# Make a Case
# for the Significance
# of Y-AP/E

remember! Y-AP/E is something new and unfamiliar to many organizations. Consequently, adults and youth will need time to become comfortable with Y-AP/E before committing to the initiative. There will be many who will wish to participate, but they will require some support to get there.

A fundamental finding of success emerged from the research literature: Effective project managers are able to "make the case" for Y-AP/E, and in so doing, are able to make stakeholders comfortable with Y-AP/E and secure their active involvement. Two strategies are used. Project managers help stakeholders reach a common understanding of the core components and principles of Y-AP/E (Leverage Point #1). Additionally, project managers are able to clearly articulate the potential benefits of Y-AP/E to colleagues and other stakeholders (Leverage Point #2).

## Reach Consensus on the Core Components and Principles of Y-AP/E

Phrases such as "youth-adult partnership" and "evaluation" can be confusing or intimidating to many stakeholders. Effective project managers take the time to clearly define these terms to make them real, concrete, and practical. They work with stakeholders to reach consensus as to what are the most critical core components of Y-AP/E.

### What are Youth-Adult Partnerships?

The lesson from practice is that the meaning of Youth-Adult Partnership (Y-AP) should be determined at the onset, during the initial phase of the Y-AP/E project. Defining Y-AP, early on, sets a standard, an expectation for the design and implementation of the project. It sets the parameter of how people will work together as a team.

We define "Y-AP/E" as the practice of youth and adults jointly working together to identify, research, make recommendations, and take collective action to address problems of mutual concern. Y-AP/E has certain core assumptions that define the practice and set standards for quality:

Y-AP/E is about multiple youth working with multiple adults over time. There is an expectation that youth and adults will get to know each other as colleagues. Y-AP is not about one adult supervising a group of youth.

Y-AP/E values inclusivity. The assignment of roles and division of labor within Y-AP/E is not determined by age. Rather, it is based on the specific interests, time availability, skills, and networks that each individual brings to the endeavor.

Y-AP/E does not assume that adults have the requisite life experience or wisdom, or that only youth are prepared to bring fresh energy or the most legitimate view to a particular issue.

It is important to stress that every Y-AP/E project ultimately arrives at its own definition. This is how ownership is promoted. We have found that beginning the process with the above definition and parameters greatly enhances the consensus building process.

**THE BOTTOM LINE:** All individuals are needed, and deserve to participate in defining Y-AP/E, and equally important, in finding their proper role within a Y-AP/E project. This process of exploration is critical. As youth and adults engage in such discussions, they move beyond an "us versus them" perspective to one of greater collegiality, cohesiveness and collective purpose.

## What is "evaluation?"

In "pitching" and "explaining" Y-AP/E to potential collaborators and funders, it is also important to take the time to discuss the concept of evaluation.

People need to hear that evaluation is a process of collaboration, inquiry, and creative problem solving. According to Michael Quinn Patton (1997): "Program evaluation is the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about future programming."

It is useful to speak of evaluation as a three pronged activity involving investigation, education, and action. Evaluation is a structured process that brings people together to learn about, discuss, and try to solve pressing problems. The interpersonal processes of youth and adults working together, of finding common ground, is as important as the more technical processes of data collection, analysis, and dissemination.

There are many reasons to evaluate:

1. Accountability: to one's funder, to the staff, to the clients, and to the community;
2. Improvement: to enhance the quality of existing programs, projects and policies;
3. Knowledge Development: to plan future programs and projects;
4. Social Justice: to demonstrate whether the most vulnerable populations are receiving appropriate and effective services.

In many Y-AP/E efforts, the aim of evaluation is to create conditions which empower participants to create more effective organizations. Participatory evaluation is a developmental process where, through the involvement of youth (and staff) in reflection, decision making, knowledge creation and collective action, individuals and organizations can be changed for the better.

**THE BOTTOM LINE:** It is necessary to help stakeholders take a broad view: Y-AP/E is about multiple youth working with multiple adults to identify and solve common problems. Y-AP/E is multi-faceted. It includes elements of shared discovery, deliberation and decision making, and collective action. That said, it is most crucial that participants ultimately define Y-AP/E in ways that make sense for the project being designed and implemented. This process of definition will ground the group and set standards for quality.

## LEVERAGE POINT #2:
## Articulate the Benefits of Y-AP/E

Everybody is busy. In order to convince stakeholders to fully invest their time and expertise in Y-AP/E, there ought to be a big payoff. If we are to expect practitioners, residents, and youth to engage in collaborative evaluation, they must see the potential value of their work.

It is for this reason that effective managers need to fully and consistently put forth the rationale for Y-AP/E. They need to create their own "pitch" and speak cogently about its benefits. Fortunately, there is a strong and growing body of research that supports these efforts, some of which is summarized below.

### Enhanced Confidence, Competence and Social Networks among Youth and Staff

The research is clear that strong youth-adult partnerships promote positive youth development. The benefits are broad and deep. For example, when youth are involved in assessing and designing projects, their sense of empowerment is strengthened. Youth gain a greater sense of responsibility for themselves, their organizations, and their communities. As youth feel valued by adults, their self-confidence is strengthened.

Y-AP/E also promotes skill development and social competence. Youth learn the fundamentals of conducting research, such as issue identification, methods of data collection, and data analysis. At the same time, they develop skills such as public speaking, critical thinking, team work, and professional conduct.

Finally, youth build their social capital. They gain access to adult networks, advisors, and mentors. These new relationships, as well as those formed with peers, provide young people with greater awareness and access to educational and employment opportunities.

Adult staff benefit in many of the same ways. When staff partner with youth on things that matter, they also feel more empowered, and develop a deeper sense of mastery. The staff sees that they can work with youth in new ways, and that youth respond positively to partnership-oriented approaches.

By getting to "know" youth in a deeper way, staffs increase their confidence which in turn leads them to do their jobs most effectively. YAP/E is particularly satisfying because it meets the generativity needs of adults. Staff feel positive about themselves because they are passing on their expertise and wisdom to the next generation. And like youth, adult staff also gain analytic skills. Throughout the research process, they get a chance to reflect on their work and their organizations, and develop new goals and ambitions.

**THE BOTTOM LINE:** YAP/E has multiple benefits for youth and adults. Youth become motivated to contribute which in turns leads to an increased sense of connectedness to their organizations. They gain valuable "insider" knowledge, such as understanding power and alliance building, and skills that will help them succeed within group settings. Adult staff develop greater skills in how to work with and support youth development, and in so doing, become more motivated and prepared to contribute to the organization.

## Organizational Benefits: Representation, Quality, and Reputation

Research indicates multiple organizational benefits when youth partner with adult staff. The first change observed is typically greater representation of youth in organizational decision making. Quite often, youth are not involved in decision making in their own organizations, even though they have a clear interest in participating. Y-AP/E provides a vehicle for their participation. It allows youth to move from the margins of organizational decision making to the center of problem identification, analysis, and change. They move from being the objects of knowledge to being knowledge producers.

Youth workers, community workers, and adult volunteers, are often at the periphery of organizational or community decision making. One clear benefit of YAP/E is that the process can also enhance their representation by elevating their voices and making prominent their ideas.

Over time, enhanced representation and the addition of new voices into influential organizational discussions lead to the expectation that young people and staff will be collaborators in confronting important issues. Further, the organization starts to hear, first hand, the interests and concerns of the young people it is serving. These processes ultimately contribute to improved experiences. Because organizations have more direct and authentic understandings of youth, staff are better prepared to implement quality programming. When youth recognize that the organization respects young people, they become more committed and attend at a higher frequency. They also become more likely to recruit their peers to attend. Consequently, the organizational culture is refreshed and improved.

The research also indicates that organizations that fully embrace Y-AP/E are held in high esteem in their communities. They become viewed as model organizations, as places that provide quality youth development services and are able to more effectively reach new community members (youth and adults) and organizations. This approach and reputation also makes the organization more appealing to potential funders.

## Benefits for Communities

Many community leaders endorse YAP/E because it helps to prepare youth to be the "next generation" of public and nonprofit leaders. Existing research is supportive of this perspective: When youth are engaged in quality service with supportive adults, they are more likely to participate in future community affairs.

As they become engaged in partnerships with adults – identifying problems, researching issues, and developing strategies for improvement – attitudes toward youth begin to shift. Specifically, many community leaders, observing the competence of youth, move from being a Y-AP/E skeptic to a Y-AP/E champion.

A variety of benefits begin to accrue. Studies indicate that youth raise new issues in the public sphere and that their involvement changes the tone of public processes. In some communities, coalitions and alliances become motivated to take on new youth-oriented issues and to involve youth in the processes of deliberation. In other communities, agencies and organizations become motivated to integrate Y-AP/E into their own operations and projects.

**THE BOTTOM LINE:** Adults needs to observe the competence and motivation of youth. When they see youth and adults accomplishing things together, it leads to the expectation that youth should be involved in community matters. The benefits of Y-AP/E begin to grow and become institutionalized.

## Positive Impact on the Evaluation Process

It is not simply that Y-AP/E sets new organizational expectations and standards for excellence. It strengthens the capacity of the organization to conduct evaluations of their programs that are both useful and high in quality. Youth often employ creative methods which add richness and depth to the evaluation. They are also able to access harder to reach samples, such as homeless youth or youth living in economically challenged neighborhoods, and may be more effective in obtaining reliable information from their peers than are adults.

Development of evaluation tools is another area where youth and adults working in partnership can benefit the evaluation process. Youth ensure that survey language and questions are "youth friendly" which can greatly enhance data quality. We also have learned the value of youth and adults jointly discussing the meaning and implications of evaluation findings which can enhance the use of data for quality improvement and can strengthen programming. During these "data dialogue" sessions, young people validate the accuracy of findings, affirming the extent to which they are true reflections of perceived experience and also identify gaps in knowledge which require further investigation. One of the hallmarks of the participatory evaluation approach is the inclusion of subjects or communities studied in analyzing and interpreting data – which not only enriches discussion but can lead to greater utilization of the findings.

## KEY LITERATURE FOR TIP SHEET 3:

- Anyon, Yolanda and Naughton, Sandra
  Youth Empowerment: the Contributions and Challenges of Youth-Led research in a High-Poverty, Urban Community. JGC Issue Brief: Youth Empowerment, February, 2003

- Foster-Fishman, Pennie; Nowell, Brenda; Deacon, Zermarie; Nievar, M. Angela; McCann, Peggy
  Using Methods That Matter: The Impact of Reflection, Dialogue, and Voice. American Journal Community Psychology (2005) 36:275-291

- Kirshner, Ben; O'Donoghue, Jennifer; McLaughlin, Milbrey
  Youth-Adult Research Collaborations: Bringing Youth Voice to the Research Process. Chapter 7 of "Organized Activities as Contexts of Development: Extracurricular Activities, After-School and Community Programs" by J. Mahoney, R. Larson and J. Eddies (eds.)

- London, Jonathan K.; Zimmerman, Kristen; Erbstein, Nancy
  Youth-Led Research and Evaluation: Tools for Youth, Organizational, and Community Development. New Directions for Evaluation, no. 98, Summer 2003

- Ozer, Emily J. and Wright, Dana.
  Beyond School Spirit: The Effects of Youth-Led Participation in Action Research in Two Urban High Schools. Journal of Research on Adolescence (2012) 22: 267–283

- Powers, Jane L. and Tiffany, Jennifer S.
  Engaging Youth in Participatory Research and Evaluation. Journal of Public Health Management and Practice, 2006, November (Suppl) S79-S87

- Sabo, Kim
  A Vygotskian Perspective on Youth Participatory Evaluation. New Directions for Evaluation, no. 98, Summer 2003

- Patton, Michael Quinn. Utilization Focused Evaluation. 3rd Edition, Sage, 1997