

Building Quality in Afterschool



Youth Engagement Continuum

The following checklist can be used for assessing the approach and services your organization incorporates to promote participation, positive development and engagement of youth participants in your program(s). The results should be used to refine programmatic goals, to inform strategies for program improvement, and intentional program design.

Name: _____ Role/Title in Program: _____

Organization/Program: _____ Location: _____

YOUTH SERVICES

- Provides services to address individual problems and circumstances of young people
- Programming defined around treatment and prevention

First category on the continuum of youth engagement consists of programs and services that use the traditional **youth services** approach. This model views youth as clients and thus employs techniques of **intervention** and **treatment**. The youth, or client, is a **passive agent who receives services to help resolve an issue or problem**. This model is considered successful when the issue or challenge is eliminated. The youth services model is effective in addressing a community's specific problem or acute need by providing a simple, isolated solution. As a critique, though, the model does not work effectively in all situations because it is not effective in providing long-term follow-up services or support in dealing with ongoing and/or more complex youth needs.

*For example, a **youth services** model can be extremely successful in providing a program to pregnant teens. Because the situation occurs over a fixed period of time, once the baby is born the teen moms are no longer in need of the prenatal services that were being provided. On the other hand, the model can fall short. For example, schools often attempt to deal with classroom problems by requiring failing students to attend a tutoring program until grades have improved. But if the cause of a student's failure stems from a more complex situation than just a need for academic help, the school may need to refer students to a more comprehensive program based on a different model.*

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

- Provides services and support, access to caring adults and safe spaces
- Provides opportunities for the growth and development of young people
- Meets young people where they are
- Builds young people's individual capacity
- Provides age appropriate support
- Emphasizes positive self identity
- Supports youth-adult partnerships

The second category on the continuum of youth engagement is **youth development**, which provides a broader, multifaceted approach to dealing with the struggles that youth and their communities face. These programs provide services, support, and opportunities to help young people develop successfully during adolescence. It **builds on a youth's individual strengths and helps with identity development**. Instead of only serving youth when treating a problem, this model works with prevention in mind, viewing barriers as the challenges that youth must overcome to improve their future life opportunities. The **youth development model meets youth at their level, providing age-appropriate support and services from caring adults through youth-adult partnerships**. Again, the key difference in this category of the continuum is that the attitude of youth as passive clients needing intervention changes to youth working with adult and program partners to build the competencies and identity needed to overcome and work through challenges.

YOUTH LEADERSHIP

**Includes components of Youth Development approach plus:*

- Builds in youth leadership opportunities within programming and organization
- Helps young people deepen historical and cultural understanding of their experiences and community issues
- Builds skills and capacities of young people to be decision makers and problem solvers
- Youth participate in community projects

The third category on the continuum of youth engagement is the **youth leadership** development model, which builds on previous models through collective empowerment. This model includes components of the youth development approach, but builds deliberate leadership development opportunities for youth in programs and organizations. In other words, while this model does build competencies and identity, it goes one step further and helps young people see their relationship with an organization or community. Youth become leaders by caring for others while developing themselves. Often, **youth leadership development is conducted in community service organizations where the goal is to work and improve the status quo**. Overall, youth leadership development builds the skills necessary for youth to work through personal and community challenges by becoming competent decision-makers and problem-solvers.

YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

***Includes components of Youth Development and Youth Leadership plus:**

- Engages young people in political education and awareness
- Builds skills and capacity to do power analysis and action around issues they identify
- Begins to help young people build collective identity of young people and social change agents
- Engages young people in advocacy and negotiation

The fourth category on the continuum of youth engagement is the **youth civic engagement** model. Using the foundations of youth leadership development, this model develops young people's skills and habits even more directly using the democratic process, both in organizations and the community at large. **Specific skills training and political education helps young people work collectively to identify issues of importance, with the emphasis clearly shifting from individual empowerment to group empowerment.** As such, youth, through existing councils and advocacy groups, learn about the political structures of community and government. Thus, the youth civic engagement model develops young leaders by developing the political education, awareness, advocacy, and negotiation skills they need to build their collective identity as participants in social change.

YOUTH ORGANIZING

***Includes components of Youth Development, Youth Leadership and Civic Engagement plus:**

- Builds a membership base
- Involves youth as part of core staff and governing body
- Engages in direct action and political mobilizing
- Engages in alliances and coalitions

The fifth category is the **youth organizing model**, which features youth engaging in efforts to bring about **systemic change**. Youth organizing is a model that trains young people in direct action community organizing in order to alter power relationships and generate institutional **community change**. Young people organize themselves to define issues, recruit members and/or supporters, work with other organizations, build coalitions, create solutions, and implement and evaluate those efforts. This model directly attacks the normal hierarchy and boundaries of power relationships by raising the social and political status of young people to that of mature adults. In dealing with the challenges that many young people and their communities, youth study their communities face, interact with others having common situations, build relationships and a membership base, create a governing body, and engage in action leading to a better community while also feeling empowered themselves.

Source: Pittman, K., Martin, S., Williams, A. (2007, July). *Core Principles for Engaging Young People in Community Change*. Washington, D.C.: The Forum for Youth Investment, Impact Strategies, Inc.

The Youth Engagement Continuum

Intervention -----> Development -----> Collective Empowerment -----> Systemic Change

Youth Services Approach	Youth Development	Youth Leadership	Civic Engagement	Youth Organizing
<p>Defines young people as clients</p> <p>Provides services to address individual problems and pathologies of young people</p> <p>Programming defined around treatment and prevention</p>	<p><i>Includes components of Youth Services plus:</i></p> <p>Provides services and support, access to caring adults and safe spaces</p> <p>Provides opportunities for the growth and development of young people</p> <p>Meets young people where they are</p> <p>Builds young people's individual competencies</p> <p>Provides age appropriate support</p> <p>Emphasizes positive Self-identity</p> <p>Supports youth-adult partnerships</p>	<p><i>Includes components of Youth Development approach plus:</i></p> <p>Builds in authentic youth leadership opportunities within programming and organization</p> <p>Helps young people deepen historical and cultural understanding of their experiences and community issues</p> <p>Builds skills and capacities of young people to be decision makers and problem solvers</p> <p>Youth participate in community projects</p>	<p><i>Includes components of Youth Development & Youth Leadership plus:</i></p> <p>Engages young people in political education and awareness</p> <p>Builds skills and capacity for power analysis and action around issues young people identify</p> <p>Begins to help young people build collective identity of young people as social change agents</p> <p>Engages young people in advocacy and negotiation</p>	<p><i>Includes component of Youth Development, Youth Leadership and Civic Engagement plus:</i></p> <p>Builds a membership base</p> <p>Involves youth as part of core staff and governing body</p> <p>Engages indirect action and mobilizing</p> <p>Engages in alliance and coalitions</p>