grantees' specific TPP programs. OAH then worked with the organizations to customize the questions and structures for the YLSs. One of the grantees ultimately turned the questions into an interactive workshop that included solo and pair exercises, drawing, and team-based activities to reach through to youth with differing levels of comfort with group discussion and generate critical program feedback. This grantee shared its template with the two other grantees, one of whom conducted a workshop-focus group hybrid, and a third that elected to implement a more traditional style focus group. One also included a youth in the design and facilitation of its session. All three grantee organizations paid youth a small stipend for their participation and in some way coordinated or subsidized their travel.

Outcomes

Following the conclusion of the 2018 youth listening sessions, OAH hosted several sessions to unpack and assess the youth input along with process-based lessons learned.

This assessment period culminated in the identification of thirteen youth insights for grant programs and informed the second iteration of the project in 2019.

13 Key Youth Insights for Grant Programs

- 1 Youth should be equal partners - not just recipients or advisors - in youth programs. Youth value opportunities for meaningful decision-making and to develop and implement their own projects
- 2 Programs need time to process this new mindset around adult-youth partnership and adapt their operations and culture
- 3 Youth-serving professionals need training in order to develop the skills necessary to promote and accelerate the cultural shift required to treat youth as equal partners
- 4 Partnering with youth means engaging them in meaningful decision-making and giving youth opportunities to provide regular feedback on the programs that serve them
- 5 Youth value programs with meaningful projects, retreats, community events, and opportunities to socialize
- 6 Youth need to have their basic needs met in order for them to be present, learn, grow, and thrive in youth programs
- 7 Youth are hungry for information, and eager and empowered to share it with their peers
- 8 Youth value being seen as leaders and view youth leadership programs as a way to earn status in their communities
- 9 Adult allies should reflect the population they serve and be humble, flexible, positive, and inspiring
- 10 Programs need to fairly compensate youth to value youth contributions, which allows for inclusive participation
- 11 Programs that bridge health promotion with cultural exploration and identity make a profound impression on youth participants
- 12 Adults should connect youth to the services and supports the youth say they need, not what the adult thinks they need
- 13 Some youth are regularly confronted with complex, real life problems, such as teen pregnancy, gangs, and gun violence

In December 2018, all FY2015 TPP grantees were notified about the 2019 project and invited to submit a proposal if they were interested in participating. OAH selected ten grantees for geographic diversity as well as a heightened commitment to sessions that engage vulnerable populations, including youth in the Juvenile Justice system and from tribal communities. OAH purposefully sought out participation from grantees with varying levels of youth engagement experience. For those grantees with less experience, OAH provided basic guidance and structure, as a way for the organizations to practice and build their capacity for sustained youth engagement in the future. OAH provided all ten grantees with a YLS planning packet, complete with materials to help with designing and implementing their sessions that were largely informed by the 2018 experience. Participants also post their materials on a shared online platform so that their fellow

grantees can reference, comment on, and learn from their efforts. YLSs will take place between March and June 2019.

2019 Youth Listening Sessions Sites and Strategies

Grantee Location	YLS Strategy
Phoenix, AZ	Writing workshop and performance
Minneapolis, MN	Group and individual activities with Juvenile Justice youth
Spartanburg, SC	Instagram call for video responses preceded by youth focus group
Durham, NC	Photovoice with youth involved in both the Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare systems
Albuquerque, NM	Accelerated Evidence-based Co-Design
Dallas, TX	Focus groups consisting of group conversation and activities with two single-sex groups of Juvenile Justice youth in detention
Hartford, CT	Youth theater
Hugo, OK	Workshop with games and discussion groups with Native American youth
Clarksdale, MS	Focus group consisting of group conversations and activities
Rochester, NY	“Day in the life of youth” simulation and roundtable with adults and youth

OAH is simultaneously conducting a literature review to identify best practices for youth engagement, focusing on fair compensation and youth hiring practices, and will create a Youth Listening Sessions Toolkit that updates and integrates all critical insights and lessons learned from two years of the YLS project.

YLS Implementation Key Considerations

The Youth Listening Sessions require serious commitment and investment from both selected grantees and OAH. OAH offered the following advice to ensure manageable and productive experiences when implementing a YLS project:

1. Create time and space for intra-agency brainstorming and planning processes. In preparation for both YLS rounds, OAH spent months brainstorming, planning, and identifying their process and content priorities and goals for the sessions.
2. Ensure sufficient staff time and effort before, during, and after the sessions. OAH served as TA provider to participating grantees and was in frequent contact during the planning and implementation processes, and provided assistance as grantees processed their outcome data and planned next steps.
3. Align your YLS goals with grantee goals including the prioritization of eliciting input to improve youth programs. This alignment leads to a more effective partnership and symmetry in both grantee and agency efforts and expectations throughout the project.
4. Create space for grantees to exercise flexibility in their YLS implementation. OAH avoided being overly prescriptive about the grantee’s YLS structures and methods. They worked with grantees to ensure the YLS met the identified goals and the needs of the population, while providing grantees with enough advanced planning time to drive the design, structure, and content of their sessions (e.g. what questions to ask, location

selection, young adult participant identification, data collection methods, outcome analyses, and identification of next steps).

5. Be transparent about expectations for grantee participation. From the beginning, OAH clarified expectations such as frequency of meetings, agendas, requirements for YLS debriefs, and identifying actionable next steps responsive to the information gathered in the session. OAH ensured that grantee project officers were looped into YLS efforts so that they could track and support the grantees' YLS follow-up. From start to finish, grantee participation in the 2019 YLS process was a nine-month commitment.
6. Support grantee data analyses and plan manageable action steps. OAH's grantee participants had varying levels of data collection and analysis experience. To prevent grantees from becoming overwhelmed by their post-listening session responsibilities and deliverables, OAH staff provided direct support for digesting and assessing YLS data and worked with agencies to identify concrete and responsive action items.

Assessing Effectiveness

OAH developed a logic model and will be performing an implementation evaluation, in-house, to record challenges experienced and lessons learned in an effort to continuously improve and support grantee and federal youth engagement efforts. OAH would also like to learn how participation influenced grantee motivation and capacity in order to more systematically integrate youth voice into their programs.

Building Internal Buy-in for the Youth Listening Sessions

OAH credited office champions as key to making the listening sessions possible. The office's small size (fewer than 20 staff) also gives staff the opportunity to partner with grantees on small and innovative projects. Staff also recognized the need to "work smart" by starting its first round of listening sessions with just three sites and seeking out grantees that would be receptive to the idea and able to implement the events in a short timeframe.

Supporting the Field

Adolescent Health: Think, Act, Grow® (TAG) is a national call to action led by OAH and is a comprehensive, strengths-based approach to promoting and improving adolescent health. TAG calls on organizations and stakeholders such as professionals, practitioners, researchers, and family members who work with teens to prioritize activities that promote the physical, social, emotional, and behavioral health and healthy development of America's 42 million adolescents.

TAG was developed with the input of 80 national, youth-serving organizations through an iterative and consensus building process and launched in 2014. The resulting consensus resulted in TAG's Five Essentials for Healthy Adolescents, which are:

- positive connections with supportive adults
- safe and secure places to live, learn, and play
- access to high-quality, teen-friendly health care
- opportunities to engage as learners, leaders, team members, and workers

- coordinated, adolescent- and family-centered services

After identifying the Five Essentials, OAH then worked with the experts to develop action steps for each sector that can be implemented in the short or long-term. The OAH website then links to resources to help clinicians implement this action step and additional recommended action steps.

Youth engagement and PYD principles are integrated throughout the Five Essentials and the action steps. In 2015, OAH partnered with the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative and Forum for Youth Investment and other federal agencies to convene a meeting to better define and integrate youth engagement for TAG. To receive young adult input, the partnering organizations submitted the draft principles to their respective youth councils for review and vetting.

Developing Tools and Resources

In line with its mission to support the field, OAH developed and disseminated a number of resources and tools including the sampling below.

The [TAG 2018 Playbook](#) provides a primer on key topics in adolescent development and a starting point for stakeholders who are new to youth engagement. OAH will soon complete a Spanish-language version of this document.

The [Game Plan for Engaging Youth](#) summarizes and provides additional resources on TAG's Principles of Youth Engagement, Youth Engagement Tips for Professionals, and [Eight Successful Youth Engagement Approaches](#). The approaches gives guidance on youth engagement strategies including youth councils, youth governance, youth serving on boards, youth voice, youth leadership programs, youth advocacy, youth service, and youth organizing.

The TAG website gives more information on TAG and has resources available for download.

Disseminating Youth Engagement Supports Nationally

OAH operates a detailed and widespread communications campaign in support of TAG.

Social Media: OAH uses YouTube and Twitter (with 17,000 followers) to distribute TAG resources including TAG Talks, short promotional videos, and the TAG Toolkit, and to establish a virtual presence at conferences and around the country.

Traditional Methods: OAH issues twice monthly e-blasts to 68,000 followers, quarterly newsletters, and emails to grantees for further distribution to their list-serves. TAG staff also coordinate with federal partners to distribute information and products. These partners include the HHS Digital Digest, the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs, and the HHS Adolescent Health Working Group.

Adolescent Health Workshop Series

In 2018, OAH convened an Adolescent Health Workshop series using Human-Centered Design (HCD) methods to look at the issue of integrated approaches to adolescent and community health. HCD was specifically selected for its suitability for working with ambiguous, complicated problems and its focus on the end-user. Series participants were selected for their diversity of perspectives and positions, and included direct

service grantees; youth policy experts; federal staff from OAH, USAID, and ED; and youth representatives. OAH also incorporated information gathered during the youth listening sessions as part of the materials that were used.

Over the course of three two-day sessions, the 15 attendees participated in common HCD activities such as problem framing, domain mapping, idea generation with creative matrices, and feasibility and impact considerations. After the first session, attendees were expected to speak with between one and three individuals affiliated with juvenile and criminal justice, trauma and violence, or access to healthcare fields, including young people. During the third session, young people engaged with participants to co-design and provide feedback on ideas.

The series served as a testing ground for new ideas and as a training on human-centered design techniques. The participants, collectively, presented 6 different ideas at the end of the workshop series for consideration. Nearly all ideas shared a similar theme – centering youth voice. Of note, suggestions were made to involve more youth, earlier, in future endeavors. The series reinforced the need for OAH to continue focusing on meaningful youth engagement work.

“People walked away with a new way to approach problems and new way to look at them and tools that engage end users and youth.” – Workshop participant

Key Youth Engagement Strategies

Training and Support for Grantees

Youth engagement is a major component in OAH’s TPP Program. FY2015 TPP grantees replicating evidenced-based programs are expected to have a youth leadership council that informs their programming. Grantees funded to design new teen pregnancy prevention approaches are expected to include youth in their planning and development process.

Grantees fall along the spectrum of youth engagement expertise. To support grantee efforts, OAH created guidance documents on its youth engagement expectations. OAH collaborated with more experienced grantees to develop a webinar on practices that support meaningful engagement including hiring youth as staff and creating supportive spaces for adult-youth partnership. OAH has also collaborated with grantees to develop three podcasts on building strong youth leadership councils. Finally, staff review the grantees’ reports and applications, as well as continuously monitor grantees’ progress in applying youth engagement best practices. Through concrete recommendations and technical assistance, grantees are encouraged by agency staff to continuously improve and utilize more meaningful youth engagement practices.

Moving Forward

OAH seeks to incorporate youth voice into all its efforts. OAH continues to work with partners across the country, including the State Adolescent Health Coordinators, the OASH regional offices, and numerous national organizations (e.g., AMCHP, APHA, ASTHO, SAHM) to use TAG and the Five Essentials for Healthy Adolescents as a framework for working to ensure all adolescents are healthy and thriving. The office is also developing a TAG implementation toolkit, which will provide concrete methods that stakeholders in

multiple fields can use to assess their alignment with the Five Essentials and engage in exercises and activities that will move their adolescent support efforts forward.

OAH is also continuing to implement and evaluate its 2019 iteration of the youth listening session project in order to draw further insights for action. OAH plans to share lessons learned and to this end, staff have applied and been accepted to present at national conferences and plan to produce a resource that documents OAH grantee youth listening sessions practical experiences and closes gaps in knowledge of youth engagement best practices in the field.

Finally, OAH created the Youth Engagement in Adolescent Health (YEAH) Team in order to plan and manage youth engagement efforts across the office. YEAH is in the process of developing a youth engagement vision in order to ensure heightened coordination and intentionality in youth engagement strategies going forward.

Resources:

Using Human-Centered Design to Better Understand Adolescent and Community Health

This brief provides a short introduction to and resources about Human-Centered Design and a process analysis of OAH's Adolescent Health Workshops.

Adolescent Health: Thing, Act Grow® (TAG)

The TAG website contains resources on adolescent development, successful strategies, information on implementing tag, videos and webinars.

Youth Leadership Council Expectations

This document provides guidance on the role and function of the councils and recommends start-up processes and first steps for the councils.

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation: Supporting the Field

Agency Representatives:

- Michelle Boyd, Social Science Analyst
- Cheri Hoffman, Director of the Division of Children and Youth Policy
- Sarah Oberlander, Social Science Analyst

The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) is charged with advising the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health Human Services on policy research, development, and coordination; and strategic planning and evaluation. ASPE's Director of the Division of Children and Youth Policy also chairs the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs (IWGYP), a collaboration of over 20 federal departments and agencies focused on creating positive health outcomes for youth.

Youth Engagement Strategies Project

In 2017, ASPE funded the Youth Engagement Strategies to Prepare Youth for Successful Adulthood project as a means to support youth engagement in federal agencies and among federally funded programs, and to also highlight effective youth engagement practices and encourage their use. The project has resulted in the development of a background paper on youth engagement; a 1.5 day Youth Engagement Strategies convening of subject matter experts including young adults, policymakers, practitioners, researchers and scholars; and this report on youth engagement strategies in federal agencies.

To integrate the principles of youth engagement into the project, ASPE required the contracting agencies (Policy Research Associates, American Institutes for Research, and Youth MOVE National) to include a young adult as part of its planning teams, ensure the equal participation of young adults as experts during the convening, and to support the young adult attendees as they navigated the logistics necessary to attend the event. ASPE also included young adult interns as part of its team planning and monitoring the project's implementation.

ASPE's definition of youth engagement includes individuals between the ages of 10 and 24, however, the decision was made to include young adult convening participants between the ages of 18 and 24 (unless a potential participant lived within the D.C. metro area). This decision was primarily made in response to budget constraints that precluded the ability to cover travel and lodging for additional adults to travel with and chaperone participants under the age of 18.

The Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs

ASPE coordinates the Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs (IWGYP), which supports youth.gov and engage.youth.gov (also known as Youth Engaged 4 Change or YE4C). ASPE has engaged youth in different ways over the past six years including as Virtual Student Federal Service Interns, Truman Fellows, and ASPE interns. Some young adult interns have helped create adult-facing web content for youth.gov and many others have created timely, youth-facing content for the YE4C website and

related social media. Youth creating content for other youth has been a hallmark of the YE4C website and social media presence since the site was launched in 2014. In Fall 2018 and Spring 2019, young adults played significant roles in overhauling the YE4C website.

Youth Listening Sessions

Since 2016, the IWGYP has coordinated two listening sessions with young adults between the ages of 16 and 19 from around the United States. The 2018 convening was done in coordination with the HHS Office of Population Affairs and focused on understanding how youth make decisions in their daily lives, including decisions about family planning.

The 2016 listening session focused on creating opportunities for federal staff to hear directly from the children who have or have had an incarcerated parent about the effects of their parents' incarceration. Policymaker attendees represented the Bureau of Prisons, U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Justice.

"Each listening session has had a different genesis and a different purpose, but it's all been out of the desire to hear directly from young people – so we aren't a bunch of adults creating content and running programs based on what we think will help them. We want to hear what they actually need." Cheri Hoffman

Contracting Youth Engagement Projects

ASPE's youth engagement-focused projects require contracted organizations to utilize authentic youth engagement strategies in their work. When selecting partners, ASPE looks for those who have a solid track record in youth engagement and who are leaders in that space. They are also open to finding partners who may be less well known, but who demonstrate significant experience with and knowledge of youth engagement practices. During proposal reviews, they pay close attention to how organizations talk about youth engagement and the youth they work with. For example, do potential contractors discuss the strengths young people bring to the table, or do they discuss youth engagement from a deficit-based approach? ASPE staff recognizes that this puts more responsibility on them to become critical reviewers of information and to look for descriptions of solid practices versus the use of youth engagement buzz words.

For policymakers funding grantees with limited youth engagement experience, ASPE recommends working with grantees to gradually build their capacity and develop realistic plans for meaningful engagement. When appropriate, they also recommend connecting grantees with organizations that can provide advice and assistance on youth engagement. For grantees struggling to implement appropriate practices, consider this a learning opportunity, and provide as many tools and resources necessary to do it well.

Feedback loops are also important when contracting youth engagement work. ASPE staff recommends asking young people for their thoughts on an event, and also debriefing with other federal colleagues. Processing events with people takes more staff time, but doing so also creates opportunities to learn and share best practices.

Key Youth Engagement Strategies

Engaging Agency "Champions"

In addition to identifying and mobilizing ASPE staff members with strong youth engagement skills and goals, ASPE prioritizes providing support for staff in other federal agencies with youth engagement interests and goals.

Ensuring Sufficient Human and Financial Resources

To promote the equal participation of the young adult experts in the 2017 Youth Engagement Strategies convening, the contracting agencies hosted pre-event calls with the young adults to ensure they understood the convening's purpose, their role, and to field any logistical concerns. Young adult subject matter experts received the same compensation for their time as other expert participants. To limit any potential financial hardship, young adult participants received their per diem in cash on-site, and coordination with the hotel was possible if anyone did not have access to a credit card.

Vision for the Future

ASPE staff strive to keep the agency moving up Hart's Ladder of Engagement via mechanisms that integrate youth engagement into the fabric of ASPE's work processes. ASPE also hopes to support the development of an evidence base for the statement "engaging youth in programs improves outcomes for the youth who are engaged."

Resources

Youth.gov

The IWGYP created this website to provide interactive tools and other resources to help youth-serving organizations and community partnerships plan, implement, and participate in effective programs for youth.

Youth Engaged 4 Change

Youth Engaged 4 Change (YE4C) is a website that provides youth-focused resources and opportunities that inspire and empower young people to make a difference in their lives and in the world around them by improving their knowledge and leadership skills.

HART'S LADDER OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION



Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation provides a visual assessment of the various levels of youth engagement. The first three rungs do not represent actual youth engagement.

Office of Disability Employment Policy: Engaging Young Adults with Disabilities

Agency Representatives:

- Taryn Williams, Supervisory Policy Advisory
- Kirk Lew, Sr. Policy Advisor

Contractor Representative:

- Jennifer Thomas, Institute for Educational Leadership

The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), housed within the U.S. Department of Labor, develops and influences the policies and practices of all levels of government and employers as it relates to disability employment. Guided by a Youth Team comprised of ODEP staff, the agency views youth engagement as a means to ground its work in the directly communicated needs of young adults with disabilities. To this end, in 2001, ODEP created the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth). The Collaborative works to ensure that young adults with disabilities have access to education, employment, and independent living services as they transition to adulthood.

Youth Action Council on Transition (YouthACT)

In 2013, the NCWD/Youth, coordinated by the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL), launched YouthACT. YouthACT is a five-year initiative which funds youth-adult partnerships between youth with disabilities, adults, and supporting organizations. Young adult members of the partnerships are typically between the ages of 15 and 25. The adult partners were connected to a supporting organization, usually as an employee or volunteer. Selected teams developed and implemented local action plans to address a specific need in their local communities over a two-year term.

The Cohorts

YouthACT supported three cohorts of youth-adult teams selected via a national competitive process. Selected teams were required to create an action plan, list of goals, describe the role of the supporting organization, and describe any technical assistance needs. The teams developed a variety of projects to meet the needs of their local communities, which included developing a local public service announcement to disrupt the school-to-prison pathway for youth with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders, leading a youth-facilitated support group for teens, and leading a project that coordinates the creation and delivery of handmade cards for teenagers hospitalized for mental health treatment and crises. For more information on the YouthACT Initiative and Teams, see the [YouthACT Overview Video](#) and [YouthACT Team Profiles](#).

From Partner to Ambassador

As the initiative transitioned from an active recruitment and project implementation phase to product dissemination phase in its fourth year, IEL used the shift to create an opportunity for Youth ACT members who were ready for a higher-level leadership opportunity. These Youth Engagement Ambassadors, former cohort members, participated in the dissemination planning and implementation of the YouthACT resources. They were asked to write one blog entry about their experience (e.g., how they

used the resources or about their transition to adulthood); give two presentations in their local communities; participate in an IEL-funded conference trip; participate on monthly calls to share feedback on their local presentations; and to participate in a national twitter chat discussing resources on job searching, post-high school options, youth adult partnerships, information for policymakers, and leadership tips.

Key Youth Engagement Strategies

Training and Support

IEL hosted an annual in-person training for participants. Since the teams serve for two years, they were expected to attend two trainings. Participants also received training through monthly virtual calls and quarterly webinars on topics requested by the young adult participants (e.g., financial literacy). Initially, the monthly meetings were conducted by telephone but this seemed to limit the youth participants' level of engagement. A switch to video calls increased engagement and enthusiasm for the monthly meetings.

IEL offered trainings on a wide range of topics during the initiative including: facilitation, networking, self-promotion (e.g., demonstrating the competence to give a presentation), communication skills, community organizing, working in an organized manner, analyzing available resources, active listening skills, national resources, and how bureaucratic systems work.

Ensuring Sufficient Human and Financial Resources

Stipends

ODEP's funding allocation for honoraria has served as both an effective incentive for youth participants, as well a means for ensuring that youth with disabilities have access to funds and resources that enable them to participate.

Youth-Adult Partnerships

Young adult participants appreciated the presence of ODEP staff at the annual trainings and on the monthly calls. Their presence and participation gave youth access to direct conversations with federal staff. The conversations also created open channels for ODEP staff to learn about the priorities and key concerns for youth and young adults with disabilities as they transitioned into the workforce.

YouthACT Implementation Challenges

The prohibition on using federal funds to purchase food created some difficulties as providing food at meetings and events is key when working with a youth population. In response to this barrier, IEL leveraged other funding to provide meals for the teams and ambassadors.

There were also challenges around travel and room and board that come with working with a young adult population that may not have the necessary ID's to travel (or those ID's may get lost during travel). IEL aimed to select hotels that the youth would feel comfortable in, and many hotels offering a federal rate required the display of a federal badge at check-in. ODEP staff worked with IEL to produce letters for each youth to overcome this hurdle.

The prohibition on lobbying with their YouthACT affiliation sometimes had a temporary chilling effect on the young adult participants' vision of how they can interact with policymakers. IEL taught participants to navigate this constraint by recognizing the difference between educating policymakers and lobbying. Participants were also

encouraged to partner with their network and supporting organization to work with their local policymakers.

The assessment process also posed challenges. IEL implemented annual surveys with all of its teams, as well as assessments after each monthly call. For youth with some types of disabilities, these evaluations were difficult to complete and their response levels were initially low. As a solution, IEL assigned interns not directly working with the YouthACT Initiative to assist young adult members when necessary.

Creating Workforce Development Opportunities

Recognizing the difficulty that some young adults and adults with disabilities may have or perceive in accessing federal internships and employment, two full-time ODEP staff members coordinate a process by which 175 federal staff annually interview thousands of current college students and recent graduates with disabilities for inclusion in a database that federal agencies can search to identify potential applicants for federal internships and career opportunities. Participating in the process does not guarantee a position; however, it can help individuals with disabilities build connections, receive references, and receive feedback on their application materials and interviewing skills directly from

Vision for the Future

The YouthACT coordinator Jennifer Thomas noted that youth seek out opportunities and welcome the chance to gain leadership experience. She is hopeful that support for the young adult engagement will continue and that they will be able to expand their leadership skills and experiences through participation in local and federal councils and through other opportunities. She also encouraged research on building organizational capacity, especially in terms of staffing, to successfully implement youth engagement work and the available supports for youth support professionals.

Resources

Youth Development and Youth Leadership in Programs

Recognizing that youth development practices are foundational to all other youth work, this paper defines and differentiates youth development and youth leadership programming and activities.

Youth Development and Leadership: Opportunities to Develop Connecting Competencies

Building on the document described above, this innovative strategies brief focuses on building young adults' connecting competencies—positive social behaviors, skills, and adults that help them form and main positive relationships with supportive adults.

Guideposts for Success

In this report, NCWD/Youth identifies the supports young adults need to transition successfully to adulthood.

United States Agency for International Development: Institutionalizing Youth Engagement

Representative:

- Michael McCabe, Agency Youth Coordinator

For the past 55 years, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has provided development aid and disaster assistance around the globe. The agency's missions in each partner country can range from agricultural and technical assistance to education and health-focused aid. Supporting and engaging young adults through programs, leadership and advocacy training, skills attainment, and global network building has evolved into a key component of the agency's work with its governmental and nongovernmental partners in each country.

Partnering with Young Adult Changemakers

USAID's youth engagement work has expanded as the agency has shifted from viewing young adults as beneficiaries of its efforts to partners in its work. The agency trains and engages young adults in 39 countries. Thus far, over 100,000 young people have been trained through USAID-funded training platforms. The agency's youth engagement work and training are grounded in the four domains and seven key principles of positive youth development (PYD). As seen in the examples below, the actual strategies and modalities used vary by country; however, the agency prioritizes involving young adults from the very beginning of its work in each community.

PYD Domains	PYD Principles	Components
Assets	Skill Building	Youth have access to resources, skills, and competencies
Agency	Skill Building	Youth understand they have the ability and resources to "make or influence" decisions about their own lives
Contribution	Youth Engagement	Youth are engaged in their own positive development as well as the development of their communities
Enabling Environment	Healthy relationships and bonding; belonging and membership; positive norms; safe space; access to services	Young people's environments supports the other domains and strengthens the youth's abilities to thrive and remain safe and secure.

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Adapted from youthpower.org PYD Framework

Key Youth Engagement Strategies

Youth in Research: Youth Speak Program in Morocco

In Morocco, USAID coordinated a training program that taught young adults who had dropped out of school to conduct research with their peers to determine strategies to reduce dropout rates. Impressed with the results, Morocco's government expanded the research from three of the country's districts to ten.

[Youth Speak Toolkit](#)

Youth Leadership: Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI)

Built through a public-private partnership between USAID, Proctor & Gamble, and CISCO; African youth receive leadership training, access to technology, and expertise that empowers them to collaborate with global partners and increase the impact of young people's ideas across the continent.

Youth-Led Trainings

USAID partners with Restless Development, an international development nongovernmental organization led by young professionals, to train its staff and partners on authentic youth engagement. Restless Development conducts trainings for the agency around the world but focuses primarily on the agency's African missions.

Youth Advisory Councils:

In Guatemala, USAID sponsors a Young Indigenous Fellows Program via which young leaders from the country's Western Highlands, a predominately indigenous zones, participate in six-month long internships in Guatemala City and also participate in a youth advisory council.

Youth in Technology

YouthLead.org is a web platform designed by and for young changemakers around the globe to provide connection and access to resources. A Youth Advisory Group was instrumental in the site's design and planning process for the website. Young adults between the ages of 15 and 35 can join YouthLead to connect with other young leaders around the world and find resources and events.

Organizational Youth Engagement Structure

In 2012, the agency adopted a Youth and Development Policy (YDP) that integrated youth engagement throughout all of the agency's programs, and at all stages of the work (including assessment, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation). To

accomplish the goals of the policy, USAID created staff positions specifically charged with ensuring the YDP's implementation.

Washington D.C. Level:	1 agency-wide Youth Coordinator; Youth Core Technical Working Group: carries out work plan of priorities developed to benefit the agency.
Major Office Level:	Technical youth advisors
Country Level:	Youth Points of Contact: adult staff members focused on ensuring youth programming and ensuring the integration of the YDP in all of the agency's work. Youth Working Groups/Inclusive Development Working Groups: assess how to integrate and engage youth effectively in programs.

To further stimulate its youth development work, USAID created Youth Power, a funding structure for the agency's country-level work which has both implementation and evaluation components. On the implementation side, missions design cross-sectoral youth programs to embed the seven key principles of youth engagement. On the evaluation side, USAID develops tools and research projects to demonstrate effective and ineffective strategies in the youth development field. Youth Power's evaluation component also contains a website (youthpower.org/youthpower-learning), webinars, four communities of practice, and 100,000 users to share effective engagement strategies. While some young adults participate on youthpowerlearning.org, many rejected the site as too traditional. In response, USAID developed youthlead.org, described above.

Training and Supporting USAID Staff

In 2017, USAID launched a five day PYD course for all of its youth points of contact and youth specialists. The agency trained 175 staff members in this course in 2017 and expected to train an additional 100 in 2018.

For all other staff and partners, USAID modified the 5-day course into a one day training. Both the course and the training spend a significant amount of time on youth engagement, which the agency acknowledges is the PYD key principle it has struggled with the most. The agency is also near completion and close to launching PYD 101 and 201 e-modules for all agency staff members.

To support its staff's continued learning, USAID operates an intranet that contains youth engagement specific tools. Staff are also able to access the following three technical supports:

Youth Compass Tool:

A post-award youth action planning tool that guides and supports USAID staff and their implementing partners.

Technical Assistance Working Groups:

These working groups help staff complete key tasks by, for example, developing sample language for embedding youth engagement into country strategies, project designs, and solicitations.

Task Orders:

USAID can request specific technical assistance for their youth engagement efforts.

Building Buy-in Among Service Receiving Communities

USAID designs and monitors the country-level youth engagement projects and the agency's implementing partners carry them out. Implementing partners explain the projects' youth engagement goals to communities focusing on the family and community benefits that result from increasing young adult productivity and developing partnerships between young adults and adults. They work to avoid building tension between community leaders and young people, although this tension is already present if young adults feel their voices are not being heard.

Implementing partners use different models of social cohesion building and intergenerational dialogue. They also talk directly with families of the engaged young adults. The agency commonly uses the Graduation Approach created by BRAC, an international development organization in Bangladesh known formerly as the Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee. That model originated as a tool for girls empowerment that created safe spaces in which girls could gather to talk about girl's empowerment and economic opportunity. Eventually, implementers must talk to the girls' families to create buy-in and explain the value of the program and the safe spaces to improve the families' livelihoods and increase income.

Sustainability***Sustaining USAID's Youth Engagement Work***

The project design component of all the agency's solicitations include questions about sustainability. The goal is to avoid creating a resource heavy project that cannot be sustained. Projects are encouraged to develop a sustainability formula or plan that reflects true commitment from the local communities as evidenced by volunteerism, access to community assets, private and public sector engagement, and/or a social enterprise component.

Challenges Sustaining Youth Engagement within USAID

The staff overseeing the agency's youth engagement work is small with just one full-time coordinator and a full-time assistant. For the other staff in the agency involved in its youth engagement work, this is just one task that they must juggle with their other duties. The Youth Power funding mechanism has a budget ceiling of \$650 million for its work globally. This is not a dedicated, annual line-item.

Vision for the Future

Michael McCabe would like to move discussions of youth engagement's impact beyond generalities and toward specific evidence of youth engagement's impact on actual outcomes. Through his work he has seen youth engagement work well when there is a general model or frame that young adults can adapt and fit to the needs of their own communities. He is interested in exploring ways to "micro-franchise" models of youth engagement by identifying what young people need in their toolbox and ways government agencies and NGOs can support those tools with seed capital.

Resources:

Positive Youth Development Measurement Toolkit

Designed for use by program implementers and evaluators, the toolkit offers mechanism for effectively measuring positive youth development program outputs and outcomes.

youthlead.org

This website is built for and with the input of global changemakers between the ages of 15 and 35. The site offers resources, information, and a global support network. Non-changemakers are able to access the websites resources and information.

Virtual Student Federal Service: Virtual Internships

Representatives:

- Bridget Roddy (Virtual Student Federal Service Coordinator)
- Nora Dempsey (Senior Advisor for Innovation) of the Creative Diplomacy Team

The Virtual Student Federal Service (VSFS) program engages U.S. citizens of any age who are also enrolled in college or graduate school in remote internships. The program began at the U.S. Department of State in 2009 and has grown to involve any federal agency seeking to engage talent with minimal bureaucratic barriers. Unofficial partners include: the Fulbright Association, Education USA, and the Robertson Foundation for Government, among others. In the 2018-2019 cycle, there are 38 federal agencies participating and approximately 1,200 students working on approximately 500 projects. Projects are submitted by federal offices with a variety of needs including social media, graphic design, data visualization, research, translation, writing, editing, and other skills. Students work approximately 10 hours per week from September through May.

Bringing Personal Life Experiences to Virtual Internships

VSFS also offers students different opportunities to use their personal life experiences as strengths. For example:

- The Indian Health Service is engaging students who live on reservations in helping create the Indian Health Service of the future.
- The U.S. Department of Agriculture has marketed the VSFS program to land-grant universities to attract students from around the country who can help guide the work of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- The U.S. Department of State has engaged diverse voices of students who could use their personal experiences and foreign language skills on an array of projects (e.g., tutoring foreign diplomats, shaping strategy for reaching people in foreign countries).
- The U.S. Department of Education has students involved in helping develop and disseminate information about financial aid.
- Some virtual interns advise foreign students interested in studying in the U.S.A.

Key Youth Engagement Strategies

Peer-to-Peer Engagement

The VSFS office hosts a closed Facebook group which offers current and former virtual interns access to job openings as well as peer-mentoring. Additionally, some virtual students with other commonalities – such as being enrolled in the same school or engaging with the same federal agency – participate in some form of peer-to-peer engagement. For instance, there are over two dozen virtual interns at UCLA who meet monthly to network and support each other throughout the duration of the internship.

Training and Support

VSFS designed guidebooks for mentors across government as well as virtual students. The guidebook includes recommendations for communication, working remotely, collaboration tools, and other tips for success. Additionally, each agency may offer training and tailored resources to VSFS interns. For instance, the U.S. Forest Service has 40 interns this year and is offering virtual trainings to help interns learn how to develop their resumes and prepare for interviews.

Assessing Effectiveness

Students are surveyed when accepted and again at the end of the year. Similarly, the VSFS office speaks with mentors at the beginning of the program and at the end of the year. Throughout the year, both mentors and students have opportunities to reach out for support when challenges arise. The VSFS office makes improvements to the program based on the experiences of students and mentors.

Building Buy-in Among Leadership, Colleagues, and Partners

The VSFS program was first launched in the U.S. Department of State's Office of eDiplomacy, which focused on open government and citizen engagement. At that time, the parameters of the program were unclear; however, the idea of transparent engagement with citizens who are digital natives at no cost to the government was very attractive. The broader acceptance of virtual work has also helped pave the way for broad take-up of this approach to engaging new talent. As the program has grown significantly, it continues to be free, encourages students to pursue public service, and continues to be regarded positively and spoken of highly by federal agencies and students alike.

Navigating Bureaucratic Challenges

The potential for significant growth of the VSFS program was unknown when the program was launched in 2009. As a result, the program developed organically and faced relatively minor hurdles, such as securing the resources to develop a strong website, identifying good options for unclassified work, and the like. Also, early on, virtual work was very new and it took some time for this cultural shift to take hold. Over time, the popularity of the program across all federal agencies was clear and the Department of State recognized the benefit of new collaborative networks in many fields.

Vision for the Future

The VSFS office plans to strengthen its messaging to support its goal of continued growth while expanding the diversity of the program. The office plans additional outreach to historically under-represented groups, such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Indian Reservations and Tribal Colleges, and community colleges, among others in response to growing needs within the federal government. For instance, the office plans to recruit more students with art and design backgrounds as there has been a notable increase in demand for those skills from federal agencies. The VSFS office also plans to become more integrated with USAJobs.gov by May 2020. The project submission, student application, and intern selection process with all happen through USAJOBS.gov which will encourage students and post-graduates to rely on the site

in their search for internships and employment. Finally, the office hopes to help other countries set up similar programs around the world.

"Sometimes we have a challenge or problem and know how to get there; but sometimes, we don't know how to get there, and we can find a better solution if it's more open-ended. We shouldn't assume we have the answers all the time. Young people have creative solutions. Giving them a chance to come to those solutions without us interfering too much works really well." Bridget Roddy

Appendix: Introductory Resources on Youth Engagement

Core Principles

- [Core Principles for Engaging Young People in Community Change](#)

The principles described within this resource can help build the capacity of organizations and communities to ensure that all youth believe that they have the resources needed to make their communities better places for themselves, their families, and their peers.

- [Positive Youth Development \(PYD\) 101 Online](#)

A series of short courses intended to introduce PYD to new youth work professionals, volunteers, and advocates. The online courses were created by Jutta Dotterweich and Karen Schantz of ACT for Youth, together with members of the Cornell University Social Media Lab.

- [Achieving Authentic Youth Engagement: Core Values & Guiding Principles](#)

A two page fact sheet that presents the three core values—preparation, support, and opportunity—that the Jim Casey Youth Opportunity Initiative believes young people in foster care need to truly have a say in planning their own future.

Youth-Adult Partnerships

- [Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric](#)

A tool for professional development and program evaluation in youth settings.

- [Authentic Youth Engagement](#)

Explores how agencies can support both strong youth-adult partnerships and authentic youth engagement.

Participatory Budgeting

- [Participatory Budgeting Project](#)

School participatory budgeting develops student leadership, supports student and school success, lifts up student and parent voice, and involves the entire school in meaningful civic experiences.

- [Youth Lead the Change: Participatory Budgeting, Boston 2016](#)

This report outlines the third year of Youth Lead the Change: Participatory Budgeting Boston. Young people from across the city were asked to suggest ideas for capital projects that will bring long-term physical improvements to parks, streets, schools, and neighborhoods on city-owned property.

Toolkits

- [2007 CFSR Toolkit for Youth Involvement – Engaging Youth in the Child Family Service Review](#)

This Toolkit offers practical strategies for collaborating with youth in the Child and Family Services Review. It includes information to keep in mind when partnering with youth, feedback forms and de-briefing strategies, strategies for implementing surveys and conducting focus groups, and much more.

- [Community Youth Mapping – A Tool for Youth Participation and Program Design](#)

Community Youth Mapping is a youth-centered participatory development strategy that engages young people and adults in canvassing their communities to document community-based resources, needs, and opportunities.

Civic Engagement

- [Changing the Rules: A Guide for Youth and Young Adults with Mental Health Conditions Who Want to Change Policy](#)

A guide written for youth and young adult-led groups and organizations that want to make changes in policies that affect them and other transition-age youth.

Assessments

- [Youth Engagement Evaluation Tool](#)

Participants evaluate where they fall on the readiness scale in the areas of organizational readiness, youth-adult partnerships, youth leadership and decision-making, youth as evaluators and researchers, and diversity.