

Engaging youth to advance safer streets for all

Recommendations for meaningful youth engagement

The following recommendations are meant to maximize successful partnerships with youth. They address challenges and barriers to this success based on the real-life experience of young people. A companion publication, [*Engaging Youth to Advance Safer Streets for All: Guide and Inspiration for Partnership Between Youth and Adults*](#), provides the background for these recommendations.

◀ Set the stage for success ▶

Expect good intentions.

- Start with a positive outlook.
- Everyone wants the best for their communities.

Create a welcoming environment.

- Create a safe space where everyone feels welcome and comfortable.
- Be willing to listen or shift your mindset.
- Ask questions, especially to get clarification.
- Be patient. Understanding each other takes time and some stumbling around.

Respect each other's time.

- Everyone's time is important and needs to be valued. Communicate if you need to bow out of a commitment.
- Youth, if you are asked to present at an event and you don't show up, that adult may be hesitant to ask another youth in the future. Don't hurt opportunities for your peers.

Respect each other's knowledge.

- Often each person has a piece of knowledge or perspective that contributes to the solution.
- Youth, you have the lived experience and the direct connections to understand how youth in your community feel and what they would like to see changed. This is your superpower - use it.

Be honest and transparent.

- No one else knows how you are feeling, the challenges you are facing, or your workload.
- Others can work with you to manage challenges, but only if they know they are happening.



*Nashville students engaged in designing their community.
Source: Civic Design Center.*

Partnership ideas

Youth groups are using the following activities in partnership with adults to change their communities.

- Helping the city develop transportation plans
- Collecting street and community assessment data
- Developing street designs
- Advocating for reduced transit fares for students
- Constructing quick build projects
- Bringing youth across the country together to advocate for bicycling
- Generating community support for slowing traffic especially around schools

◀ Getting to work ▶



Youth working on quick build project in Honolulu. Source: Ulupono Initiative.

Build relationships and establish common interests.

— Adults —

- Find out what inspires and motivates youth in your community, and what frustrates them.
- Learn about what attracts them to your issue, what their vision for the future is, and how they envision accomplishing it.

— Youth —

- Reach out to city leaders on building a youth-centered project. Oftentimes, city leaders are looking for projects that engage youth in their communities.
- Identify a community road safety policy issue or project.
- Mobilize your peers. Road safety is interconnected with many other issues. Does addressing road safety through another angle - such as transit access, food justice, climate change - bring more interest?

Establish action plans with everyone's goals in mind.

— Adults —

- Provide youth with resources and information to become active in advocacy, policy, and education.
- Invite youth participants to co-create and receive feedback on program objectives, timelines, and opportunities that may be of interest to youth. This bolsters buy-in and engagement before the program even starts.
- Provide youth with guidance on problems and potential solutions.

Think beyond tokenism and traditional roles.

— Adults —

- Youth should be seen as key stakeholders rather than just peer educators or photo ops. Include them in the decision-making processes like you would any other stakeholder. Co-create agendas, project schedules and objectives.
- If there is a specific youth or youth-led group that you would like to engage, ask how you can support them - not just how they could support you. What is their mission? Are there opportunities for co-creation or collaboration?

Example of tokenism

A group is about to announce a new program about youth. Someone asks if anyone knows any youth that could be there for the kick-off event, after all the program is about youth.

Example of engagement

A group wants to develop a new program. Youth are included in the planning stage and throughout the process. Youth attend the kick-off event and address questions from the audience.



Members of Atlanta Students Advocating for Pedestrians (ASAP) meeting with local officials. Source: ASAP.

Big changes are possible.

- Don't be afraid to aim high. Some youth groups are already partnering with city governments to work towards major change.
- Consider infrastructure improvements such as traffic calming and policy change such as lowering speed limits. These are proven strategies to improve safety that youth have been able to influence.

◀ Make it sustainable: Meaningful youth engagement is not a one-time thing ▶

Be a spokesperson for youth voices.

— Adults —

- Provide your youth network with external opportunities when possible, such as media exposure, speaking opportunities, and/or professional development opportunities



National Bike & Roll to School Day event in Washington, DC.
Source: Walkbiketoschool.org.

Work for a long-term partnership.

— Adults —

- Meaningful youth engagement requires regular involvement through an intentional process.
- Have something to offer youth leaders in return for their time and lived experiences. This could be financial support, such as stipends, or resources, tools, knowledge, and/or sharing power through shared decision-making.
- Provide methods for new youth to know the history of engagement.

— Youth —

- Keep information about the partnering organization and the specific project and pass it on to others so that young people can carry on your work after you move on.

Example of offering opportunities

Has a reporter reached out to you for an interview? Has a conference planning group asked you to do a webinar or participate in a panel discussion on a subject that involves youth? Consider suggesting that the opportunity be shared with a youth advocate.



While the recommendations are focused on middle and high school student involvement, younger students have ideas, too! Here, young community members picture a new transportation network.
Source: Collaborative Sciences Center for Road Safety.

Suggested citation

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