

2024 ADOLESCENT PREGNANCY  
PREVENTION GRANTEE CONFERENCE



BUILDING BRIGHTER FUTURES  
WITH TODAY'S YOUTH LEADERS

JUNE 25-27 | SAN FRANCISCO, CA



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# Unlocking the Power of Youth Leadership

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# AGENDA

- What is Youth Leadership and Why Does It Matter?
- How to Cultivate Youth Leadership
- Case Study: Future Coach
- Q&A



# What is youth leadership and why does it matter?



# What is Youth Leadership?

- The practice of young people exercising influence and guiding others, both their peers and the broader community.
- Encompasses the development of skills that allow young people to set goals, build networks, and engage in actions that promote personal and community growth.

(Wehmeyer, Agran, & Hughes, 1998)



# What Can Youth Leadership Offer?

- Fresh ideas and innovative solutions
- Unique energy and enthusiasm
- Perspective untainted by the status quo

# Why Youth Leadership

- Decades of examples – from the Civil Rights movement and anti-war protests to modern climate change, school safety, and social justice activism
- Digital tools have amplified youth power and made it more collective and global
- Youth have strong roots in communities, nonprofits, and grassroots initiatives



# The Impact of Youth Leadership

- **On Young People**
  - Development of self confidence, useful skills, agency and sense of purpose
  - Improved academic and job performance
- **On Organizations**
  - Fresh ideas and innovative approaches – leading to growth and adaptation
  - Credibility and relevance for organization on youth-related issues
- **On Society**
  - Positive social change holistically while building a more engaged, equipped next generation



**Video: What does it look like when a young person discovers their power to lead?**

# How might we cultivate youth leadership in our organizations?





**WORD CLOUD: What word(s) captures how you feel about the state of youth engagement at your organization?**

# Hart's Ladder of Youth Participation: From Manipulation to Shared Decision Making



# Hart's Ladder of Youth Participation

- **Manipulation:** Youth are used to support adult agendas without understanding the issues.
- **Decoration:** Youth participate in activities but do not understand their purpose.
- **Tokenism:** Youth appear to be given a voice but have little or no choice about how they participate.
- **Assigned but Informed:** Youth are assigned roles and understand the purpose of their involvement.
- **Consulted and Informed:** Youth give advice on projects and are informed about how their input will be used.
- **Adult-Initiated, Shared Decisions with Youth:** Projects are initiated by adults, but decision-making is shared with youth.
- **Youth-Initiated and Directed:** Youth initiate and direct projects with adults available as support.
- **Youth-Initiated, Shared Decisions with Adults:** Youth initiate projects, and decision-making is shared with adults.



# What Effective Youth Engagement Looks Like



## Respect & Trust

Treat young people as equal partners and respect their contributions.

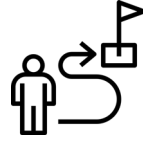
*Eg: Involve youth in strategic planning meetings where their opinions are given the same weight as adult members*



## Inclusivity & Diversity

Ensure diverse voices are represented & included.

*Eg: Actively recruit youth from different backgrounds, including marginalized communities, to participate in leadership roles.*



## Structured Support

Provide guidance and mentorship.

*Eg: Establishing a mentorship program where experienced leaders regularly meet with youth to offer advice, support, and professional development opportunities.*



## Clear Expectations

Give young people ownership of their projects and hold them accountable.

*Eg: Allowing youth to lead community projects from inception to completion, including managing budgets and teams, with periodic check-ins to provide feedback and ensure accountability.*



## Transparency

Be clear about goals, processes, & decisions.

*Eg: Clearly communicating the goals and expectations of a project, the decision-making process, and how youth contributions will be used.*

# What Ineffective Youth Engagement Looks Like



## Lack of Respect

Orgs solicit feedback or ideas from youth but do not implement or seriously consider their suggestions.

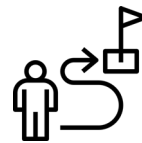
*Eg: Conducting a focus group about a program, then ignoring the recommendations.*



## Tokenism

Youth included in activities or decision-making processes in a superficial manner, with little to no real influence on outcomes or decisions.

*Eg: Inviting a young person to a board meeting for the sake of appearance but not allowing them to voice their opinions or contribute meaningfully.*



## Lack of Support

Youth are given roles or responsibilities without the necessary training, resources, or support to succeed.

*Eg: Assigning a youth leader to organize an event without providing guidance, budget, or a support team.*



## Unclear Expectations

Not setting clear, achievable goals or expectations for youth involvement.

*Eg: Involving youth in a project without clearly defining their responsibilities or the project's objectives.*



## Inconsistency

Inconsistent, unreliable engagement practices that do not create a stable or predictable environment.

*Eg: Sporadic meetings or irregular communication that leaves youth unsure about their roles or the status of projects.*

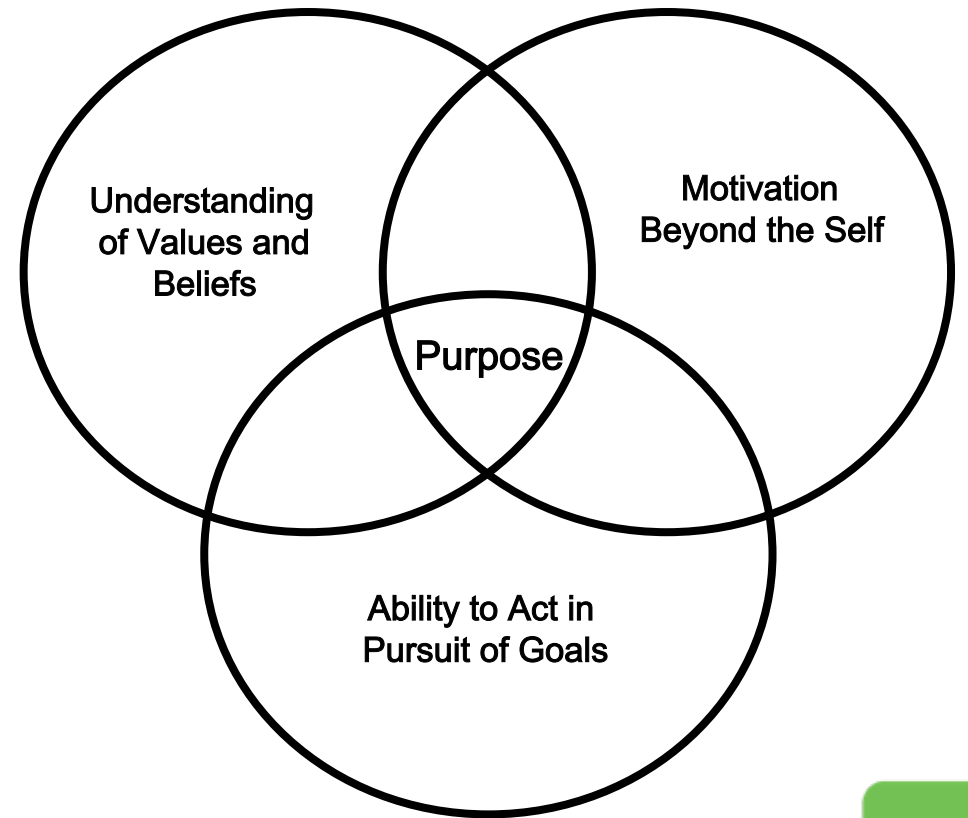
# Five Strategies for Developing Youth Leaders

1. Cultivate youth purpose
2. Provide compensation
3. Create meaningful roles
4. Develop a sense of belonging and community
5. Provide ongoing coaching and support



# Strategy 1: Cultivate Youth Purpose

- Purpose is a critical component in youth development, providing a sense of direction and motivation.
- Youth with a clear sense of purpose are more likely to achieve personal and professional goals and contribute positively to their communities.
- Studies have shown that young people with a strong sense of purpose are more resilient and better equipped to navigate life's challenges.



# Strategy 2: Provide Compensation

- **Financial**
  - **Stipends:** Offer stipends to compensate youth for their time and contributions. This not only values their efforts but also removes financial barriers to participation.
  - **Scholarships:** Provide scholarships for educational advancement. This can motivate youth to engage and excel in leadership roles.
- **Non-Financial**
  - **Recognition:** Acknowledge and celebrate the achievements of youth leaders through awards, certificates, and public recognition.
  - **Professional Development:** Offer opportunities for skill-building and career development, such as workshops, training sessions, and internships.



## Strategy 3: Create Meaningful Roles

- Create concrete roles and accountabilities, eg: positions in strategic leadership, project management, or public speaking/ambassador.
- Match roles to the individual strengths and interests of youth. Conduct assessments and have discussions to understand their aspirations and capabilities.
- Provide opportunities for youth to choose roles that excite and challenge them, ensuring they are invested and motivated.

# Strategy 4: Develop Belonging & Community

- **Creating Inclusive Environments**
  - Foster a culture of inclusivity where every youth feels valued and respected.
  - Implement policies and practices that promote diversity and inclusion, ensuring all youth have equal opportunities to participate.
- **Peer Support and Networking Opportunities**
  - Facilitate peer mentoring and support groups where youth can share experiences, challenges, and successes.
  - Organize networking events that connect youth with peers, mentors, and professionals in their fields of interest.

# Strategy 5: Provide Coaching & Support

- **Meet Young People Where they Are**
  - Don't make assumptions about the role, skills, capabilities, relationship to work that young people come into the work with
- **Regular Feedback and Guidance**
  - Establish regular check-ins to provide feedback and discuss progress. This helps youth stay on track and feel supported.
  - Offer regular constructive feedback and criticism.
  - Create structured mentorship opportunities where youth are paired with trained mentors who can offer guidance, advice, and encouragement.

# Example Roles & Structures

**1. Board Membership:** Involve youth as members of org boards to provide insights and influence decisions.

- Benefits: Brings fresh perspectives and ensures decisions are relevant to youth.
- Challenges: Requires preparation and support for youth to effectively contribute.

**2. Advisory & Team Roles:** Invite youth to serve as advisors or team members on planning and program development.

- Benefits: Tangible opportunities to contribute to day to day strategy and operations.
- Challenges: Ensuring youth feel empowered to speak up and are trained with needed skills.

# Example Roles & Structures

**3. Testing/Piloting:** Engaging youth in testing and piloting new initiatives and programs.

- Benefits: Provides real-world feedback and increases youth buy-in. Also great for program credibility.
- Challenges: Needs structured processes and clear communication.

**4. Feedback Sessions:** Conducting regular feedback sessions to gather perspectives and improve initiatives.

- Benefits: Continuous improvement and active ongoing participation from youth.
- Challenges: Structure and process required for engaging youth and acting on feedback.



# Case Study: How do we cultivate youth leadership at Future Coach?



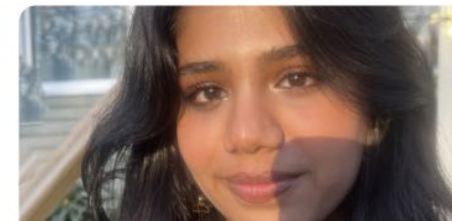
## Case Study: Future Coach

**Future Coach** will be the first personalized coaching service that will give young people access to real-life, trained coaches, supercharged by AI, who will support them as they navigate life and pursue their dreams.



# Youth Leader Advisory Board

- The YLAB represents our target audience – young people from 16-22 representing diverse geographies and backgrounds
- They play a central role in our human-centered design processes and work closely with our designers and user researchers.
- They have been part of every major decision and hundreds of minor ones as we've brought Future Coach to life.



# Pilot and Beta Testing

- **Involving Youth in Pilot and Beta Testing**
  - We have run programming and pilots with thousands of young people that have informed all elements, big and small, of our product and plan.
  - Young people test all new features, with a focus on relevance and overall user experience, and provide written and verbal feedback
- **Examples and Outcomes of Testing Phases**
  - Initial pilots confirmed or debunked fundamental design assumptions
  - Beta testing will now optimize the actual platform and user experience

# Alumni & Youth Employees & Interns

- **Roles and Contributions**

- Alumni: Serve as mentors, ambassadors, and role models for current participants. They share their experiences, offer guidance, and help build a supportive community.
- Youth Employees & Interns: Take on various roles within the organization, from administrative support to program coordination, bringing fresh perspectives and energy.

- **Success Stories and Impact**

- Alumni and youth employees have driven key initiatives over time.
- Their contributions have led to significant org growth and enhanced program delivery.



# Ongoing Focus Groups and Market Research

- **Continuous Improvement through Youth Feedback**
  - Regular focus groups to gather feedback on various aspects of the program, from content quality to delivery methods.
  - Ongoing feedback loop ensures that what we are building is relevant and responsive to evolving needs.
- **Impact of Youth Insights on Future Coach**
  - Insights gathered from focus groups have directly influenced original design and key edits to features.

**What can you take back to  
your work and community?**






# Recap & Key Takeaways

- Cultivating youth leadership is essential for personal, organizational & societal growth.
- Respect, inclusivity, support, ownership, and transparency are crucial to authentic engagement.
- Develop purpose, provide compensation, create meaningful roles, foster community, and offer ongoing support.
- Alumni roles, YLAB contributions, pilot testing, and focus groups have been transformative for Future Coach.
- This is not rocket science – every organization can find ways to bring youth leadership and voice to the center of their operation!

# Your Turn - What is Your Commitment?

- What is working in terms of your organization/initiative's approach to cultivating youth leadership?
- What could be better?
- Did you hear something today that you want to take back to your context?



**POLL: What will you do to increase youth leadership in your organization?**

# Questions?

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What do  
you see  
in your  
future?