

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

A RESOURCE GUIDE

A SEAT AT THE TABLE
A VOICE IN DECISIONS





TABLE OF CONTENTS

Project Summary	1
Youth in Focus	2
Core Values & Principles	3
Qualities of Youth Engagement	4
Frameworks	5
Hart's Ladder	6
IAP2	7
Benefits of Youth Engagement	8
Techniques to Engage Youth	10
10 Things to Keep in Mind	12

PROJECT SUMMARY

Engaging youth in conversations and decision making has many documented benefits to both organizations and youth themselves. For the purpose of this resource guide, youth can be described as aged 15-30. Emerging literature supports that the age bracket that defines youth has been slowly expanding due to various social factors.¹

The development of this resource guide occurred in consultation with youth serving agencies across Nova Scotia to better understand the current state of youth engagement. This further identified learnings for NSHA from the group's wisdom and experiences. Youth across Nova Scotia were encouraged to be involved and have their voice heard through an online survey hosted on the engage4health.ca platform.

The research and ideas shared by agencies and youth helped to enrich this resource guide. It helps us understand how to do youth engagement across NSHA to ensure their voices are at the table and showcase how youth can be part of future health conversations.

" Treat youth with the same respect given to older generations. We are bright, innovative people who can change a lot if given the opportunity. "

NS Youth

1. Settersten, R. A., & Ray, B. (2010). What's going on with young people today? The long and twisting path to adulthood. *Future Child* 20(1).

YOUTH IN FOCUS

1 in 5 Nova Scotians are between the ages of 15-30¹

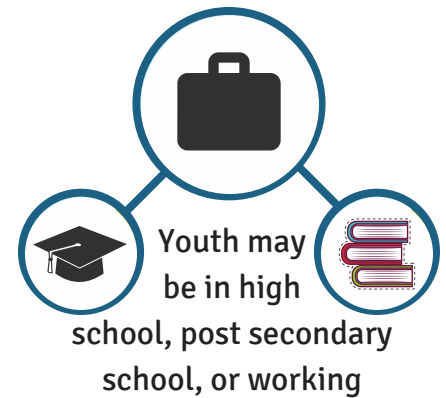


Roughly **51%** of youth aged 15-30 live in the Halifax region¹



Not only does the literature support that youth want to be involved, NS youth surveyed in 2018 supported this, with **66%** saying they would like to be involved in conversations

Overall, youth reported that they feel they are disconnected from the health care system in Nova Scotia



NS youth want to be involved in discussions about their health, not only to share their experiences, but to also learn from health care providers

“ Any reciprocal relationship makes me feel engaged because I get to learn and teach ”

NS Youth

According to NS youth, in 2018, the top three qualities to help them feel comfortable engaging in a conversation include:

1

Knowing that their voice is listened to in conversations

2

Feeling that their voice is respected in conversations

3

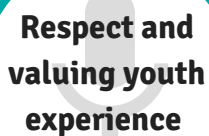
Feeling like they have an equal opportunity to contribute to the conversations

CORE VALUES & PRINCIPLES



Trustworthy and positive partnerships

Positive and trustworthy partnerships are at the heart of youth engagement. Taking the time to build relationships with youth during the process can result in a better commitment from them in the long term.



Respect and valuing youth experience

A youth's first-hand perspective and voice can contribute to positive outcomes. Youth have a wide variety of experiences and often have a different perspective compared to adults. Be wary of adultism, which is a bias towards adults experiences over those of younger individuals. Adopt a youth lens through which to see youth.



Inclusiveness

Ensure that the voices at the table are truly representative of the population you want to hear from. Work to eliminate barriers so youth from diverse backgrounds are able to participate in a culturally safe environment.



Meaningful engagement

Meaningful engagement requires being aware of multiple parts of the process that focuses on the individual's personal perception of success and their level of influence. Keep in mind that the topic needs to be personally relevant or believed to be important to youth. Closing the feedback loop and reporting back is important.

QUALITIES OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

1

Feeling their Voice is Respected and Heard

This is the most important quality identified by youth.

- There are many ways you can help youth feel respected and listened to including:
 - Addressing power imbalances between staff and youth.
 - Document what is heard in the room - this shows you are listening.

Feeling Safe and Secure

This isn't just about the physical space, but also how comfortable youth are in attending and participating in the event.

- Doing things such as:
 - Letting youth know who will be in the room prior to the event.
 - Letting youth know how they will be sharing their voice (e.g. one-on-one, comment cards, group discussion).
- Giving youth as much information prior to the event can eliminate fear of participation.

3

Equal Opportunity to Contribute

Without quality 1 and 2, youth will not feel they have an equal opportunity to contribute to the conversation.

- There are various ways you can give youth the opportunity to share their voice including:
 - Set ground rules as a group. This can give everyone in the room the chance to speak up.
 - Be aware of individuals who dominate conversations. Make sure to ask everyone in the room if they'd like to speak.

Transparency

Being open, honest and accountable will contribute to a transparent environment.

- Be clear on why you are asking for feedback.
- Be upfront about what can and can not be changed.
- Be sure to close the feedback loop by following up on how their input was and wasn't used.

FRAMEWORKS

We reviewed numerous models and selected these two because of their relevance to youth engagement practices.

HART'S LADDER

Hart's Ladder is a model used to describe engagement based on participation levels. For the purpose of this model, Hart's Ladder will be adapted to youth.

Many toolkits have used Hart's Ladder to identify the importance of youth involvement. Hart's Ladder identifies participation on 8 different rungs where the bottom 3 are identified as showcasing the least amount of participation from youth. This framework can provide a sense of where youth engagement falls within a certain initiative or decision-making process.

IAP2

The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) model focuses on the spectrum of engagement goals ranging from informing to empowering, with each having a clear and concise promise to the public. Although IAP2 does not particularly focus on the unique needs of youth engagement, IAP2 is a very useful tool to understand the purpose, goals, and objectives of a project. IAP2 can ensure that the promise to the public is clear, which can help build strong and trustworthy relationships which are key for youth engagement.

HART'S LADDER OF PARTICIPATION



- 8 Youth & adults share decision-making**
Youth and adults are both involved in decision-making and allow experience to be shared.
- 7 Youth lead & initiate action**
Where youth develop and implement an activity or initiative without adults taking a directive role.
- 6 Adult initiated, youth involved in planning**
Adults have the initial idea but youth are involved every step of the planning process and implementation.
- 5 Youth are consulted and informed**
Project is designed and run by adults but youth understand the process. Youth's opinions are treated seriously.
- 4 Youth are assigned but informed**
Youth understand the intentions of a project, know who made the decisions about their involvement and why. Youth play a meaningful role and volunteer for the project after the purpose of the project is made clear to them.
- 3 Youth are tokenized**
Youth are apparently given a voice but have little or no choice about the subject or the style of communicating it and little or no opportunity to formulate their own opinions.
- 2 Youth are used as decoration**
Youth are used to 'perform' at an adult event related to an issue that they have little or no idea about.
- 1 Youth are manipulated**
When youth do or say what adults suggest they do, but have no real understanding of the issues. Youth are asked what they think and adults use some of the ideas but do not tell them what influence they have on the final decision.

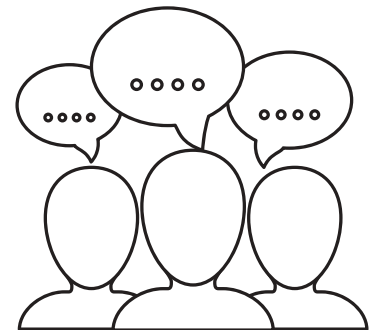
IAP2

Increasing impact on the decision ¹

	Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower
Public Participation Goal	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
Promise to the Public	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

Table sourced from IAP2 ¹

The IAP2 framework is a great place to start when looking to engage youth. It helps to keep in mind that there are specific promises with each level of engagement. It is important to remember that at each level the specific needs of youth need to be kept in mind. A good example of this is when providing information in the inform stage where the information needs to be presented in a youth-friendly matter.



BENEFITS OF

Organizations that give youth the opportunity to engage are not only getting a unique perspective but also give youth the opportunity to grow and learn how to exercise their leadership potential. When organizations give youth the opportunity to participate in meaningful engagement, they may receive solutions to issues they may not have ever considered!²

Promotes a Culture of Inclusion

When youth of all ages are involved in engagement opportunities, it shows the strong dedication to diversity, as NSHA identifies age as a diverse quality.

Improves Quality of Policy Decisions Impacting Youth

By engaging youth in discussions makes development of programs, services and policies more appropriate and relevant to youth needs.²

BENEFITS FOR ORGANIZATIONS

Builds Trust and Transparency

By involving youth in decision-making or planning processes, the trust between individual and organization will strengthen over time.²

Increased Credibility

When youth see that organizations have opportunities where they can share their voice and experience, it can raise the credibility within the youth population substantially.⁵

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Youth can benefit from engagement in a variety of different ways. Youth provide a unique perspective on topics directly affecting them, which helps them feel a connection to the issue. Although it may seem that organizations are the only ones who benefit from engaging, youth can also gain valuable personal skills, self-confidence, and experience.

Personal Growth, Self-Esteem and Identity Development²

Increases confidence of youth to participate in their communities and decision-making processes. Engaging in conversations can provide learning opportunities to build skills and develop self-esteem in various settings.

Develop Interpersonal Skills and Broaden Social Networks

Engagement opportunities are opportunities to develop stronger interpersonal relationships within their social networks, as well as build on existing interpersonal skills.¹

BENEFITS FOR YOUTH

Strengthens Resiliency & Critical Thinking¹

Opportunities to be engaged in a positive environment and successful experiences, youth will most often continue to engage in future conversations that build on existing critical thinking skills.¹

Increases Civic Engagement

Increases young people's knowledge of government and non-government processes and the ways in which they can influence the decision-making processes that impact them.¹

3. Ontario Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health. (n.d.). Why it matters: Benefits for youth. Retrieved from <http://www.yetoolkit.ca/content/benefits-youth>
4. Catalano, R. F., Berglund, M. L., Ryan, J. A. M., Lonczak, H. S., & Hawkins, J. D. (2004). Positive youth development in the United States: Research findings on evaluations of positive youth development programs. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 591, 98-124.
5. Mokwena, Steve. "Putting Youth Engagement into Practice: A Toolkit for Action." London: Commonwealth Youth Programme, Commonwealth Secretariat, 2006.

TECHNIQUES TO

Workshops

Workshops are well liked by youth, as they focus on learning through discovery and collaboration. Sessions can vary from a few hours to a full day event, that can include various types of engagement techniques. A popular technique to use at a workshop is a World Café.¹

Things to keep in mind: Workshops can be skill building, educational, or artistic. Try to include different learning styles to accommodate youth's unique needs.

The engagement process often uses a variety of techniques to gain valuable feedback, but don't forget these techniques aren't one-size-fits-all. Below are a few tried and true ways to engage youth.

Open House

An open house or informal event, where multiple "stations" provide youth information and opportunities to provide feedback.¹

Things to keep in mind: Make sure there are opportunities for youth to provide feedback because open houses can tend to provide one way communication which may limit engagement.

Online Engagement

Using online sites aside from social media is a good way to engage a large youth audience with targeted questions.²

Things to keep in mind: Websites need to be accessible across mobile devices and accessibility programs such as screen reading programs.

ENGAGE YOUTH

Youth Councils

Youth councils are a great way to let youth have greater power and show leadership. These councils would meet regularly to aid in planning and organization. Youth councils are a useful tool because they can be consulted at any step in the decision-making process.¹

Things to keep in mind: Make sure the purpose and the scope of the council is clearly defined.

Social Media

Social media is a great way to provide one-way information and to promote engagement events. It can also be used as a follow-up tool.² Sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are all good places to start, but use may vary between different age groups.

Things to keep in mind: Social media needs to be continually monitored and updated.

Focus Groups

Focus groups can provide youth with the opportunity to share their voice without having to make a long-term commitment. This technique can be helpful to gather preliminary feedback but to also assess options.²

Things to keep in mind: Although this might sound like an open house, focus groups include purposefully recruited youth and usually consist of small groups for increased conversations and learning opportunities.²

Surveys

Surveys can be useful to gather broad information about youth as a population. Be sure to have a purpose for the data.¹

Things to keep in mind: Make sure to use youth friendly language (i.e. no health jargon).

10 THINGS TO KEEP

Engagement can be quite complex and the whole process takes time. It can be easy to forget the small details that really matter to youth. Below are 10 things to keep in mind when you are doing your planning!

1 LOCATION

Providing engagement activities where youth commonly gather can increase participation. Choosing locations youth are familiar with can eliminate barriers to accessing facilities that are unknown to youth.

2 ACCESSIBILITY

It is important to consider facilities on public transit routes and that are wheelchair accessible. Eliminating transportation barriers such as offering bus tickets can increase participation.

3 TIMING

Remember, youth have busy schedules. Offering events or engagement activities during school hours can be impractical. Consider scheduling during evenings or weekends.

4 REFRESHMENTS

Think about providing light refreshments. This is particularly important if the event occurs during a meal time.

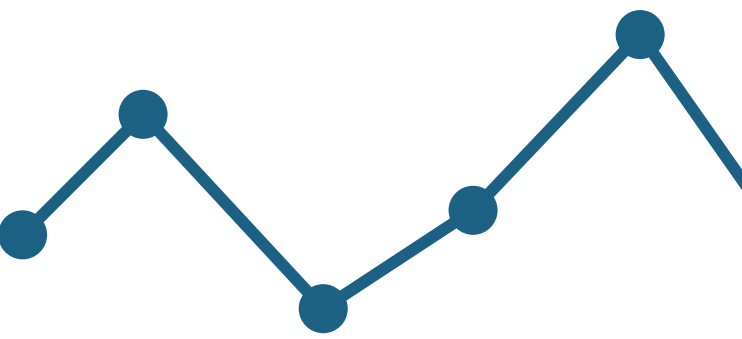
5 LANGUAGE

Be aware of language being used throughout your engagement process. Avoid using jargon, acronyms, and lengthy descriptions. Making sure youth understand what you are communicating is important.

“ Don't just ask for our feedback and insight. Youth have to have a seat at the table. You can't talk about us without us and you can't make meaningful decisions without us. We must be present. ”

NS Youth

IN MIND



6

RELEVANCE

Do not assume what is relevant in the adult world is relevant to youth. It's important to make sure what you are engaging about has relevance to the youth that are participating.

7

ENGAGE EARLY

Engage youth as soon as possible. Having youth as part of the process from the beginning can increase successful engagement.

8

FOLLOW UP

Following up is just as important as any other part of the engagement process. Youth want to know where their voices were heard, how they contributed and what the next steps will be in the process.

9

EXPENSES

Many youth have limited income. Providing a small honorarium to cover expenses would be beneficial for participation.

10

ASK YOUTH

Sometimes its as easy as asking youth what they want or are interested in. Keep it simple.

Developed by:
Angela Radelich
Kristen Hemming

On Behalf of the NSHA Public
Engagement Team

Visit us online @ engage4health.ca
Follow us Twitter @[@engage4health](https://twitter.com/engage4health)