

Involving Youth

in Your Asset-Building Initiative

Youth involvement builds assets at the same time that it strengthens the ability of an initiative to have a real and lasting impact on all young people in the community. Involving young people in planning, leading, and decision making gives an initiative a richness and authenticity that is well worth any complications that adds. (It also builds asset 8: Youth as Resources.)

Ideally, young people should be involved in asset-building initiatives from the very beginning. However, that isn't always easy to do; many adults are used to planning and leading things *for* youth rather than *with* them. The first step is making a commitment to do the work needed to get youth involved. Once you've done that, try some of these recruiting, training, and action ideas from communities that have successfully brought youth on board:

RECRUITING

- ✦ **Focus on building relationships with young people who are or might be involved in your initiative.** While it might be tempting to “get to work” right away, taking the time to get to know young people and to let them get to know you will make them more likely to want to get and stay involved.
- ✦ **Conduct a youth leadership retreat with high school students.** Train them in the asset framework. Get their ideas on how to build assets and make your community an asset-building one. At the end of the retreat, ask for volunteers for your initiative.
- ✦ **Make a list of meaningful ways to involve youth.** Then brainstorm a list of youth to involve. Contact people in schools, youth-serving organizations, congregations, service-learning programs, and neighborhood groups with names of young people to recommend. Ask about young people who may already be involved in asset building.
- ✦ **Look beyond the “usual suspects.”** Reach out to youth who are not in student government, athletics, or other high-profile activities.

TRAINING

- ✦ **Conduct a training session for youth and adults on how to work effectively together.**
- ✦ **Train young people in your initiative to be peer helpers or mentors.** Suggest that they use these skills in their schools, congregations, and neighborhoods and with their friends.



- ✦ **Train teams or pairs of youth and adults to speak about asset building.** These teams could speak to Rotary or Lions groups, youth organizations, schools, community groups, or other groups or organizations.
- ✦ **Expect some adults to resist involving youth in decision-making and leadership positions.** Many adults are not used to working side by side with youth. Discuss concerns openly and look for successful ways for youth and adults to work together.

ACTION

- ✦ **Empower youth to come up with their own asset-building ideas.** Support them in making their ideas come to life.
- ✦ **Don't limit youth involvement to one special committee or task force.** Engage young people in leading and guiding your efforts, including visioning, planning, decision making, and getting the word out about asset building and the initiative.
- ✦ **Create a youth advisory board for your initiative.** Or designate a specific number of positions on each of your task forces, boards, and other groups for youth to hold. For example, one community initiative has a 32-member steering committee with 16 youth and 16 adult representatives.
- ✦ **Have both youth and adults regularly evaluate the role of young people.** Are youth really being used as resources? Or are they simply viewed as tokens or recipients of your efforts?
- ✦ **Be clear about young people's roles and levels of authority.** If you say they are equal partners, then treat their decisions and actions as you would treat those of an adult.
- ✦ **Develop specific tasks and projects for young people.** Teenagers, especially younger teens, will be better able to contribute if they have clear guidelines and goals for what to do.
- ✦ **So that no one starts to dominate meetings, set up a regular system for getting input from everyone.** For example, you could go around the group at each meeting and offer each participant the chance to speak.