



YOUTH ENGAGEMENT BLUEPRINT: **A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE FOR** **NON-PROFIT PROFESSIONALS**

**This step-by-step
guide will help non-
profits develop
impactful youth
engagement
strategies!**



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Executive Summary

You're ready to engage youth—fantastic! But where do you begin? Welcome to the **Youth Engagement Blueprint: A step-by-step guide for non-profit professionals**. A comprehensive resource designed to help working professionals and their organizations kick-start their youth (aged 18-30) engagement strategies.

In this guide, you'll find a detailed plan walking you through the entire process of developing a youth engagement strategy. We will begin by assessing your organization's current approach to youth engagement, identifying key challenges, and then creating actionable youth engagement strategies that will serve as solutions to those challenges. Additionally, you'll learn how to select the right leader for these initiatives and craft a plan of action to bring your vision to life.

By the end, you'll have a clear understanding of your next steps—and I'll be here to guide you through the process. Curious to see how I can support you? Click here to find out [more](#).



Photo by RF_._studio: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/women-at-the-meeting-3810753/>

Step 1: Assess the Current Approach

Before you start planning how to involve youth in your organization, you need to evaluate your organization's current approach to engaging and interacting with youth. Take this assessment as an opportunity to highlight any work your organization has to engage youth and how it can be further amplified. Additionally, it is an excellent way to identify any challenges or problem areas within your organization that youth engagement can help with.

This section will cover the basics of how you can approach this assessment, focusing on evaluating your engagement with youth internally and externally.

HOW TO ASSESS YOUTH ENGAGEMENT APPROACH

1) ASSESS INTERNAL PRACTICES

First, take a look at how your organization internally operates or interacts with youth. The objective of this portion of the evaluation is to understand how your organization engages youth and what that looks like.

Consider the following:

- Does your organization have any youth (aged 18-30) employees?
- Are these individuals regularly consulted on decisions that impact your community and organization?
- Are there any programs, projects, initiatives or teams that you believe could use or benefit from youth engagement? If so, why?
- Are the opinions of youth valued, listened to and respected?
- Has your organization ever created a youth space dedicated to hearing youth feedback, having youth assist with projects or being an advisory body?

The answers to these questions are subjective, so it's important for you and your team to carefully evaluate them. ***Focus on whether your organization engages youth and, if so, assess how effective those initiatives are.***

2) ASSESS EXTERNAL PRACTICES

Second, it's equally important to evaluate how your organization engages with youth externally. At your discretion, you can include youth volunteers in this portion of your assessment or in the internal practices section.

In this portion of the assessment, consider the following:

- Has your organization created external opportunities to reach youth?
- Has your organization previously recruited or currently recruits youth volunteers? Has your organization developed targeted recruitment efforts to get young people engaged?
- Does your organization have standing relationships with youth-serving organizations in the broader community?
- Does your organization serve youth?

What you are looking to understand in this section is your external surroundings and how your organization navigates youth engagement in that context.

Are there any potential options of organizations you can partner with?

How can you boost or continue to grow your youth volunteer efforts?

The **key idea** is to identify how your organization is currently reaching young people, where to invest more for a greater return, and how the broader context supports youth engagement.



Photo by Buro Millennial: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/three-persons-sitting-on-the-stairs-talking-with-each-other-1438072/>

To complete your evaluation, take some time to delve deeper into these final questions with the knowledge you've gained from reflecting on your external and internal practices regarding youth engagement.

- Is your organization able and willing to increase or begin its efforts in engaging youth?
- Have you been able to identify opportunities both internally and externally where the youth voice or perspective would be beneficial?
- What gaps or challenges does your organization have when it comes to youth engagement?
- Are there any barriers you foresee coming up that may hinder your ability to engage youth?



Photo by Brooke Cagle on Unsplash

After completing this exercise, a few things should become clear to you:

1. What ***opportunities already exist within your organization and community*** for youth engagement that you can build upon?
2. What ***gaps exist both internally and externally in your organization*** when it comes to youth engagement?

The next section will address how youth engagement strategies could be used to fill these gaps or support your organization's existing work.

Step 2: Problem Identification & Solutions

The second step in the process is to narrow down what aspects of your organization need youth engagement and reflect on what potential solutions can address those problems i.e. youth engagement strategies.

We'll first identify the problems from your assessment and research in step one. Then, we will work on developing youth engagement strategies to tackle those issues.

a. Identify problems, gaps and areas for improvement

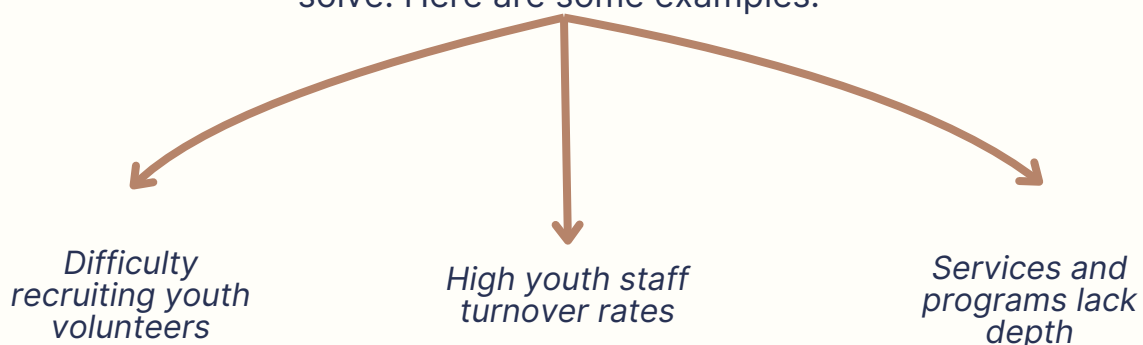
Review the information gathered in step one and identify problems that your organization wishes to address.

Is your organization experiencing a high turnover among younger staff? Are you having difficulty finding youth to volunteer with your organization? Are there programs or initiatives that are lacking depth and perspective?

Here are a few questions to help with that reflection:

- What is the undercurrent or recurring issue your organization is facing?
- Are there particular aspects of your organization or the work they do that have similar issues?
- Is the youth perspective something that has been already implemented or considered in problem areas or challenging situations?
- What resources does your organization have to engage youth?
- What do you envision youth engagement looking like?

What you will end up with after this reflection is a clear idea of the problem you're trying to solve. Here are some examples:



Solution-building encompasses two parts. Firstly, you need to have a clear understanding of the type of young people you are trying to bring into your organization. Or what I like to refer to as developing your ideal youth personae. The second part involves devising a strategy to engage with the youth you are trying to reach.

b. Solution building



Building your ideal youth persona

Start researching and thinking about who you want to bring into your organization.

What skills did they bring to the table? What attitude did they have? What were they interested or passionate about? How did they find your organization? Considering these attributes allows you to *narrow down who you are going to look for* to bring into your organization, and what they can do to help solve youth problems.

Building your youth engagement strategy idea

Now comes the fun part – You've identified your problem and who can help solve it (ideal youth), but how will you do it? The beauty of youth engagement strategies is their adaptability and flexibility.

It's really up to you how you engage youth, but the one common thread through all strategies is that ***youth are being consulted, listened to and having their perspective implemented as solutions***. That is what sets a successful youth engagement strategy apart from ones that don't succeed - implementing the perspective and ideas that are being collaboratively given to you with youth.



A sprinkle of inspiration...

I've seen countless strategies employed, but here are a few of my favourites that could help tackle the examples of problems I listed above.

Difficulty recruiting youth volunteers

Solution: **Organize an open house** that is geared towards young people from the base of the event to the content of the event and marketing of the event.

High youth staff turnover rates

Solution: Re-evaluating hiring, work and exit processes by consulting young people who have either worked for your organization or have engaged with them. Consider **focus groups or discussions** with various youth to uncover the reasons why there is a high turnover rate among youth.



Photo by Matheus Bertelli:
<https://www.pexels.com/photo/diverse-people-attending-master-class-in-studio-3856035/>



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<https://www.pexels.com/photo/diverse-people-attending-master-class-in-studio-3856035/>

Depths and programs lacking depth and perspective

Solution: Setting up a **youth advisory board** that provides their opinion, expertise and ideas.

Difficulty connecting with broader community

Solution: Develop a **youth council** that acts as a liaison between your organization and your community to identify needs within the community and work alongside your organization in developing potential solutions.

Step 3: Selecting a Youth Engagement Leader

Selecting the right person to act as a youth engagement leader is a critical component to ensuring that your youth engagement strategy is a success. This person will oversee the project from beginning to end and ensure that it is carried on sustainably for the long term.

Youth engagement is a continuous commitment, and it is strongly recommended that there be one person who becomes the resource or go-to person for all things related to youth engagement. Not only will it help streamline efforts for your team, but it will act as a resource person for the youth you are engaging.

Who To Appoint

Choosing who to appoint is entirely up to you and your organization, and the experience required or desired is at your discretion. However, I find it helpful to outline a few qualities or experiences that someone should have to assist them in getting started.

Note:

Youth engagement and the practices associated with it are easy to learn and not having the experience outlined should not be a deterrence to someone taking on this initiative.

Experiences to look for in your youth engagement leader:

- Experience in **community relations, stakeholder relations** or **member management**.
- Experience in **managing volunteers** or staff.
- Strong interest in **engaging with youth** (or previous experience).
- Experience in **strategic planning**.
- **Capacity to add work** to their current workload.



Tip: When appointing a leader, ensure they have the resources, capacity, and availability for long-term commitment to youth engagement, which demands ongoing attention from the right person.

Step 4: Determine Objectives & Goals

With your problem identified, and your youth engagement strategy solution idea percolating, it's now time to set concrete objectives and goals that will help you fulfill your youth engagement strategy (aka solution).

When brainstorming your objectives and goals the question you should always be coming back to is **“What do you want the outcome to be? What is the end goal of engaging with youth?”**.

Your goals and objectives are laying out the work you need to do to successfully implement and carry out your youth engagement strategy.

Setting goals and objectives will:

- Encourage you to reflect and identify your baseline of youth engagement and set up metrics to measure your success.
- Help you define what success in the context of youth engagement looks like for your organization.
- Outline what it is exactly you are working towards.
- Clarify how your organization can sustain youth engagement practices for the long term.

How do you do that?

1) Write down your goal(s)

Start by writing out one big dream goal. **What does it look like? What results come from it? What has internally or externally changed in how your organization operates? What gets created or started?** Coupled with the actual youth engagement strategy, write out a SMART goal that aligns with your organization's mission, your youth engagement strategy and your end goal.

2) Write out your objectives

Objectives are your goals broken down into bite-sized steps, actions and milestones you would need to hit to achieve your goals. **Think of your objectives as a detailed road map to your goal.** Your objectives do not need to hold the minute-by-minute breakdown of all your tasks, but it will set the course for how you prioritize and accomplish your tasks.

Step 5: Strategy & Task Building

It's now time to dive into the details of your youth engagement strategy!

You know what you want to do, and you likely have already decided on the tasks you're going to accomplish to get there, but let's use this as an opportunity to get everything down on paper. In short, it's time to build a game plan.

Action 1:

Find out how to reach youth in your community

Earlier you reflected and created your ideal youth. In that research journey you probably already came across relevant information that will help you here. Where are the young people you are trying to reach? Do they engage with your organization in real life or online more? Do they find your organization through other community organizations? Where are the young people? **Knowing where they are will help you immensely in crafting your messages and the channels you will use to reach out to them.**

Action 2:

Build out a communications plan to reach them

Following action one, it's time to build out a communications plan. After defining your strategy and identifying the youth you need to engage, the only next step is to go out and reach them. Use the content and research you've gathered to create a communications plan and **develop content that reaches the youth you are looking to bring into your organization.**

Action 3:

Task building

After you've put your communication plan into motion, it's time to develop your tasks in more detail. Reflect on your chosen youth engagement strategy and **begin outlining the concrete steps needed to achieve your goals.**

With all those steps in place, it's time for you to get to work. Youth engagement strategies are simple, they are at the end of the day, strategies. Used every day, strategies become easier to repeat, modify or adapt to changing environments.



Photo by Gary Barnes:
<https://www.pexels.com/photo/cheerful-diverse-girlfriends-reading-document-at-table-6231630/>

Final Recommendation

This is the last piece of advice I'd strongly recommend – you can modify and change your youth engagement strategy as much as you need to. If one thing doesn't work out as you had hoped, try something new. I know the immediate reaction is what if this all fails? ***The way I see it, if you're trying then you can't possibly fail. The very willingness and act of trying to engage youth means more than most people recognize.***

Engaging youth starts small and then eventually with time, commitment and practice, you'll see how it has intrinsically become a part of your organization and the positive impact it has made on your community.



Photo by Matheus Bertelli: <https://www.pexels.com/photo/group-of-multiethnic-people-gathering-around-female-speaker-in-studio-3856027/>

Step 6: Additional Support From SBC

The step-by-step guide was designed with you in mind. It was made so that anyone working at any organization can take its skeleton and apply it to their work. But I feel you, it's a lot to take in. Youth engagement at first can seem overwhelming, but I can assure you it's a lot simpler than you think. With the proper guidance, tools and resources at your disposal, you'll be engaging with youth in no time.

Hi, my name is Sarah!

I work with non-profit organizations to help them build their youth engagement strategies and walk them through every step of the process.

I fundamentally care about youth. I care about young people; and their futures and I care about your organization. Without young people, the consequences you'll face will be detrimental. You need youth to support your organization today and tomorrow.

That's where I come in!

I work to bridge the gap between youth and community organizations just like yours to help you solve your most pressing problems and overcome issues so that you can work on building a resilient, strong and hopeful community.

If you're interested in learning more about how we can work together, I'd love to learn more about your ideas on youth engagement and how I can support them. [Reach out here](#) or learn more by taking a look at the [services I offer](#).

Thanks for reading! As always, share your thoughts, comments and youth engagement experiences with me, I'd love to hear them!



**THE KEY TO YOUR
ORGANIZATION'S
SUCCESS ISN'T
COMPLICATED – ALL
YOU NEED IS THE
YOUTH.**

Resources

Recommended blog posts:

[The Non-Profit's Guide to Understanding Youth Engagement and Outreach \(blogpost\)](#)

[Unpacking the Why: What Motivates Youth Volunteers?](#)

[Empowering the Future: How Youth Engagement Builds Community Resilience](#)

[How to Effectively Engage Youth in Your Community: Tips for Organizations](#)

[How to Advocate for Youth Engagement in the Workplace: Convincing Your Boss to Embrace the Youth Perspective](#)

[Youth Engagement on Social Media: Key Factors to Consider Before Starting](#)

[Are You Prioritizing the Youth Perspective? Assessing Your Organization's Level of Youth Engagement](#)

[The Power of Youth Engagement: Benefits for Youth](#)

[How to Effectively Combine Communications and Youth Engagement for Your Organization](#)

Youth Engagement resources:

[The Non-Profit's Guide to Understanding Youth Engagement and Outreach \(guide\)](#)

[What is Youth Engagement, Really?](#)

[Youth Engagement and Empowerment - IWRMACTION HUB](#)

[Youth Engagement in Collective Impact Initiatives](#)

Additional Notes

Please note that AI Editor (Grammarly) was used in the assistance of drafting this guide.



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