YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIPS IN COMMUNITY DECISION MAKING

What Does It Take to Engage Adults in the Practice?

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FOREWORD

Youth-adult partnerships are integral to 4-H and represent one of the core values of our programs. These partnerships were part of the original design of 4-H programs developed at the turn of the 20th century when state land-grant college and university researchers and the United States Department of Agriculture first saw the potential of young people to change their rural communities for the better. These were the earliest pioneers of what we now know as organized 4-H youth clubs, where young people learned and demonstrated to their families the success of the latest agriculture or food-related technology from their institutions of higher learning.

The 4-H Youth Development Program has expanded and adapted to meet the needs of all youth as our nation's economic and demographic profiles have become more diverse in the 21st century. 4-H now focuses on science, engineering and technology; healthy living; and citizenship. One of the greatest needs of young people—no matter what the program focus—is to be leaders now. By exercising independence through 4-H leadership opportunities, youth mature in self-discipline and responsibility, learn to better understand themselves and become independent thinkers. Youth are given leadership positions in 4-H clubs that allow them to work with other members and take responsibility for some or many of the decisions and/or actions that were once solely those of adults. Organization skills, patience and group dynamics are key traits learned that become priceless assets to youth as they mature into contributing adults in society. In 4-H, we believe that youth must have a voice in the issues that affect them and help guide organizations and the programs and initiatives that have been created on their behalf.

As 4-H Youth Development professionals and volunteers, we are at the forefront of incorporating youth-adult partnerships into our work with young people. These partnerships are essential to ensuring that youth learn through opportunities in which they master life challenges, cultivate independence with the guidance of caring adults, gain senses of belonging within a positive group, and share their spirits of generosity toward others. Yet, we believe all youth development professionals want to be better at engaging young people in mutual decision-making in a meaningful way.

The following pages are the culmination of two years of intense research about how adults can work with young people as partners. It shares the most common challenges experienced by 4-H Youth Development professionals as they attempted to promote youth-adult partnerships in organizations and community settings at the local level and outlines key strategies for overcoming those challenges. Furthermore, the research provides effective strategies for promoting authentic youth participation in decision-making.

We realize that sustaining youth leadership is difficult, and we do not claim to have all the answers. This research analyzing youth-adult partnerships throughout the 4-H Youth Development Program is a start. We encourage you to use this research to strengthen these partnerships throughout your 4-H program and share your successes so that others might learn from them. After all, if we in 4-H are truly successful in cultivating and sustaining youth-adult partnerships, we not only individually transform the lives of young people, but also create a caring society with communities that are youth and family friendly.

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National 4-H Headquarters, CSREES, USDA

Donald T. Floyd, Jr.
President and CEO
National 4-H Council

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- The many 4-H educators, advisors and staff in five states who gave generously of their time and shared their experiences, and to the youth, adult 4-H volunteers, and other community partners who also shared their insights during interviews.

We would also like to thank and applaud the many 4-H staff, volunteers and youth throughout the country who are working to implement youth-adult partnerships in decision-making. Your work is inspiring!

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PART I

Introduction

Youth participation—the direct involvement of youth in shaping the direction and operation of their programs, organizations, communities—is perhaps the most innovative practice that has emerged from the field of positive youth development. The idea that youth and adults can (and should) work together ***as partners*** on issues of mutual concern is what most clearly distinguishes positive youth development from other approaches to youth work, be it prevention, treatment, or education.

As with any innovative idea, there are formidable barriers to implementation. Rarely are youth integrated into community and organizational decision making structures and processes. There are few policies or structures to support youth-adult partnerships (Y-AP) in these settings. The field has yet to create a body of knowledge, basic or applied, about how to integrate Y-AP into our organizations and communities.

National 4-H Headquarters at USDA, along with its non-profit private sector partner National 4-H Council, have long promoted Y-AP as a key element of its policy and programming. Most recently, National 4-H Council launched their 4-H Youth in Governance Initiative (see Appendix A for an overview). The overarching goal of this initiative is to provide the field with models, resources, and research-based information to help policy makers and practitioners "infuse" youth into the governance of 4-H, county boards, and community coalitions.

The present research and report is grounded in the context of this Youth in Governance Initiative. Our aim is to analyze how 4-HYD staff create and sustain opportunities for youth and adults to engage as partners in community decision making. This report has eight parts following the introduction:

Part II: The Theory, Research, and Practice of Youth-Adult Partnership
Part II presents an overview of theory, research, and practice in this area. This section puts youth participation into an historical context and provides an empirical rationale for Y-AP.

Part III: 4-H Youth Development and the Promotion of Y-AP
Part III describes 4-HYD's historical role in promoting the active engagement of youth in local programs and in the governance of the organization. This section places the report in the context of the current national Youth in Governance Initiative.

Part IV: Research Questions and Methods
Part IV identifies the questions guiding the current research, describes the sample, and provides an overview of the methods used to collect and analyze the data.

Part V: Study Findings: Challenges to the Local Implementation of Y-AP
Part V outlines the most common challenges experienced by 4-HYD county staff in the study as they attempt to promote Y-AP at the local level. Using examples from county staff, this section places these barriers within the organizational context of 4-HYD.

Part VI: Study Findings: Strategies for Engaging Adult Stakeholders in Y-AP
Part VI provides an overview of key findings regarding county staff strategies for promoting Y-AP. This section presents a conceptual framework outlining the types of management goals and leverage points that guide county strategies for engaging adult stakeholders in Y-AP. Framework concepts are illustrated using data from the perspectives of county staff, adult and youth stakeholders.

Part VII: State Level Support for County Staff
Part VII offers preliminary recommendations for how state-level 4-HYD systems may support the efforts of county staff to promote Y-AP at the local level. This section also includes an outline of the research plan for the next phases of this longitudinal study of the 4-H Youth in Governance Initiative in multiple states..

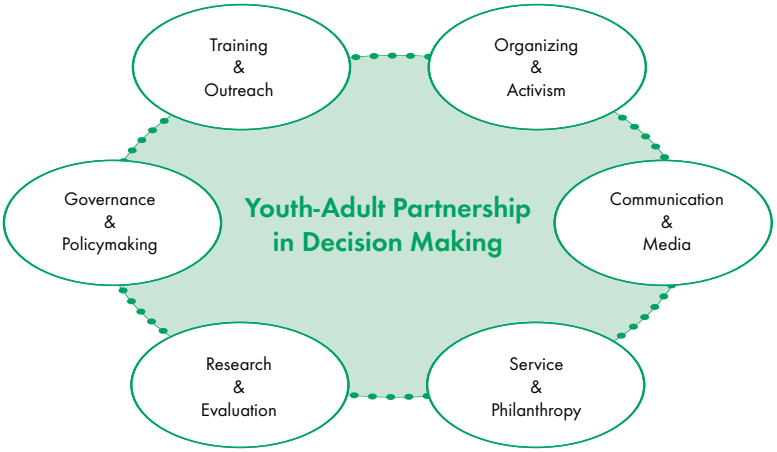
Part VIII: Recommendations: Creating the Conditions for Youth-Adult Partnership
This final section of the report summarizes key findings across the local and national data regarding effective strategies for promoting youth participation in decision making.

The Theory, Research and Practice of Youth-Adult Partnership

The practice of youth and adults working together is "often bedeviled by misunderstandings over seemingly obvious words" (Cutler and Taylor, 2003). We begin, therefore, by articulating the definitions and assumptions that guide our research.

Youth participation—also known as "youth engagement"—is an umbrella term that subsumes a range of opportunities for young people to engage in collective decision making and action (Figure 1). Also highlighted in Figure 1 is the emerging consensus that youth-adult partnership (Y-AP) is a cornerstone of authentic youth participation. Y-AP is a common element that cross-cuts and is central to the different types of youth participation in the United States (Camino, 2000; Search, 2005; Perkins & Borden, 2003).

Figure 1. Functions of Youth-Adult Partnerships in Organizations and Communities



Y-AP involves more than just the placement of a token youth on an organizational board. Rather, the ultimate aim is to "infuse" youth within multiple levels of a given organization or community, be it on the design team for a new program, on the board of directors, and on public information and advocacy work teams.

A fundamental tenant of democracy is the idea that as many "adult groups" as possible be represented "at the table." Y-AP in decision making is an extension of that tradition. The active engagement of youth can help ensure that diverse voices and perspectives are represented in the decision making processes. Youth engagement may be particularly critical when decision making groups are debating issues that directly impact youth and the places where they live, work, and learn. Infusing youth into multiple forums of decision making may also contribute to efficiency. When a range of opportunities exist, youth can choose to participate in ways that most closely match their own interests, capabilities, and developmental needs.

Defining Characteristics of Y-AP in Decision Making

Our conceptualization of Y-AP is derived from the ground-breaking work of The National Commission on Resources for Youth (1974). This body spoke to the importance of youth and adults working together in a collaborative manner, specifically in terms of:

> …planning and/or decision-making affecting others, in an activity whose impact or consequence extends to others, i.e., outside or beyond the youth participants themselves. There is mutuality in teaching and learning, where each age group [youth and adults] sees itself as a resource for the other and offers what it uniquely can provide. (p.25)

Camino's (2000) research further refines the conceptualization of Y-AP. In addition to mutuality, Y-AP is grounded in: (a) principles and values of inclusiveness; (b) the skills of community building; and (c) methods of reflective action. Other analysts have elaborated on these and related themes (Checkoway, 1998; Kirby & Bryson, 2002; Kirshner, O'Donoghue & McLaughlin, 2002; Matthews, 2003; Pittman, 2001; Sherrod, Flanagan & Youniss, 2002; Shier, 2001). Building from this foundation, we conceptualize the defining characteristics of Y-AP as including the following:

- The goal of Y-AP is to integrate youth into existing forums of decision making that have traditionally been reserved for adults, while also creating new structures for youth to influence important decisions. Y-AP is a practice and a strategy, not a "new" program.

- Y-AP is a collective construct. The primary purpose is not to help individual youth make better decisions about their personal lives (although this may occur). Rather, Y-AP is about engaging groups of youth and adults in organizational change and community building over a sustained period of time.

- Issues of power are embedded in all aspects of collective decision making. Affirmative actions by adults, not only new policies, are necessary to ensure that youth are not marginalized. Not only do adults need to take the perspective of youth into consideration, they must also demonstrate a willingness to take action on the input that youth provide.

- There are many adults, including large numbers of organizational staff and community residents who lack institutional power. Intentional actions are often necessary to ensure that the voices of these persons are represented in Y-AP. It is not only youth who can be marginalized in decision making processes.

- Most young people and adults who are new to collective decision making require adequate preparation and support to ensure that the experience is meaningful for them and the organizations.

Making the Case for Y-AP in Decision Making: Theory and Research

Why is it critical to engage youth and adults in collective decision making? The rationale—ensuring representation and voice, building civil society and responsive organizations, and promoting youth development—has been put forth for many years (Zeldin, Camino, and Calvert, 2003). Over 55 years ago, for example, Hollingshead (1949) observed that United States policy tends to: "..segregate children from the real world that adults know and function in. By trying to keep the maturing child ignorant of this world of conflict and contradiction, adults think that they are keeping him pure" (p.108). Hollingshead was most concerned with the isolation of youth who did not have access to the "naturally occurring opportunities" for participation that were available to those with economic advantage and social capital. These themes echoed those of John Dewey (1938) who theorized that adolescents suffer when they are removed from the real world of local issues. For Dewey, youth-adult partnerships in community settings were not only inextricably linked to learning about civic knowledge and citizen action, but apply equally to all other subjects. For these reasons, Dewey urged that participation in local democracy be a cornerstone of public education.

These ideas resurfaced during the 1970s. Both the President's National Advisory Committee on Youth (1974) and the National Task Force on Citizenship Education (1977), for example, concluded that both the developmental needs of young people and society's needs for active citizenry could be met most effectively by providing youth with learning opportunities outside of the school classroom. Youth participation was endorsed as a powerful strategy for increasing student knowledge about community, and equally important, for encouraging involvement in collective and democratic action. Research supported these ideas. When youth are given consistent adult support, and the chance to reflect with adults, participation was found to promote a range of positive outcomes among young people (Bucknam & Brand, 1983; Hamilton, 1980; Newmann, 1975).

Unfortunately, youth policy during the 1980s was more strongly influenced by other policy reports, most notably "A Nation at Risk" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Explicit in this report was the assumption that the purpose of education is to transmit the kind of academic knowledge and skills that can be measured by standardized tests, and secondly, that this purpose is best accomplished by conventional classroom instruction. The movement for experience-based

civic education lost momentum. (Contemporary similarities to No Child Left Behind, and its influence in overshadowing a focus on civic education and service learning in the schools, is discouragingly apparent).

The 1990s saw renewed attention to youth participation in decision making. Internationally, the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) heightened visibility of the issue. Article 12 states that all youth have the right to be heard on matters affecting their lives, including policy matters, and have their views taken seriously in accordance with their age and maturity. By 1998, all UN countries—except the United States and Somalia—ratified the CRC (Mason, 2005). According to these signatories, youth participation allows children to better protect themselves, strengthens their commitment to democracy, and leads to better policy decisions (Lansdown, 2001).

The CRC has prompted some of the ratifying countries to create policies expanding opportunities for youth to play an active role in making decisions about their own lives as well as their communities. In the United Kingdom, for example, ratification converged with the rise of the consumer movement and new child-centered paradigms within the social sciences to form a widespread youth participation movement (Sinclair, 2004). All government agencies, in the field of human services, have been directed to adopt specific policies on how they involve youth in governance (Cavet & Sloper, 2004). Recent efforts have expanded toward the development of a "participation infrastructure," with the aim being to help local government offices and voluntary sector organizations implement and sustain the practice in a quality way (Cutler & Taylor, 2003).

In the United States, the emphasis on Y-AP in decision making arose as a fundamental practice of "positive youth development" in community organizations, and of service learning in schools. At first, Y-AP was viewed as a means for promoting positive youth outcomes. Over time, however, as local communities and organizations began to mobilize around participation and service, it became evident that youth and adult partnerships could also be a catalyst for effective policy making, planning, and organizing both within and outside formal organizational structures (Camino, 2000; Pittman & Tollman, 2001; Kim & Sherman, 2006). Ginwright and Cammarota (2006) summarize this perspective:

> … Youth should be recognized as subjects of a knowledge production that underpins their agency for personal and social transformation. If democracy still seems to be a noble ideal, then supporting youth agency should be considered a high priority. The only chance for democracy to expand in the next generation is for young people to be perceived of and treated as vital agents of social transformation. (p xix).

In response to lessons from the field, youth engagement has emerged as a focal point for scholarship on adolescent development. This body of theory and research creates an additional "case" for Y-AP:

- The notion that the processes of youth and community development are intertwined is emphasized by Villereaul, Perkins, Borden, & Keith (2003). When youth are allowed entry into influential settings of decision making, it is theorized that they can become significant resources for creating the kinds of contexts, ecologies, and communities that enable positive youth development—for themselves and for others (Benson, Scales, Hamilton & Sesma, 2006; Lerner, 2000).

- Developmental theory continues to highlight the key role of adults in helping youth make the most of these opportunities. Opportunities for participation are argued to have the most powerful developmental potential when youth form close relationships and instrumental partnerships with youth workers, teachers, and community leaders over a sustained period of time (Hirsch, 2005; Zeldin, Larson & Camino, 2005).

- A strong body of research demonstrates that youth participation in decision making, when supported by caring adults, promotes the social and academic development of youth in families (Eccles et al., 1993; Steinberg, 2001), schools

(Mitra, 2004; Newman, 1996), and youth organizations (Michelsen, Zaff & Hair, 2002; Catalano et al., 1998; Zeldin, 2004). Positive outcomes include a stronger sense of self, increased critical thinking, teamwork, organizational skills, social capital, and an enhanced sense of group belonging and a long-term commitment to service (Independent Sector, 2002; Scheve et al., 2006).

- Listening and responding to customers has been demonstrated to enhance the effectiveness of organizations (Kirby et al., 2003; Wheeler, 2000). There is an emerging body of research indicating that youth participation has positive influences on the culture, structure, and programming of youth organizations (Cavet & Sloper, 2004;Ginwright, 2005) and schools (Fielding, 2001; Levin, 2000). Inviting youth to the table can raise the bar for everyone, with youth and adults gaining a deeper connection to the organizational mission and vision (Zeldin et al., 2000).

- Contemporary organizational assessment and program planning tools emphasize youth-adult partnership, with the aim being to help organizations promote youth voice in governance, program planning, and quality implementation (Camino & colleagues, 2004; Hi/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 2005).

It is important, of course, not to over-romanticize the power of youth participation and Y-AP in decision making. At the same time, the substantial evidence—theory, research, and application—cannot be dismissed. The philosophical rationale for the practice is powerful. Reducing the isolation of youth from community life and maximizing representation are fundamental goals of democracy and social justice. There are gaps in the research base, for sure. But the available studies offer the consistent message that when Y-AP is implemented in a quality manner, good things happen. There is little doubt that Y-AP has positive impacts on both youth and adults. In some cases, Y-AP can enhance organizations that are actively seeking to transform themselves. In other cases, Y-AP can serve as a catalyst for groups that are resistant to change.

The Current Status of Y-AP in the United States

Despite the persuasive rationale, it is important to emphasize that Y-AP runs counter to standard practice and established values in the United States. Consequently, Y-AP remains at the periphery of youth policy, school reform, organizational governance, and community development. Focused work over a sustained period of time will be necessary to integrate Y-AP into our institutional structures and cultural norms.

That being said, there are clear and widespread indications that the status quo is changing, and may be changing rapidly. Youth-focused organizations are taking the lead, and have created a broad range of opportunities for youth to engage in organizational and community decision making (see Figure 1). But, youth organizations are not the only entities in play. Young people are also serving as members of a range of municipal and organizational boards (Kirshner et al., 2002; Sinclair, 2004). They are taking active roles in community development, participating alongside adult residents in land-use planning processes (Knowles-Yanez, 2005; Pittman, Tollman et al., 2001; Speak, 2000). They are mobilizing their peers and residents to take action of a range of social and environmental justice issues (Chawla, 2002; Checkoway et al., 2003; Edwards, et al., 2002). Public health workers are increasingly adopting more empowering approaches that engage youth as trainers, advocates and partners in community-wide tobacco, HIV/AIDS and violence prevention efforts (Altman & Feighery, 2004; Public Health special issue, 2006; Hoffman, 2005). Youth participation has reached the agendas of the public sector, and has been endorsed by interest groups such as the Council on Mayors and the National Civic League. Consider the view of the National League of Cities:

> Nothing is more important to the health of our democracy than the active engagement of young people in representative government at the local level. For this reason alone, mayors and city council members across the nation have sought creative and effective ways to ensure that youth from diverse ethnic, economic, cultural, and language backgrounds have a "seat at the table" in

> their cities and towns. (Downloaded from www.nlc.org on 10.16.06)

The United States has most certainly enhanced its collective will and capacity for youth participation over the past decade. There is a foundation in place that offers hope for the future. But, again, we can't romanticize Y-AP. The quality of implementation does not yet match the quality of the rhetoric. The most pressing question is: *How do we ensure that youth participation does not become the latest 'flavor of the month'?* Framed more positively: *How can we sustain the momentum for youth participation that has arisen over the past decade?*

National and state-level structures, such as the youth cabinets and the interagency collaborations being planned in response to the recently passed Federal Youth Coordination Act, are critical. But change is ultimately implemented locally. Bringing youth participation to scale will also require sustained efforts at changing the guiding principles and dominant cultures of organizations and communities, as illustrated in a recent study by Kirby and colleagues (2003). These researchers conducted case studies of twenty-nine UK organizations that were seeking to promote youth participation. The study found that the most successful organizations were those that viewed participation as an overarching approach, rather than a discrete and isolated set of activities. These organizations had worked to create a "culture of participation" that regularly included youth and adults as key partners in organizational change and program improvement.

This brings us back to our point of departure: youth participation is intertwined within processes of organizational and community change. Interventions designed to promote Y-AP must therefore work within these parameters. The goal is not simply to "bring youth to the table" around contemporary issues, but equally important, to create a culture of participation that values and provides structure for partnership in the future. As Sinclair (2004) observes:

> [The] challenge for the next decade will be how to move beyond one-off or isolated consultations to a position where children's participation is firmly established within organizational cultures and structures for decision-making. (p.116)

Our current research agenda emerges from the above context. The aim is to provide empirical information to inform program managers, organizational leaders, public officials, and grant makers who are committed to youth participation. Specifically, we are seeking to describe how organizations overcome the numerous challenges to integrate young people into forums of organizational and community decision making. We are exploring what it takes to create a culture that values youth-adult partnership in organizations and communities.

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4-H Youth Development and the Promotion of Y-AP

4-H Youth Development (4-HYD) provides an ideal context for the present research. A well-established system that has been in operation for over a century, 4-H has long emphasized youth leadership through real-world action. In the early 20th century, for example, 4-HYD helped young people learn about the latest agricultural technologies being developed at the land grant institutions. Youth were among the early adopters of such technologies, and in some cases, taught their parents by example. Subsequently, the scope of the 4-HYD program has steadily expanded beyond agriculture to include community service, citizenship, leadership, the arts, and healthy living, among others. In all of its priority practices, 4-HYD strives to promote active learning and collaborative decision-making among young people and adults (Kress, 2005). Commenting on the historical legacy of 4-H, National Program Leader Cathann Kress describes the integral role of youth participation:

> Youth-adult partnership is the very essence of what 4-H is designed to be. The philosophical underpinnings of youth in governance are the same philosophical underpinnings that led to the formation of our organization, and are just as relevant now as they were then.

Today, 4-HYD continues to evolve in response to the needs of local communities and advances within the larger youth development field. The program is focused on promoting a sense of belonging, mastery, generosity, and independence in youth participants. Fundamental to these goals is the emphasis on youth-adult partnerships and the power of youth. Don Floyd, CEO of National 4-H Council, succinctly makes the point: "If you're going to have a legitimate relationship with young people, you have to engage them in decision making."

Consistent with these perspectives, 4-HYD has worked vigorously to redefine and expand the role of youth in decision making. For example, the National 4-H Council allocated ten spots on its Board of Trustees to youth in 1993. In the late 1990's, 4-HYD's "At the Table" initiative sought to build broader awareness of Y-AP by highlighting promising practices and positive outcomes. As a result of 4-HYD's "National Conversation on Youth Development" in 2002, a process which involved more than 40,000 youth and adults, the National 4-H Strategic Plan was revised to include the following goals: (1) 4-H will create a culture in which youth are equal partners in decision making and governance; (2) 4-H youth will be full partners, resources, and contributors in developing, delivering, and evaluating [our] educational experiences.

As part of this shift toward maximizing youth voice, power, and partnership, 4-HYD staff activity has broadened in focus from the delivery of 4-H programming to the promotion of youth participation in organizational and community governance. In 2004, with support from youth and adults throughout the system, 4-HYD launched its "Youth in Governance" initiative. The goal of the initiative is to promote and institutionalize youth participation within 4-HYD programming while creating opportunities for youth and adults to partner in quality ways within the governance structures of Extension and those of the communities in which 4-HYD operates. The initiative has five working groups —research, programs, curriculum, skills, and organizational infrastructure—each of which is identifying leverage points and resources that can be employed to achieve these goals (Appendix A). Additionally, eight states—six of which received a small grant of $10,000—have committed themselves to working to institutionalize youth-adult partnerships into the statewide governance of 4-HYD. These states have agreed to serve as naturally occurring laboratories for the present research.

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Research Questions and Methods

This research offers both a county and state perspective on the integration of Y-AP into the work of 4-HYD and its partners. The primary focus of the present report is on the dissemination and implementation of Y-AP by 4-HYD at the county level. Two sets of questions guide this aspect of the county-level inquiry:

- What are the challenges to the dissemination and implementation of Y-AP that exist within the traditions and structure of 4-HYD? How do county staff respond to these challenges when orienting their work to create conditions that are favorable to Y-AP in organizational and community decision making?

- How do 4-HYD staff engage adult stakeholders to maximize the likelihood of successfully integrating Y-AP into policy and program decision making? What are the goals and leverage points that guide county staff? What strategies are perceived as most effective?

To collect data for the local study, semi-structured interviews were held with 4-HYD staff in 23 Wisconsin and California counties. All of these staff were working to integrate youth into at least one of three decision-making forums: 11 staff were promoting Y-AP within the 4-HYD governance structure (e.g., 4-H Executive Board, Leaders Board), six were working within local government structures (e.g., Board of Supervisors, City Council, Youth Advisory Board), and six staff were integrating Y-AP into community-wide coalitions. In addition, three in-depth case studies were conducted in Wisconsin to examine the study questions from multiple perspectives. During the case studies, we observed the youth-adult partnerships in action and conducted focus groups and interviews with key stakeholders (e.g., youth participants, adult volunteers, local officials, agency partners, 4-H staff). All of the youth in these projects were of high school age.

The second component of this study focuses on the role of state leadership in promoting Y-AP across the public system. The sample for this study are five states—Arizona, California, Missouri, Montana, and Wisconsin—that are engaged in "Youth in Governance" initiatives. The specific focus of the initiatives vary, with the commonality being that each state is seeking to integrate youth into central office and state-wide forums of decision making. Two questions guide the state-level inquiry:

- How can state staff best support the efforts of county-based staff in disseminating the Y-AP in decision making?
- Through what strategies can Y-AP be firmly established and institutionalized as a priority for state offices of 4-HYD?

We will be following these states longitudinally over a three-year period. So far, we have conducted one site visit to each state, and have interviewed the 19 adults and five youth (age 17 to 21) who are heading up the initiatives. Additionally, during 2007, we will add a second wave of three states to the study sample.

The present study focuses on change at the county level. We do, however, provide a preliminary analysis of state support for local efforts (see Part VIII). Findings on state leadership for Y-AP are scheduled to be disseminated in November 2008.

Data Analysis

Data for the local component of the study were analyzed through using grounded theory methods. Our first step was to gain insight into the community and institutional contexts in which the Y-AP occurred. We were particularly interested in key elements of 4-H Youth Development structure and culture with regard to its ability to embrace the innovation of Y-AP. From this foundation, the research team analyzed the semi-structured interviews. Recurring themes and associations within and across the research questions were identified through open and axial coding. Subsequently, the case study data was analyzed to further explore the research questions from the perspectives of youth participants, adult volunteers, local officials, agency partners, and to further contextualize our understanding of causality and plausible interpretation.

A range of methods were employed to ensure the credibility of the analysis. Multiple forms of triangulation—data source, methods, and investigator—were employed to enhance validity. As noted, the research questions were explored from the perspective of adults and youth who, collectively, had taken on a broad range of roles and responsibilities within the Y-AP. Data was collected through observation and document review, as well as through interview and focus groups. Through ongoing meetings over six months, the study findings were discussed continuously by the three researchers, with specific attention to identifying discrepant evidence and negative cases. State and county staff also participated in many aspects of case study design and analysis. Finally, member checks were conducted with seven staff involved in similar initiatives in three states not included in this study. One expert in the field, one state staff, and three county staff provided additional comments on the analysis prior to its completion.

For these reasons, we are confident that the present findings have a strong degree of validity and are grounded in the perspective, language, and experience of those who are seeking to integrate Y-AP into organizational and community decision making. We emphasize that this is a study of "promising practices" for promoting Y-AP. This report is not a program evaluation. We do not wish to imply to the reader that all of 4-HYD, nationwide, is aggressively seeking to include youth in decision making. About ten states are leading the way. Further, we do not wish to imply that all of the stakeholders interviewed or observed in this study were successful in implementing Y-AP in a quality way. Many were not. Fortunately, we were able to learn from those who were successful as well as from those who were unable, for a variety of reasons, to successfully promote Y-AP. We believe that this diversity in 'success' adds integrity and validity to the analysis.[1]

[1] For a detailed presentation of the study methods and analysis, see Shepherd Zeldin, Julie Petrokubi, & Carole MacNeil (in press). Youth-adult partnerships in decision making: Disseminating and implementing an innovative idea into established organizations and communities. *American Journal of Community Psychology.*

Study Findings: Challenges to the Local Implementation of Y-AP

It is difficult to disseminate any new practice into any public system. Fixsen and colleagues (2005) summarize the reasons:

> Large human service organizations are characterized by multiple and often conflicting goals, unclear and uncertain technologies for realizing these goals, and fluid participation and inconsistent attentiveness of principal actors. It is in this field that efforts to import research findings and practice take place. (p.58)

Within this context of change, Y-AP poses additional challenges to implementation. This is because Y-AP has not yet entered the mainstream of thought or practice in the United States. By definition, Y-AP is a social innovation (Zeldin, Camino, & Mook, 2005). Y-AP is a new idea, with little institutional or normative support in the United States. A majority of the general public has not considered whether youth may contribute to collective decision making. In brief, 4-HYD is swimming against the cultural tide. County staff seem to accept this challenge as part of the job, and during interviews, rarely bothered to complain about it.

All county staff were explicit, however, in speaking to the strengths and weaknesses of 4-H's history and traditions in terms of promoting Y-AP. On the one hand, the history provides a network of loyal "alums"—parents, community leaders, public officials—who care deeply about the program. They "honor the clover" and "bleed green" for the program. Through this network of committed stakeholders, the alums increase the visibility of 4-HYD and reinforce shared beliefs about the value of 4-H to youth and to the community. On the other hand, the traditions and metaphors of 4-HYD diminish the ability of staff to innovate. The organization's longevity means that traditions are deeply rooted and imbued with implicit, often unexamined beliefs about how things should be done.

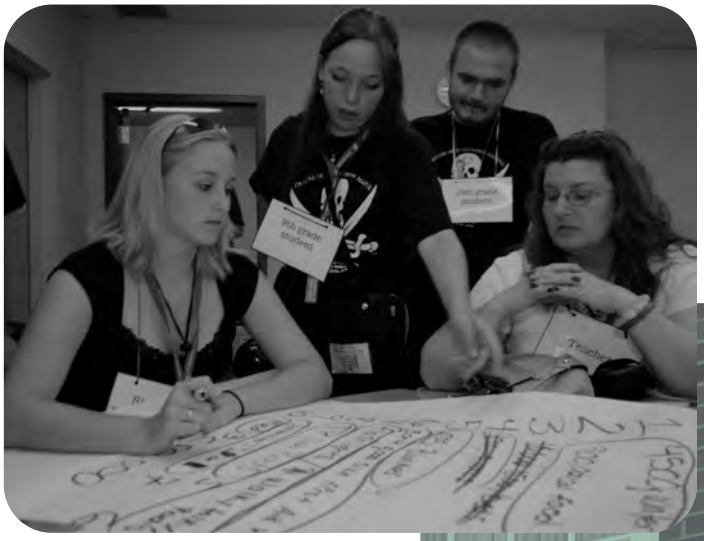
Attempts by county staff to challenge the status quo are often met with resistance from program stakeholders. One 4-H volunteer we interviewed made a joke to illustrate the point: "Question: How many 4-H volunteers does it take to change a light bulb? Answer: Change? You want us to change?!" This resistance can vary from mild doubt that change is needed to a full scale campaign to ensure that the change doesn't happen. Almost all county staff have personal examples of this issue. In one state, the inclusion of youth on county Extension councils—the focus of their current systems change efforts—was suggested a decade ago, but nearly resulted in the firing of two county agents because of intense resistance to the proposal.

This is not to suggest that 4-HYD stakeholders who have been in the organization for a certain period of time are unable to consider organizational change or to embrace Y-AP in decision making. It does suggest, however, that along with stakeholders' deep-seated loyalty to the program, there is an attachment to established structures, metaphors, and processes. These conditions can put county staff in a risky position as they seek to infuse young people into organizational and community decision making. As one county staff explained:

> [4-H] is a very traditional program, so we can be very easily burdened with carrying on with the traditional cycle of events so that when we want to do something new and different, the time isn't there, the resources are not there. So sometimes it means shifting away from something that someone in the county holds near and dear...You end up with the tradition of 4-H as being very positive, in terms of keeping the organization moving and giving direction and so on, but it's also a little bit of baggage.

Not only do county staff bump up against established traditions, but often, staff find that Y-AP requires them to broaden their roles and responsibilities. For example, given that Y-AP is a new idea, county staff find themselves in the position of having to convince volunteers and community leaders to do something different—to take a leap of faith by adopting Y-AP. Toward that end, county staff explained that they have had to become effective "marketers," "cheerleaders," and "advocates" for the practice. Further, while traditional 4-H programs have established curriculum that is often implemented by experienced volunteer leaders, county staff have to "gear up" anew for Y-AP. They must orient and train volunteers for the new practice, and establish new networks to support the practice.

All of this takes time, and time is perceived as a scarce commodity. For county staff, most of whom have been burdened with budgetary cutbacks over the past decade, finding the time to promote Y-AP becomes a tremendous obstacle. This is especially challenging for staff who seek to fulfill the goal of promoting Y-AP in community organizations outside of 4-H. Fortunately, some staff are impressively strategic and efficient in their change efforts. It is from such staff that we have learned lessons about how to best promote Y-AP. These lessons are highlighted below.


9th grade student
Teacher

Study Findings: Strategies for Engaging Adult Stakeholders in Y-AP

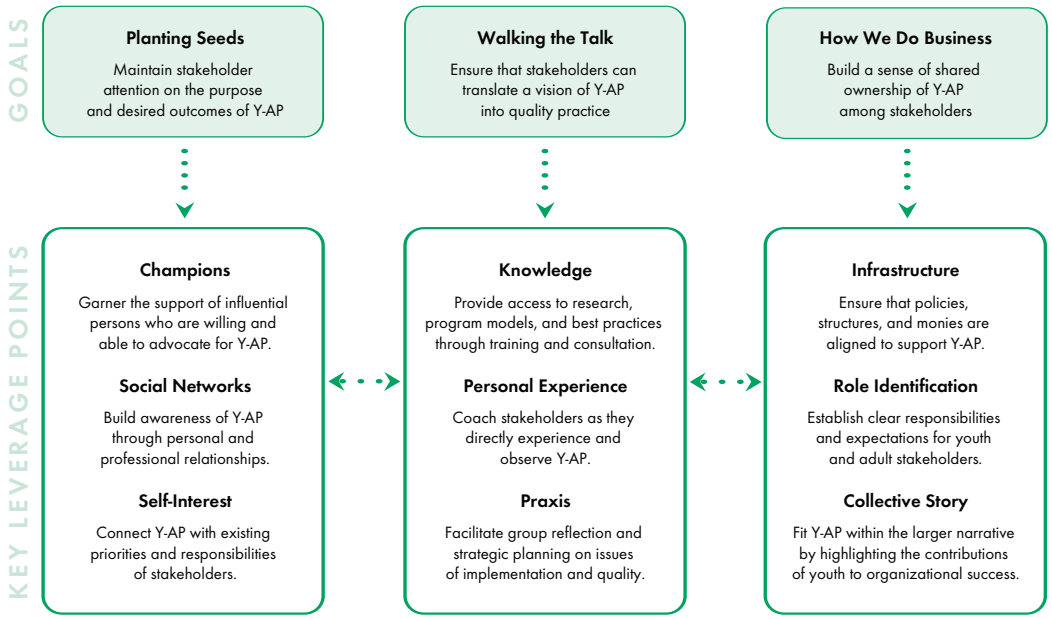
As indicated by the last section, 4-HYD county staff face three key barriers to promoting Y-AP: 1) they must take new risks to move out of traditional programming; 2) they must broaden their roles and responsibilities; and 3) they must confront pressing issues of time. In thinking about how to address these barriers, it is important to keep in mind that Y-AP is a practice, not a program. There is no set design or standard formula for a Y-AP project. Unlike a curriculum that can be implemented to specification, Y-AP requires ongoing negotiation of ideas and resources. Additionally, this practice is about more than just engaging youth. Y-AP also requires practitioners to engage adult stakeholders—local officials, volunteers, agency staff—in the ongoing processes of organization and community development.

These factors combine to create an implementation scenario that involves a great deal of interpretation on the part of the practitioner. In order to promote Y-AP, county staff must translate this new, abstract concept into terms that their stakeholders understand well enough to apply themselves. At the same time, they are constantly considering how local conditions may present opportunities or challenges for the promotion of Y-AP in new organizational and community contexts. There is clearly a craft to the ways in which staff integrate their knowledge of youth, organization and community development to support the successful implementation of this innovation.

But implementation of an innovative idea such as Y-AP involves more than craft. As previous researchers have demonstrated, we find that there is also a science to the management of innovation (Faber, 2002; Van de Ven, 1986). The most successful staff in our study were those who were able to bring busy and often isolated stakeholders together by focusing on the meaning and translation of innovative ideas. Analysis of data from our interviews and case studies of county staff efforts to promote Y-AP revealed significant parallels in the approaches used by county staff to strategically engage these stakeholders in the practice. From a theoretical perspective, these commonalities across the data indicate that the most successful staff are beginning to define and enact a set of practices for the field.

By documenting the common strategies among county staff efforts to promote Y-AP, the study aims to identify a set of "promising practices" that describe the dynamic processes of change that exemplary practitioners use to promote this complex innovation. These common practices are outlined in Figure 2. This framework is "living" in that it is not meant to be understood as a step-by-step progression of activities. Rather, the management goals, strategies and leverage points described below are the overarching considerations that guide county staff as they continually assess local conditions and refine their course of action to suit the changing context of each Y-AP project.

Figure 2. Dissemination and Implementation of Youth-Adult Partnerships: Goals and Leverage Points



What does it take to effectively integrate Y-AP into community and program decision making? How do county staff engage adult stakeholders in Y-AP? Across the range of organizational settings and staff included in this study, we found that successful county staff focused on three management goals. Specifically:

1) *Staff seek to maintain stakeholder attention on the purpose and expected outcomes of Y-AP*. In the words of staff, they maintained attention by constantly "planting seeds" within the community.
2) *Staff help stakeholders translate a vision of Y-AP into useable practices*. That is, they sought to show others how to "walk the talk" of Y-AP.
3) *Staff aim to build a sense of shared ownership among stakeholders*. Staff labeled the activities within this goal as "making Y-AP how we do business."

With these management goals in mind, staff focus their change strategies (e.g., training, consultation, convening) with the aim being to activate key leverage points in support of those goals. Nine leverage points emerged as being most critical to the integration of Y-AP into decision-making bodies: *self interest, social networks, champions, knowledge, personal experience, praxis, infrastructure, role identification, and collective story*. Attention to these leverage points, we find, allows the astute staff person to mobilize key stakeholders in support of Y-AP. Selecting which leverage point to invest in may be a risky task. As county staff noted, for example, a potential "champion" must be thoroughly cultivated, lest he or she loses interest, or in the worst case, become an opponent of the project. Infrastructure must be created to support Y-AP, but efforts to change policies can be met with passive resistance by some stakeholders, according to staff. Under certain conditions, efforts to change infrastructure to support Y-AP may actually serve to mobilize active opposition to the practice. Not surprisingly, county staff emphasize that they are always deliberate in their approach to disseminating and implementing Y-AP, taking into account local personalities and events. Our research indicates that some strategies and leverage points are more closely linked with certain management goals than others. These commonalities are highlighted below.

Goal 1: Maintain Stakeholder Attention on the Purpose and Outcome of Y-AP

All county staff emphasized that the practice of Y-AP is new to most stakeholders, and threatening to many. In response, staff seek to "plant seeds" among stakeholders, with the goal of building consensus around the purposes and expected outcomes of Y-AP. By assisting stakeholders in establishing a common vision for the practice, staff are able to build initial buy-in for the effort. This clarity of purpose also provides stakeholders with guideposts for determining the effectiveness of implementation down the line. Staff in the study found it necessary to not only help stakeholders articulate their initial reasons for inviting youth to the table, but to make sure that they keep these expectations in mind once the partnership gets underway:

> Just planting the seed, and looking at how to provide the training and support to continue to have a strong youth-adult partnership on the board, is what I see our role as. It's helping them keep that focus.

When asked to explain how they maintain stakeholder attention on a common purpose and outcome of Y-AP, staff emphasized three leverage points: champions, social networks and self-interest. Champions are individuals, typically with a degree of institutional power, who are willing to use their capital and resources to move Y-AP forward in significant ways. Almost every staff person identified a specific person who was instrumental to the success of the Y-AP project. Some staff found advocates in government officials, organizational directors, school administrators and business leaders. Others identified county Extension committee members and 4-HYD board officers as champions within the 4-HYD system. Regardless of formal position, these champions were seen as influential because they could effectively focus the attention of others on the "big ideas" of the project.

The champions interviewed during the case studies expressed that they were comfortable with this role. In the main, they were not involved in project design or with the daily logistics of implementation. Instead, they saw themselves as advocates, with a focus on establishing a clear purpose and direction for

engaging youth as partners over the long term. In one small city, officials identified their role as looking to the future, continually building structures and consensus for the idea of engaging youth in municipal governance. One city official indicated that the creation of policies securing youth equal status at the table played an important role in how these champions "framed" Y-AP as an authentic partnership:

> This is an important constituency, they just don't have a voice. And we had to be careful how we framed it—you know, this is more than eyewash. You have other cities where the mayor has a youth advisory committee that he uses. Well, ok, fine. But to actually give them a voice and a vote—now that really means something. And it will endure past any mayor.

Not only do these officials champion Y-AP within their own system, but they also reach out and advocate for the practice in other organizations and communities. The mayor of this city has sat down with leaders of adjacent localities to discuss his experience with youth on city council committees, and has been instrumental in the establishment of several new Y-AP projects in the private and voluntary sector. He described his rationale for championing youth participation in the following way:

> There is nothing worse that having somebody else lead you, when you don't have a chance to control your own destiny. It's kind of what's happening when you don't have youth on these boards. I think that some of these [community] boards would be open to having youth on there. It's just a matter of getting them going. I wonder if it's like we did at the city, where the library took the first step and was a model. We can say that we've done it at the city level, but if some outside group does that—it would be great if it was say the Chamber, the one big group that everybody looks to and is a member of. And then you branch off into your Lions, and your Kiwanis, and your curling clubs…

Champions are not always individuals in "official" positions of power. In our case study of a county 4-H system, we heard a similar perspective from a former 4-H board president who has stepped up to become an advocate for the practice with her fellow volunteers statewide:

> We never let them forget it [Y-AP]. We are always talking about it—like in the newsletter, we try to practice what we preach about roles in 4-H. So, if you are really paying attention, it's all right there…When we go to meetings, we make sure that we have both adults and youth going. We need to always keep it in the forefront that it is a partnership. The youth and the adults are equal partners in the relationship, they are working together. I think if we can remember, and we always strive to incorporate that into our projects and the 4-H board, then we will continue to make great strides. If we keep doing that, and keep talking about it with our friends who are not in 4-H…maybe get to some of the other youth organizations that are so traditional.

These comments from champions, which rely on word-of-mouth strategies, highlight the importance of *social networks* as a leverage point for planting seeds about Y-AP. However, active involvement of individual champions such as these is not enough to promote the practice throughout an entire organization or community. Consequently, staff reported that they invest a significant amount of time in building or activating their own social networks. In order to foster widespread support of the practice, staff found it essential to build alliances with diverse stakeholders at several levels of communities and organizations. As one staff explained:

> You [a staff person] can have all the skills and all the knowledge, but if you don't have the willingness to share and to develop some kind of a network or relationship that continues to expand this idea [of Y-AP], then it won't work.

Social networks were particularly important for county staff seeking to integrate Y-AP into settings outside of 4-HYD, such as local government structures and community coalitions. For these staff, social networks were the vehicle for gaining entry onto the agendas of these organizations. For example, in the municipal

partnership described above, our case study found that the county staff person was widely recognized by both youth and adult stakeholders as the local "go-to person" on youth-adult partnership.

In another county with a good number of Y-AP projects, the staff person used her strong social networks—carefully built though years of interagency collaboration and outreach—to engage a wide range of stakeholders in the practice. This embedded position in the community provided her with insight on the interests and needs of local groups, information that she used to assess which groups may be "fertile ground" for planting seeds about Y-AP. Once she identified a strategic target, she used her social capital to get herself on the agenda of influential groups for a presentation on the research rationale and practical considerations of Y-AP. In describing her strategy of gradually planting seeds in multiple organizations, this staff person explained that building a wide base of support for the practice in the community required a commitment to on-going outreach:

> We have been planting seeds in some other organizations. I just get really excited seeing this in other organizations and local government units and things like that. Because this is the way that we should be doing business. So I think it's just that kind of satisfaction when you even take a small step.

Having already established her integrity within these social networks, this staff person was able to use this trust as collateral for asking stakeholders to take a risk on a new and challenging idea like Y-AP. This staff expressed that this existing web of relationships gave her the confidence to "throw down the challenge to the group, which is easy to do, especially when you have some research and examples to back it up." Across our interviews, staff made it clear that the development and use of organizational and community networks is essential to the process of planting seeds. Not only did these relationships provide them with access to groups, staff were able to use this local expertise to be strategic in crafting and delivering their message to potential stakeholders.

Given the importance of translating the abstract idea of Y-AP into terms that resonate with local stakeholders, *self-interest* is the third leverage point identified by staff for maintaining stakeholder attention on Y-AP. Whether cultivating an individual champion or making a presentation to a group in their social network, staff emphasized that they had to connect Y-AP with the existing priorities and interests of potential stakeholders. Every staff person we interviewed stressed the importance of developing a strong "pitch" that helped stakeholders see that Y-AP would further their own professional goals or that of their organization. Staff were animated during the interviews when talking about how they tailored their pitch to different audiences. For example, when disseminating the idea of Y-AP to 4-HYD volunteers, staff typically spoke to the developmental benefits to individual youth. Many staff effectively engaged 4-H volunteers in this new idea by describing how Y-AP supports 4-H "leadership" goals by developing "soft skills" through "experiential learning." Communications to local government bodies, in contrast, most often focused on how Y-AP could cultivate youth as active and informed citizens, the next generation of community leaders.

The case studies provided many examples of staff success in helping stakeholders to connect Y-AP with their own self-interest. In addition to pitching the idea through formal presentations using research frameworks, these staff also facilitated "strategic planning" opportunities where stakeholders could articulate for themselves how Y-AP would mesh with the priorities and practices of their setting. Many times, these sessions enabled stakeholders to see the benefits of Y-AP beyond the development of individual youth participants. In one county, a staff person led a coalition through extensive planning and retreat activities before taking the steps to engage youth as partners. One indication of the success of these efforts is that during the case studies, just about all the interviewees suggested that the coalition desperately "needs" young people involved in event planning if they hope to be successful in "selling" the prevention message to communities. The following quotes from coalition members are representative of the rationales that we heard from these stakeholders:

> If you can get a kid sold on a program, they can sell it to their friends. And then their friends get excited. And then you get the guardians or parents asking questions, or looking into it. All this is bringing awareness to the event, to the coalition.

> When the kids come, we can get their input. That just makes the meetings so much better because we are getting the input we need. If you are working to keep kids off drugs, it's nice to have the kids there to ask: 'What would get your attention? What would make you listen? What could we say that would get through?'

Staff also take steps to make sure that all these stakeholders remain "on message" about the benefits of the practice. While staff may prioritize planting seeds during the early stages of a partnership, attention must be given to this goal throughout the life of a long-term initiative. Without sustained attention on why the group invited young people to the table, and what they hope to achieve from their participation, staff suggested there is the danger that adults may "slip back into old habits." Stakeholders may lose focus and commitment, and just "let it go" when youth are not meaningfully engaged. Working constantly to maintain a focus on the purpose and desired outcomes of Y-AP is a practical necessity at all stages of a partnership, as one staff suggested:

> There is always going to be [adult volunteer and youth] turnover. So thinking about ways that we can institutionalize it is probably the hardest. You get one group trained, and they buy it, and you think `oh I can relax now' and then there's a whole new group of people... It's a constant education.

4-H staff are ideally positioned to provide this type of "continuing education" around Y-AP since they are affiliated with state universities yet located in county offices. Staff suggested that maintaining their quasi-outsider position with groups enables them to continually bring up issues of quality—either by sharing resources from their external networks, or by facilitating their own research and assessment activities with groups. There are also challenges involved, as staff struggle to balance the need to inform new members of the group about the basics of the practice while pushing more experienced stakeholders to consider issues of quality and scale. Regardless of experience levels, helping stakeholders maintain attention on the desired outcomes of Y-AP is critical to building group consensus on the purpose of the partnership.

Goal 2: Translating a Vision of Y-AP Into Quality Practice

Getting adults to come around to the idea of Y-AP is only part of the equation. The real challenge, according to the adult partners and staff in the study, is transforming this philosophical commitment into quality youth engagement. Prior to participating in this Y-AP, most of these community leaders and volunteers had only interacted with youth from positions of authority as parents, coaches or club leaders. Given that Y-AP calls for a more egalitarian relationship between youth an adults, adult stakeholders reported a steep learning curve in terms of their ability to effectively relate with young people as colleagues in community decision making. In order to help adults bridge this gap between theory and practice, all county staff highlighted the importance of strategies for assisting stakeholders to "walk the talk." Of all three management goals, county staff indicated that they spent the most time pursuing this aim. Looking across the strategies used by staff in the study, three leverage points were commonly activated in support of this goal: *knowledge, personal experience and praxis*.

As local representatives of the state university system, many 4-HYD county staff identified themselves with the title of "educator." The most frequent strategy used by these community educators is to enhance the knowledge and skill of stakeholders through the provision of training and workshops. Most staff reported offering these types of structured experiences in order to educate stakeholders about the principles and practices of Y-AP. Staff balance stories with statistics, and found that real-life models were useful in helping stakeholders to visualize the practice in their own setting. For similar reasons, staff almost always

provided stakeholders with printed materials used by similar projects throughout the state and the nation. Resources commonly shared among staff include: sample policies, handbooks, application forms, curricula and lists of best practices. Again, staff emphasized the importance of context. They described how they review these materials and selectively share the resources that they believe speak most directly to the specific needs and interests of their community. As suggested by several staff in our study, the collaborative structure and culture of the 4-H system encourages this type of resource sharing:

> One of the good things that supports me in doing the work is a CD-ROM that [a colleague] gave me of YAPs. I've gone around to four or five clubs and at the club meeting do a variety of exercises on YAPs that I got from that CD-ROM.

> I didn't have to do that research, [another agent] has a pamphlet on it. All I had to do was read the pamphlet, copy it and hand it off. That's the beauty of the 4-H/Extension network, it is just an incredible resource. We all pull from each other. We try to program together too so that we all learn from each other's teaching styles, techniques and phraseologies.

While the provision of frameworks and models is necessary, content-based teaching alone is not sufficient for helping stakeholders learn how to "walk the talk" of Y-AP. Staff consistently noted that adults learn best by actually working in partnership with youth. Personal experience is the second leverage point for translating a vision of Y-AP into quality practice. Hands-on application of the practice in real-world settings allows adult stakeholders to develop the confidence and competence to engage youth in meaningful ways. One staff person observed:

> You can help people be aware of their own biases, you can help people understand what the obstacles are, you can help them to see what the gifts are, but until people see and experience [Y-AP] in a successful way, it's not likely to happen. It's only when they've had that experience.

All staff reported that they seek to create experiential learning opportunities for stakeholders. For adults who are new to Y-AP, these experiences may be facilitated as part of a collaborative meeting in the form of an ice-breaker or a small group problem solving activity. The aim is to give adults a chance to get their feet wet by working with youth in staff-facilitated activities focused on short-term goals. These "small wins" help stakeholders to better understand what it means to work collaboratively with young people, while at the same time developing a sense of confidence in their own skills and the capacity of youth. Hands-on learning opportunities also help adults realize the potential benefits and challenges of Y-AP, while providing staff with a chance to mentor, coach and debrief the experience with both youth and adults.

Modeling is frequently used by staff to complement direct experience. Almost every staff person spoke about how they engage youth as partners in settings where they participate themselves. During meetings, staff strive to demonstrate good practice by making sure that youth are seated at the table alongside adults, asking youth for their opinion, making sure that they have necessary background materials, and encouraging youth to report out on the work of subcommittees. Staff also arrange site visits so that stakeholders can observe Y-AP in action and talk with their colleagues about the practice. This type of personal experience, according to staff, helps build the confidence of stakeholders while concurrently providing instrumental tips on how to address the logistical challenges of implementation.

The third leverage point that appeared in the study as critical to helping adults "walk the talk" is praxis. Staff reported a need to always balance opportunities for experimentation with opportunities for reflective practice. Given that Y-AP is a new idea that is just coming into common practice, consensus around issues of "quality" and "best practice" have yet to be firmly established, especially among adult stakeholders outside of the youth development field. Praxis provides a strategy by which a group may reach consensus on how to best engage youth around a common goal, as one long-term adult volunteer on a 4-H board explained:

> One thing that helped a lot, we had a couple of retreats. We actually took time and sat down and evaluated where we thought we were coming from, where the young people were coming from. And it put things on paper and you had a chance to really see how everybody felt. We never had a time when we were at a meeting where we could sit down and say `Where are we going?' And we needed that…it changed some of our opinions about where we were going.

Not all staff have the luxury of facilitating the type of weekend retreat described above. More commonly, staff reported that governing bodies do not typically allocate time for retreats or see the value of on-going reflection. Activating the praxis leverage point, therefore, requires that staff foster a collaborative culture of reflective practice by less obvious means than a formal weekend retreat. For example, almost all staff spoke about how they inserted opportunities for shared inquiry into the agendas of governance bodies. Through mini-lectures, self-evaluations, and focused small group work, staff sought to promote a value on reflection, while concurrently, generating opportunities to discuss best practices.

Another common strategy reported by staff was to facilitate strategic planning sessions in order to provide youth and adults with the time and space they need to dig into some of the visioning work that tends to get lost in the day-to-day agendas and pressures of deliberative bodies. In fact, many adult stakeholders and staff reported that they found youth participation to be most effective in these types of big picture activities, since youth can offer a fresh perspective as they are more connected to the issues. One staff person intentionally used praxis to "level the playing field" since both youth and adults are in a learning mode when it comes to Y-AP. While challenging to do, staff reported that it is critical to create a space where adults and youth may get know each other in a personal way as they explore issues that are critical to the work of the group, or the quality of the Y-AP. In order to put stakeholders at ease and encourage collective problem-solving, one staff makes praxis more palatable by regularly noting that "[We] are all in this mode of discovery. I am on the journey too."

All of these "walking the talk" strategies center around the importance of allotting sufficient time and resources for staff to support adult learning related to Y-AP. Speaking from their own experience, several staff warned that rushing to place youth at the table without proper training and support for all stakeholders only "set youth up to fail" and made adults wary of Y-AP. Many staff were surprised how much training and support was necessary to help adults translate their enthusiasm for Y-AP into quality practice. As indicated by the quote below, staff need to assess the "readiness" of a group in determining the combination of training, coaching and praxis necessary before adult partners truly "understand the philosophy" of Y-AP:

> I think it just speaks to the readiness of the people who are in charge, who have the power…I don't think you can always assume that because people were interested that they have the skills to work across those age groups.

The study data strongly suggest that Y-AP is best learned when adult stakeholders are able to participate in an on-going cycle of collective learning, action and reflection. Given the lack of models for this new practice, many adult stakeholders report that they only came to realize the full potential of Y-AP through trial and error in their own setting. Over and over again, we heard stories from adult partners about how their understanding of the practice has deepened through time and experience. Typically, staff supported this process through a mix of formal opportunities for collective learning and reflection, and informal debrief and coaching sessions that focused on specific issues or incidents. The following quotes from adult partners in a range of settings (local government committee, community coalition, 4-H board) illustrate the important role that adult learning plays in the process of "walking the talk" of Y-AP:

> I think we probably had our best response with the last kid who was on there. I think also, if you look at it more closely, it was because we also feel more comfortable having the youth on there. And we knew how to actually bring that person aboard, work with them

> immediately off the bat. It was a learning process for everyone who is on there. I think that is an integral part of getting the kids to participate.
>
> I was concerned about budget things—will the youth really know? But I had to go through that whole mind change—maybe they won't know, but how else are they going to have experiences that teach them those things? I guess I just had decide that it wasn't up to me to decide what they will understand or not understand. If they want to be here, we need to give them a chance to be here and be part of it. And once they were here, I realized that these are some smart kids. We just had to give them credit for what they did know and encourage them to let us know if there is something they didn't understand.
>
> I think it is also exciting to see not just how the youth have changed, but how the adult board members have changed as well... There was a time when the adult members of the board did not necessarily support what the youth were trying to accomplish, and that kinda blew up in our face at the annual meeting. And I think we learned a great deal about ourselves from that experience.

Intergenerational power sharing is a complex endeavor, with many shades of grey that are open to on-going interpretation and negotiation. New issues emerge throughout the implementation process, as adults start to better understand both the capacity and the limitations of their youth partners. Therefore, staff in our study typically found it necessary to use "walk the talk" strategies at all stages of Y-AP. This long-term involvement enabled staff to facilitate the type of on-going collective learning that helps adult stakeholders to "own" the practice and sustain it over time.

Goal 3: Promoting Shared Ownership of Y-AP

Staff "plant seeds" and "walk the talk" of Y-AP with an eye towards making this innovation a common practice in organizations and communities. The third management goal discussed by all (except one) of the staff in the study is building a sense of shared ownership for the idea and practice of Y-AP. County staff used the phrase "making Y-AP how we do business" to describe strategies that facilitate the movement of Y-AP from being a new concept advocated for staff, to a standard practice automatically used by stakeholders. This transition is challenging. The most successful staff are those who are intentional in building shared ownership from the very beginning of an initiative, and who are vigilant in keeping focused on this goal throughout the implementation process. Study findings indicate that staff promote shared ownership of Y-AP through attention to the following leverage points: *infrastructure, role identification and collective story*.

Infrastructure development was a dominant theme during the interviews with county staff. Staff emphasized that infrastructure building is an on-going task. In one county, for example, a staff person began by providing the board of supervisors with research information and models. Subsequently, the board passed a resolution to create youth positions on the board. The staff then worked with the board to develop a recruitment and training process for youth. She secured funds to provide a per diem for the youth board members until the board could include it in the county budget the following year. Finally, she also assisted the board chair, a champion, to make the symbolic changes that reinforced the newly created infrastructure for Y-AP.

> The chair was able to arrange for additional big back board chairs to be purchased so that our young people are sitting among the adults in the same types of chairs rather than being relegated to a different part of the room. They [the board] actually reconfigured their seating so that the three youth were incorporated within them. The youth have the name plaques in front of them...And they are listed in our county board website under the list of county board supervisors.

As illustrated by this example, attention to infrastructure is necessary for creating organization policies and procedures that may promote Y-AP or minimize the barriers to the practice. However,

we found that it is not enough to just get policies on the books mandating youth participation. Shared ownership does not magically emerge among stakeholders once youth are granted an "official" seat at the governance table. In addition to policy, stakeholders need assistance in developing clear roles and responsibilities for youth stakeholders that have meaning for both the young people, and the organization.

During interviews and focus groups with youth and adult stakeholders, *role identification* emerged as a critical leverage point for building shared ownership of Y-AP. Not only does role identification foster a sense of shared ownership among stakeholders, it also helps distinguish the work of partnering from the work of mentoring. By clarifying the roles of both youth and adults, all stakeholders can begin to understand that one of the benefits of including youth as partners is that they will make unique contributions to the relationship.

Sorting out the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders may be the most challenging implementation task facing staff. In some counties, for example, the majority of adult stakeholders began the process assuming that youth should be involved in all aspects of decision making. In other counties, the weight of stakeholder judgment was that youth take on more limited roles. Additionally, the youth themselves were not always in agreement with their adult partners about the appropriate nature and scope of their roles. In our case studies, this situation was especially clear in counties that were in the start-up or growth stages of the partnership. In our focus groups and interviews at these sites, youth expressed general satisfaction in taking a fairly limited role in large-group environments, while adults expressed frustration that youth were not more actively participating in meetings. Now that youth were at the table, the groups were grappling with the best way to make use of their talent and resources. Staff, along with youth and adult partners, observed that the more defined the role and task is for the young person, the more productive their participation is to the group. One adult partner, who is actively struggling to identify an appropriate role for young people in her coalition, noticed that youth were especially engaged in a small-group activity to develop a new mission statement for the group:

> It really worked out wonderfully when we did that wordsmithing thing, maybe because it was so specifics-driven. We had a task we need to come up with, it was something they [youth members] could really zero in on. I think that they felt more a part of the action that was taking place, as opposed to the general meeting. It was more action-oriented.

In addition to creating roles for youth within the group that are focused on specific tasks or activities, several counties find that it is helpful to set aside time in the meeting where youth report to the larger group on activities that they are involved in outside of the meeting environment. In some cases, youth are involved in parallel youth groups such as the 4-H Ambassadors or on subcommittees. Youth also report out on activities that they are participating in outside the group or in school. While many adults have the implicit expectation that youth will incorporate these connections and experiences into their participation in the Y-AP, our study suggests that it is important that staff and adult partners make these expectations explicit by providing a formal venue and support for youth to do so. In one group where staff have invested a great deal of time into helping the group to identify clear roles and responsibilities for youth, young people described their roles in the following ways:

> We are given equal opportunity to speak and to vote on subject matter, we can present anything that we want to at the meetings as long as it pertains to the board. I mean we're free to add anything to the agenda we see fit to, we are allowed to speak at anytime. We are given the same responsibility as the adults are, and we are expected to carry it through and report back.

> That's like where our reports come in. We actually go out and experience the activities and stuff and we can come back to the board and because they're adults they don't see the same things we see going on and they don't talk to the same people that we do. So

> when we come back we are helping to give input to them…And a lot of times, like other youth members or younger, tell us stuff. You know, that they wouldn't necessarily feel comfortable talking to adults about. And we have a lot on our agenda that the youth are doing. So that's sorta nice to see that. That we are a big part of the board and that we, through what we do on the side and what we bring, that is helping to make a difference. Just so we can keep tabs.

Ultimately, it was up to the county staff to facilitate processes for teasing out these conflicting, and often controversial, expectations. The time spent was typically productive, however. Staff emphasized that shared ownership emerged from this process of gaining clarity in roles and responsibilities. With such clarity, youth and adult stakeholders know how they are expected to participate and what they are expected to achieve. Role identification promotes a sense of stability and collegiality among stakeholders.

The third leverage point that staff used to promote shared ownership of Y-AP is to make it part of the *collective story* of the organization or community. Often, at the early stages of a Y-AP initiative, county staff are the ones who publicly communicate the positive impact of youth participation. The best indication of success, however, is when stakeholders who are not 4-H staff begin to spread the word themselves. As one staff person observed:

> It spreads the efficacy when people at the library, the parks and rec board, even the gentleman from the airport board say "This is important for us to have young people here so that they become active when they are adults and know how to run city government." The advocacy is growing from people who have experienced the power of young people being a part of decision making.

This leverage point became most evident during the case studies. It was not unusual to hear diverse stakeholders, with varying levels of direct involvement with the Y-AP, relate the same stories to illustrate the ways in which the practice has become interwoven within the fabric of the organization. For example, in the county where youth are involved in city council committees, government officials, city staff and adult volunteers all consistently gave examples that emphasize the "citizenship" benefits of Y-AP. They described Y-AP as an opportunity to extend participation to a marginalized voice in the community while at the same time fostering the civic competence of "future leaders." Several individuals within this county told the same story about how issues raised by a young person on the library board swayed city council members to vote down a proposal to close the library on Sunday afternoons, which was a peak usage time for students. In other counties, where the group was focused on making decisions around youth-specific issues, stakeholders told stories about how Y-AP resulted in more effective and engaging youth programming.

Collective stories are not necessarily limited to praising youth contributions. For example, adult stakeholders in one county repeatedly reflected in interviews on a particular incident that served as an "a-ha" moment for their group. This incident prompted frank discussion among youth and adults about the degree of organizational commitment to authentic partnership, and resulted in action steps that significantly enhanced the quality of youth engagement. These narratives, it appears, serve as a point of reference, a rallying point, through which stakeholders can express their hopes and aspirations, articulate standards of quality, and share successes.

Over time, collective stories are seen as integral to sustainability of the effort, and serve to reinforce infrastructure building. For those staff who have reached this sustainability stage of innovation, the existence of collective stories indicates that Y-AP is being integrated into community structures and identity. Y-AP is no longer the "flavor of the month" or perceived as distinct from the overall mission of the decision making group. One staff person who has worked over time to integrate youth into a 4-HYD board, concludes:

> Initially, back when we started this process in 1991, there were board members who said "I don't think this is going to work. Why do we have young people here? We know what they need." I think it has been five to eight years since I heard a comment like that from a board

member. It has truly been a shift from "Could we have youth here?" to "We want to have youth here!" The adults value their opinion, they want to know what their needs are—they want youth input. My goal is to make sure that it [Y-AP] becomes so much a part of how the board operates, part of its foundation, that when I leave it will continue because youth and adults see it as their role.

Attention to both stories and structures were found to be essential to staff efforts to foster a sense of shared ownership of Y-AP. Stories help youth and adult stakeholders to integrate Y-AP into their understanding of what is means to be a "good" organizational staff, volunteer or participant. Structures, through the creation of clear roles and supportive policies, ensure that the Y-AP experience is meaningful for both youth and adult participants. Staff that acknowledge the importance of these stories and structures from the outset of a project are in a better position to ensure that the Y-AP will continue beyond the involvement of the current group of stakeholders.

Rules
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State Level Support for County Staff

The goals for county staff are straightforward. They must use a multitude of tools and resources—such as training abilities, teaching and consultation skills, and social networks—to maintain stakeholder attention on the purposes of Y-AP, to help stakeholders make the leap from vision to practice, and to create a sense of shared ownership and structure among all parties.

While the goals are straightforward, the challenges are equally clear. 4-HYD has a long history of promoting youth leadership, but integrating youth into community forums of decision making requires county staff to confront new issues of community culture and tradition, to take on new roles and responsibilities, and most importantly, to struggle anew with the scare commodity of time.

Given these goals and challenges, our research asks the questions: What can state staff do to best support county staff? What types of assistance are most useful? We have only analyzed data for the first year of this longitudinal study, so our findings are preliminary. But, so far, the analysis indicates that states can provide two types of support—local capacity building and institutional legitimization—that are most valued by county staff.

Local Capacity Building

The first type of support is capacity building, or the provision of building blocks, for the dissemination and implementation of Y-AP. In fulfilling this role, state staff are most likely to provide training on key concepts and practices, make curriculum available, and offer hands-on consultation. In essence, state staff provide to county staff the same types of supports that county staff offer to local stakeholders, and for similar reasons. For example, trainings can help to spread the idea of Y-AP, increase the number of different voices talking about Y-AP in decision making, and help stakeholders focus on the purpose and expected outcomes of the approach. Making curriculum available can help county staff and their stakeholders translate the ideas into practice by providing concrete information, resources, and guidelines. Providing on-site consultation—technical assistance and feedback—can help county staff build shared ownership by enhancing the confidence and motivation of local stakeholders.

When county staff were asked about the efficacy of these "building blocks," all agreed that this assistance was useful. At the same time, county staff emphasized that training, curriculum, and even financial resources could take them only so far. These supports are necessary, but not sufficient for quality implementation. Most importantly, county staff emphasized that capacity building may not be the most useful type of support for addressing the institutional and cultural barriers to change that exist in the day-to-day lives of county staff. Specifically, the provision of building blocks does not adequately address the fact that many county staff perceive that they do not have adequate time to promote and support the "high touch" strategy of Y-AP. Further, state delivered assistance may do relatively little in terms of bringing Y-AP to the top of county stakeholders' (including county staff) priority list.

Institutional Recognition and Legitimatization

It is understandable, therefore, why county staff requests for state assistance not only include training and curriculum, but more importantly, a plea for more substantial, ongoing, and visible institutional recognition in order to legitimize Y-AP at the local level. The rationale is straightforward. If local stakeholders—specifically county board members and adult volunteers—realize that Y-AP is a statewide priority, then county staff have greater leeway to make the time for Y-AP and to bring it to the top of their priority list.

Across the five states in the first wave of this study, we have observed a range of recognition and legitimatization strategies which serve to establish, elevate, and communicate Y-AP as a valued state priority: (1) disseminating research on Y-AP, (2) including Y-AP into job responsibilities, and (3) initiating and publicizing demonstration projects and networks.

A fundamental strategy of legitimatization is the dissemination of research. When the state office assembles and assertively distributes empirical information and field examples on the outcomes of Y-AP, county staff are able to show the credibility of the practice to their own stakeholders. Data from national scholars set the context, while research from state sources provides local legitimatization. For example, three of the states administered and analyzed state-wide surveys to identify the scope of Y-AP in their states. These data are now being used to identify strengths and weaknesses in the system, and equally important, their dissemination gives credence and visibility to Y-AP.

Legitimization is also promoted by including Y-AP as a primary criteria for job performance and evaluation of staff. In one state, county staff are encouraged to describe their work in promoting Y-AP. One agent explained the value of this approach:

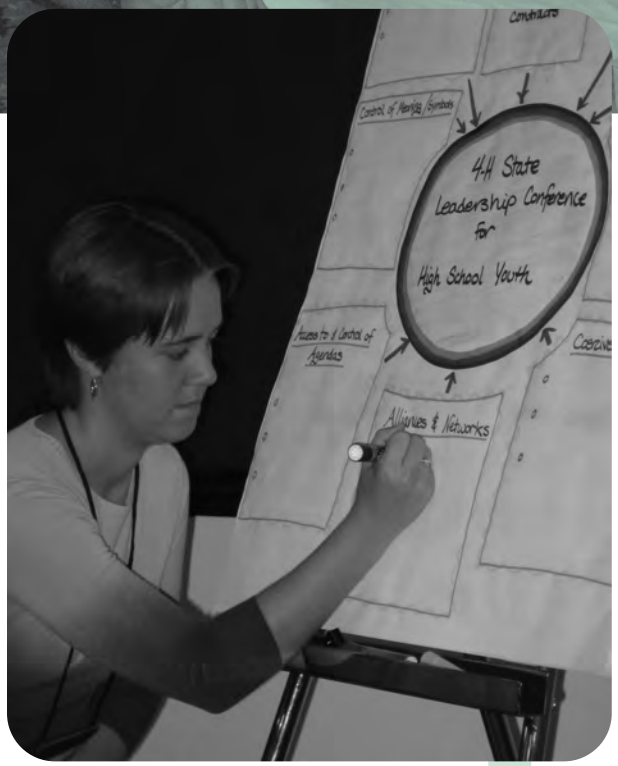
> When I write these things up in my [performance review document], I get recognized for them. I'm getting the ok from my administration that the route I'm going is ok, and good.

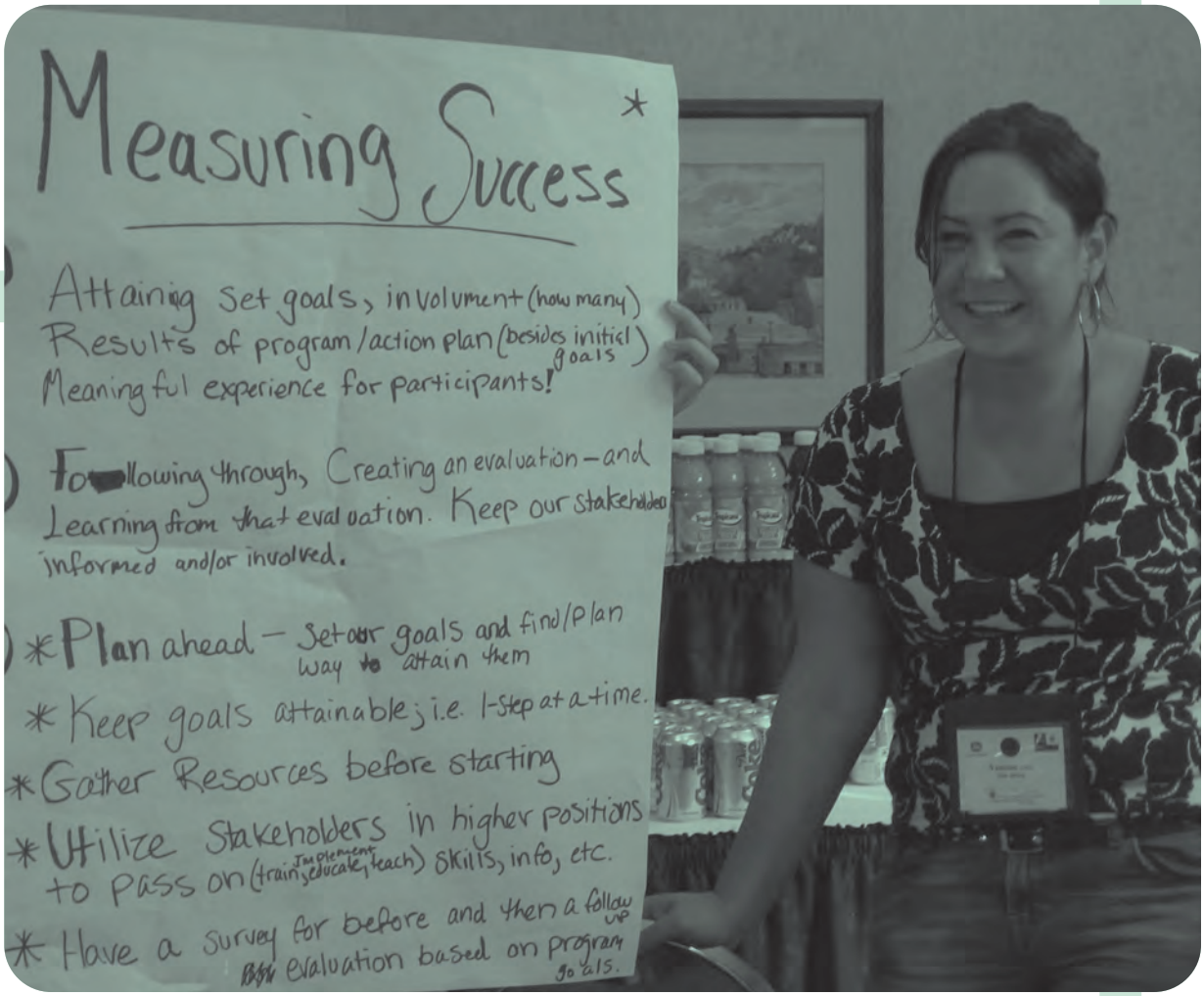
This is important for staff at the state level, also. In one state, a staff person discussed how he can devote ample time to supporting Y-AP within counties only because his supervisor provides explicit permission. Personal commitment is important, according to this staff person, but the bottom line is that he can put sustained attention to Y-AP because "my direct boss allows me the total latitude to work in these projects."

A third strategy used by state offices is to initiate demonstration projects and staff networks around issues of Y-AP. When the state lifts up Y-AP as an important endeavor in these ways, it helps staff justify spending time on the innovation. Moreover, when the state offers start-up resources and recognition of county staff, it further validates the challenging work that is being done. In one state, for example, teams from different demonstration sites are brought together, not simply for skill training or capacity building, but more importantly, to offer a forum for networking and collective celebration of their achievements. In another state, those county staff who are taking the lead in demonstrating Y-AP in decision making are given recognition for their network and given state support to provide regional and national workshops.

Future Research and Analysis

This research is continuing with three additional sites. As this research continues, we will continue to examine the role and impact of the building blocks for Y-AP as well as the impact of institutional recognition and legitimization. Our additional focus will be on identifying how these strategies can be used to bring the practice to scale. Given the time-intensive, interpersonal nature of Y-AP in decision making, and given that time is perceived as a scarce commodity, it is clear that significant organizational change cannot happen by simply adding on to existing programs and practices. Our aim, therefore, will be to explore how state offices establish Y-AP as a priority, and how they organize social and financial capital to support that priority. Findings from this second phase of the analysis will be reported in the fall of 2007.


4-H State
Leadership Conference
for
High School Youth
Alliances & Networks


Measuring Success *
Attaining set goals, involvment (how many)
Results of program/action plan (besides initial goals)
Meaningful experience for participants!
Following through, Creating an evaluation – and
Learning from that evaluation. Keep our stakeholders
informed and/or involved.
* Plan ahead – Set our goals and find/plan way to attain them
* Keep goals attainable; i.e. 1-step at a time.
* Gather Resources before starting
* Utilize Stakeholders in higher positions
to pass on (train, educate, teach) skills, info, etc.
* Have a survey for before and then a follow up
evaluation based on program goals.

Recommendations: Creating the Conditions for Youth-Adult Partnership

Because public systems tend to mirror the more traditional values of a given society, it is often said that innovative change in public systems is an oxymoron. From this perspective, the efforts of 4-HYD are inspiring: youth in the United States are isolated from forums of public deliberation, and 4-HYD is seeking to change the status quo. At the same time, 4-HYD is challenging the cultural and structural constraints inherent in its own traditions.

Despite the challenges, some county staff are able to disseminate Y-AP through the local 4-HYD system and into community forums of governance. These staff are not necessarily the most experienced or charismatic. Rather, they are the most strategic and intentional, with the personal commitment to Y-AP that is necessary to promote processes of change over the long term.

Recommendation 1: Staff need to have confidence. Y-AP challenges established systems and accepted ways of doing things. *The most successful staff have the confidence to act within this context of ambiguity and risk.* They take on the challenge of reconciling the diverse agendas and priorities of the stakeholders with whom they are working. They are personally committed to the practice and have the skill to push colleagues out of their comfort zones, when necessary.

Recommendation 2: Staff need to be strategic in their use of time. The most successful staff are strategic in how they go about disseminating Y-AP. Their efforts are centered around three management goals and associated strategies: maintaining attention on expected outcomes, translating ideas into practice, and building shared ownership and structure for Y-AP.

- Successful staff are highly focused in what they communicate to others. *At the core, staff seek to maintain stakeholder attention on the overall purpose and expected outcomes of Y-AP.* All other messages are secondary and possibly distracting. Successful staff are consistently "planting seeds," be it through formal presentations or informal conversations, to build awareness among stakeholders that Y-AP is an idea that works. They seek to communicate the promise of Y-AP in ways that link directly to the priorities of key community stakeholders.

- *Successful staff are consistently working to translate the vision of Y-AP into real-world practice.* Successful staff demonstrate, through word and deed, what it means to "walk the talk." They take the ambiguous and make it concrete. Descriptive information about program models and benefits is available in a variety of outreach materials. Adult and youth colleagues are brought in to reflect on their experiences. Be it through training, coaching or modeling, staff create opportunities for stakeholders to make meaning of Y-AP and to figure out how they themselves can contribute to the effort.

- Successful staff are explicit in their beliefs about Y-AP. At the same time, their aim is to *build shared ownership and structure for Y-AP*. They understand that stakeholders are most likely to endorse Y-AP after stakeholders have experienced it themselves. Therefore, staff facilitate experiences that encourage the idea that that "Y-AP is how we do business." They pay attention to the details, such as providing youth and adults time to get to know each other during meetings. They regularly communicate and celebrate stories of youth and adults working together as partners. They pay attention to the big picture by ensuring that policies, roles, and resources are aligned to best support Y-AP.

Recommendation 3: Staff need to balance structures and relationships. The foundation for good results in any realm of society is a structure that encourages and sustains those results. The most successful staff are strong infrastructure builders. They seek to create both institutional structures and interpersonal networks to support Y-AP in decision making.

- From a structural perspective, *staff focus on creating or adapting the policies of deliberative bodies to ensure that youth voice is seriously considered.* Successful staff seek to make the principles and practices of Y-AP ubiquitous throughout the organization, group, or community. Placing youth in one decision-making forum is ultimately not sustainable. It is important to create multiple opportunities for youth to participate in decision making. Options allow youth (and adults) to participate in ways that are most consistent with their own skills and interest. It also serves to reinforce the

organization's shift toward inclusion by creating multiple models and an increased number of participants. And, frankly, it makes it harder for those "resisters" to avoid making changes to their own practice.

- From an interpersonal perspective, the quickest way to flawed implementation is when county staff try to go it alone. *Successful staff actively search out "champions" and "allies" who are willing to share their expertise and connections for Y-AP. At the same time, they are keenly focused on building networks and infusing Y-AP into existing community coalitions.* It is the existence of networks that can sustain Y-AP. Networks can fill gaps in skills and resources, and equally important, keep energy and attention focused on the effort.

Recommendation 4: Staff need to plan for transitions. Similar to all community work, Y-AP is highly fluid. Youth "age out" and adult volunteers "rotate off" committees. Local politicians retire. New staff are hired to replace those who leave. The most successful staff plan for transition, viewing it as an opportunity to ensure the sustainability of Y-AP in decision making. Four strategies are critical:

- *Successful staff create ongoing recruitment and training mechanisms to ensure a diverse pool of youth who are prepared to participate.* They establish relationships with schools and other community organizations, and find ways to hook into established youth groups and networks. They empower current youth and adults to train the next generation of leaders.

- *Successful staff strive to ensure clarity in the roles and responsibilities of youth and adults, and to put this clarity into policy or procedure.* Youth often stress that they do not wish to be "set up" to fail. The same holds true with adults. Stakeholders can be productive and collaborative only when they know what is expected of them, when they know the rules.
- That being said, staff recognize that groups must be afforded the time to change the rules when necessary. *Indeed, this research finds that creating opportunities for collective reflection is likely the most effective strategy for sustaining Y-AP in decision making.* Reflection allows the group to make course corrections and to celebrate their successes, and it allows individuals to start to "own" the idea of Y-AP. Reflection contributes to effectiveness, morale, and visibility for the effort, which in turn can attract new allies and opportunities for additional resources.

- The devil is in the details. With Y-AP, this means that effective implementation requires attention to logistics. *The most successful staff strive to remove barriers to participation (e.g., transportation costs, inconvenient meeting times) while securing resources (e.g., availability of staff support) to maximize participation.* In spite of the fact that it is obvious, Y-AP cannot be sustained unless the partnerships are affirmatively supported.

Recommendation 5: County staff need leadership from the state. Our research is continuing, but at this point, we can emphasize that county staff need state support. We will be further exploring the role of the state—and the specific leverage points at the state level—that make the greatest contribution to Y-AP. At present, we can conclude that county staff can profit from two types of assistance.

- County staff require assistance in capacity building at the local level. At a minimum, this means that states should make available, and help deliver, quality training and consultation to county staff and their constituencies on the dissemination and implementation of Y-AP. Y-AP could be a required part of the ongoing professional development of county staff.

- *Most importantly, it will be necessary for states to explicitly legitimize Y-AP as a priority for county agents.* At a minimum, this will require state extension directors and 4-H program leaders to use their bully pulpits to continually communicate the importance of Y-AP. Incentives are necessary to recognize and celebrate county agents that are doing the work. Resources—support for programming and network building—should be provided to such staff to sustain the work they have initiated.

Future Directions

This study is the first, to our knowledge, on the integration of Y-AP into organizations and communities. In this study, we explored Y-AP in collective decision making in forums of organizational, community, and coalition governance. We believe, however, that the findings are largely transferable to other types of partnerships, be it in the activities of activism, philanthropy, research, or training (see Figure 1).

Y-AP in decision making is an innovative practice in the United States, and may perhaps be one of the most challenging practices emanating from the field of youth development to implement. This suggests that the present findings have applicability to the adoption of "less complex" or curriculum-based program strategies. Many youth development practices—mentoring, leadership training, coaching—are grounded in principles and processes that are open to multiple interpretation and implementation choices. The present findings, therefore, could be used to inform the integration of these practices into organizations and communities.

These assertions must be empirically tested by scholars and field tested by practitioners, of course. It will also be important to explore the extent to which the management strategies identified in this study are successfully utilized by other public systems and intermediaries, as well as in independent agencies and grassroots youth organizations. With the accumulation of such data, the field will be in a far stronger position to disseminate and promote the adoption of Y-AP, as well as other "best practices" in the field of youth development.

more teen
Recreation center
off the streets to keep
from negative influences
safe place to go, help them to
and self motivated, and to help
school
more positive activities
to lower the dropout rate
activities involving young
involvement, discussions
leaders, raise money
partnerships donations

4-H Youth in Governance Initiative

For decades, 4-H Youth Development has focused attention and effort on developing the leadership and citizenship skills of young people throughout the United States. As the field of youth development has evolved, so has 4-H's approach to preparing young people for leadership and citizenship roles. Beginning in the early nineties, 4-H began to look seriously at the issue of youth voice and decision-making, and began making organizational and program changes to support these efforts. At the National Conversation on Youth Development in the 21st Century in 2002, an overwhelming theme arose: youth wanted their voices to be heard and seriously considered, and were determined to play a larger role in local organizational and community decision-making. In spring 2004, at the 74th Annual National 4-H Conference, youth leaders officially supported expanding 4-H's efforts in youth in governance. In July of 2004, a task force of 4-H youth and adults came together to develop a strategic plan for the initiative, including the identification of the five "Pathways" described below.

4-H defines "Youth in Governance" as:

> *the authentic and meaningful engagement of young people in programs, organizations, and communities, where they have or share voice, influence, and decision-making authority.*

Many programmatic efforts—such as youth in government, youth on boards of directors, youth leadership training, or youth service-learning activities—can support progress toward the broader youth in governance vision.[2] Rather than perceiving youth as using resources or needing services, youth in governance acknowledges and embraces the unique and powerful contributions that young people can make to their communities—right now—not only at some point in the future when they have reached a certain age.

The 4-H Youth in Governance Initiative supports the preparation for—***and practice of***—youth participation in governance roles (in programs, organizations, and communities). The initiative targets both youth and adults, supporting each in developing the skills and knowledge needed to be effective in youth in governance. The initiative is focused on a multi-strategy (multiple "pathway") approach that builds toward both program and system change. An underlying assumption is that youth in governance is not a new program, it's a new way of doing programs. It's a youth development approach that can be integrated into any other program or activity, not only those focused on citizenship and leadership.

The Pathways

The work of the initiative is divided into five intersecting "pathways" or areas of focus. Implementation teams of youth and adults have been formed for each pathway. The work of each team is described below.

Pathway 1: Research and Evaluation
The Research and Evaluation implementation team has been focused on two principle questions: First, what does the research tell us about best practices of youth in governance, and how do we apply that to the work we do within 4-H youth development? Second, where are the leverage points for organizational change; how and where can 4-H and other organizations make changes that will enable them to operate within a YIG approach? The first question involves synthesis and adaptation of existing research; the second question involves original research, conducted in collaboration with pilot states awarded grants from the Surdna Foundation and with research workgroups from California and Wisconsin.

Pathway 2: Skills and Competencies
The Skills and Competencies implementation team has drawn from several bodies of literature, as well as practitioners' experience, to identify the core knowledge and skills of youth in governance for both youth and adults. Their work has been informed by the literature from leadership development, positive youth development, civic engagement, youth-adult partnerships,

[2] As the research effort within the initiative has developed, we have adopted the language of "youth-adult partnerships in decision making" to more fully convey the broad application of the youth in governance philosophy.

service-learning, and other related fields. The work is also linked to recent national efforts to identify professional competencies for youth development staff (PRKC).

Pathway 3: Curriculum and Tools
The Curriculum and Tools implementation team has focused on identifying and assessing existing high quality, effective resource materials that could be useful for staff, volunteers, and youth in implementing youth in governance. They have created a web-based matrix of how and where those tools might be used in different contexts (including 4-H and other community contexts).

Pathway 4: Programs and Activities
The Programs and Activities implementation team has identified examples of where youth in governance is already happening within current 4-H programs and activities, and where it needs to be strengthened. The team has also identified opportunities to make strategic shifts so that YIG philosophies can be more effectively incorporated into existing programs.

Pathway 5: Organizational Operations and Communication
In the initial phases of the initiative, this team focused on creating structures and opportunities to support the initiative at a systems level (i.e., staffing, funding, communication pieces). As the initiative progresses, the focus has been on large-scale organizational structures, policies, and practices and the system adjustments that can be made to better support youth in governance throughout the organization nationally.

The work of the initiative continues, through financial support from National 4-H Council and staff support from the USDA. As part of the initiative, this research effort will continue through Spring 2008.

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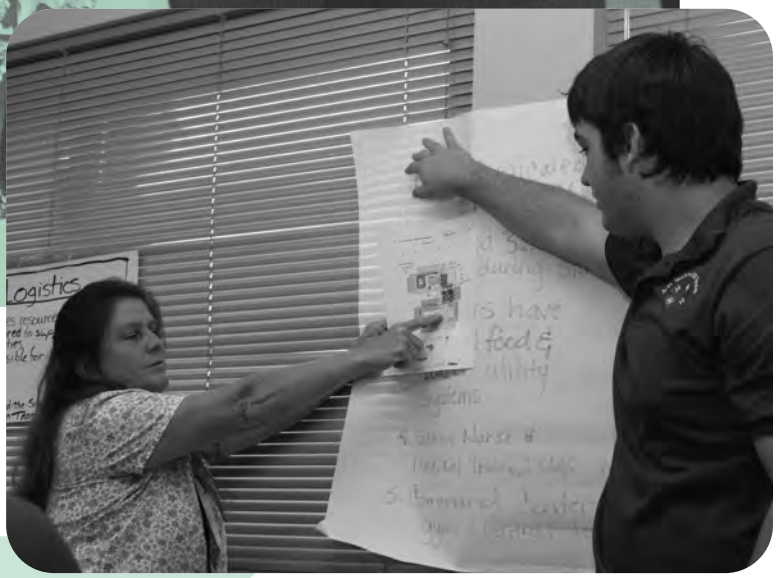

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