

# MAKING THE PITCH FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

## Understanding why

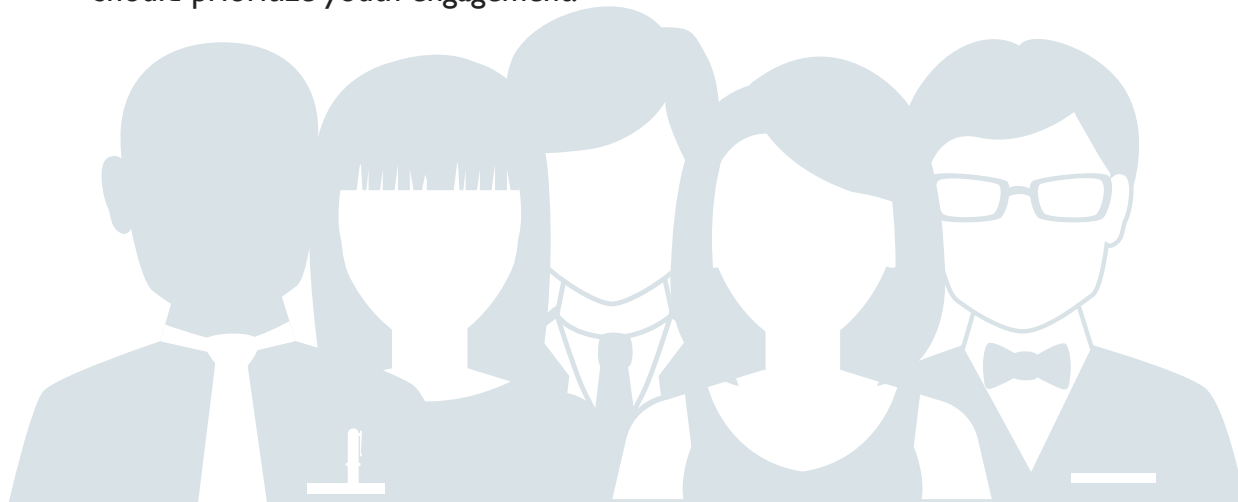
In order for positive youth development to take hold, practitioners must understand why meaningful youth engagement is important. Making this case can be a difficult task, particularly in environments where young people may be seen purely as recipients of services having no valuable contributions to make—or even worse, where youth simply are not a priority.

As the largest-ever youth generation continues to grow, it is important that we know how to pitch youth engagement to a variety of audiences, from local public officials to senior staff persons. This technical brief provides tips gathered from members of the YouthPower Youth Engagement Community of Practice for pitching meaningful and ongoing youth engagement to different actors. Suggested messages are presented based on scenarios that practitioners often encounter.

## Preparing your pitch

Before approaching your audience, **ask yourself, "so what?"**

What challenge is **your audience** trying to overcome? How can youth engagement help accomplish **their** goals? If you can answer that, you've answered their "so what?" and will be able to clearly explain why they should prioritize youth engagement.



**Meaningful youth engagement is an inclusive, intentional, mutually respectful partnership between youth and adults whereby power is shared, respective contributions are valued, and young people's ideas, perspectives, skills, and strengths are integrated into the design and delivery of programs, strategies, policies, funding mechanisms and organizations that affect their lives and their communities, countries and globally. To learn more about youth engagement, visit <http://www.youthpower.org/youth-engagement-cop>.**



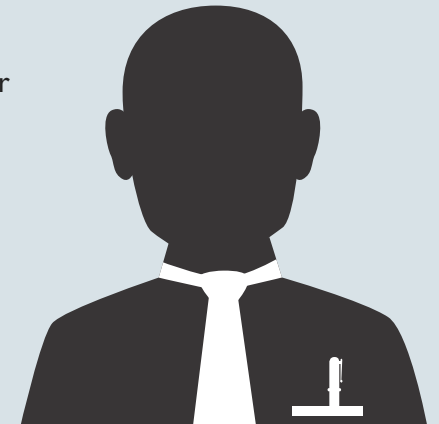
## Scenario 1: You are working on a development project with a new Chief of Party/Team Leader who does not have a background in youth development. What do you say to convince him or her to prioritize youth engagement?



- Young people make up more than half of the population in developing countries; for your projects to be successful, young men and women must be engaged as stakeholders in the development of their communities and nations.
- Youth are innovators and can propose new, creative ways to more effectively reach program goals or to solve project challenges.
- Engaging youth in development alongside adults can help foster positive inter-generational relationships, which can lead to greater community cohesion and stability.
- Youth can bring positive energy and enthusiasm that motivates others to take action.
- As 'digital natives,' many young people are more effective in using new technology tools to engage their peers and the wider community to support project objectives.

## Scenario 2: You are working on a youth development project. What do you say to convince your project officer that more youth should be on the project team, or consulted throughout?

- Young men and women have deep knowledge of their own experiences, communities, opportunities and challenges. Injecting youth voices into project design and implementation therefore supports the delivery of interventions that respond to the needs and interests of the people involved.
- Engaging youth in all stages of the project allows them to have more ownership in the activities, which can result in more beneficial and sustained youth involvement and a more robust, successful project overall.
- Research on effective youth projects has found that engaging youth in decision making is an effective means for securing their commitment, while also positively contributing to their development.\*
- Engaging youth in project implementation helps create a safe, inviting space that will attract more young people to participate.
- If you want more participation in your program, youth engagement is great for recruitment, retention, and sustainability.



## Scenario 3: A new local councilor or mayor has been elected in your community. What do you say to convince him or her that youth need to be meaningfully involved in local decision making?



- Young people are the future leaders of the community, so we need to build their leadership skills now.
- Young people make up a significant proportion, if not the majority, of the voting population; addressing their concerns is important for maintaining electoral support.
- Issues important to youth are the concerns of our community right now. Young people are great problem-solvers, when given the opportunity to participate and play a meaningful role in decision making.
- Youth participation is a right enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. \*\*

\*Zeldin, S. (2004). Youth as agents of adult and community development: Mapping the processes and outcomes of youth engaged in organizational governance. *Applied Developmental Science*, 8(2), 75–90.

\*\*Convention on the Rights of the Child, United Nations Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CRC.aspx>.

# MAKING THE PITCH FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

## *Pitching diversity in youth engagement*

Youth diversity is an important factor that must be considered in all of these scenarios. Young people are not a homogeneous group, so effective youth engagement by development practitioners, project heads, and community leaders requires inclusion of a diverse selection of young people.

What can you say to convince them to look beyond the most obvious, active young leaders and engage a representative, inclusive group?

### *Diversity pitch themes:*

- Diversity in youth reflects the diversity of the broader population. Young women and men have varying interests, needs, challenges, and opportunities based on gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, socio-economic background, geographic location, and other factors.
- Single-lens solutions to community challenges may fail to address a critical gap; a diversity of voices in programming, design, and implementation of strategies will help to identify a broader range of needs.
- Differences—of perspective, experience, and situation—can become a powerful resource to help young people build compassion and empathy for others, which in turn strengthens the communities where they live.

**Youth engagement should be valued in a range of contexts. Many young people are eager to channel their ideas, aspirations, and talents to improve their societies and nations. Meaningful engagement of diverse young people can help them contribute their assets as leaders of today and tomorrow.**



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 YouthPower Learning

This YouthPower Learning publication is based on contributions and input from the Youth Engagement Community of Practice and other members of the YouthPower Learning Network.

USAID YouthPower Learning generates and disseminates knowledge about the implementation and impact of positive youth development (PYD) and cross-sectoral approaches in international development. The project leads research, evaluations, and events designed to build the evidence base. Concurrently, YouthPower Learning employs expertise in learning and knowledge sharing to promote engagement and inform the global community about how to successfully help transition young people into productive, healthy adults. YouthPower Learning supports the implementation of the 2012 USAID Youth in Development Policy to improve capacity and enable the aspirations of youth so that they can contribute to, and benefit from, more stable, democratic, and prosperous communities.

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