

Hart's Ladder

Key Questions

Which level of Hart's Ladder is our project on?

Which level of Hart's Ladder should our project be on?

What do we need to do to move to the right level on the ladder for our project?

QUALITY OF PARTICIPATION

EXAMPLES

Young people and adults share decision-making	Young people have the ideas, set up the project and invite adults to join them in making decisions throughout the project. They are equal partners.	Young people decide they need a one-stop shop in their community. They partner with adults in different youth organisations and together lobby the government for resources.
Young people lead and initiate action	Young people have the initial idea and decide how the project is to be carried out. Adults are available and trust in the leadership of young people.	A group of students get permission from their principal to run an environmental day. The students make the decisions, and the school provides support.
Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people	Adults have the initial idea, and young people are involved in making decisions, planning and implementing the project.	A community co-ordinator asks young people for event ideas for Youth Week. The young people suggest having a skating event. The co-ordinator and young people work together to make decisions and apply for funding.
Young people are consulted and informed	Adults design and facilitate the project, and young people's opinions are given weight in decision-making. Young people receive feedback about their opinions.	A local council runs several consultations to get young people's input about a recreation park. Young people tell the council about features in the park they want changed. The council provides feedback to the young people about how their views affected decision-making.
Young people assigned but informed	Adults decide on the project and young people volunteer for it. Young people understand the project and adults respect their views.	A conference creates positions for two young people on a panel of speakers. Young people decide how to select their representatives and work with adults to understand their role.
Tokenism	Young people are given a limited voice and little choice about what they can say and how they can communicate.	A young person is asked by adults to be on a panel and represent 'youth'. The young person is not given the opportunity to consult with peers or understand the role.
Decoration	Young people take part in an event in a very limited capacity and have no role in decision-making.	A group of young people are given a script by adults about 'youth problems' to present to adults attending a youth conference.
Manipulation	Adults have complete and unchallenged authority and abuse their power. They use young people's ideas and voices for their own gain.	A publication uses young people's cartoons; however, the publication is written by adults.

NON-PARTICIPATION

It is important to remember that tokenism, decoration and manipulation are not examples of youth participation. You do have the choice to move away from these methods towards more meaningful participation.



INCLUDING YOUNG ADULT VOICES 101

DO

- Allow young adults to define themselves and their cultures.
- Ensure young adults have access to information and trainings.
- Ask young adults what they need and their priorities.
- Let young adults make the decisions with the same power as the professionals involved
- Be respectful.
- Be flexible---find or develop unique ways for young adults to be involved.
- Include more than one young adult.
- Have diverse representation.
- Foster clear and transparent communicate.
- Create an environment where it's safe to ask questions by setting a level playing field for people to ask questions.
- Provide a clear introduction to and exit from the group.
- Continue providing support and coaching/ training to increase young adults' ability to be involved.
- Provide on-going opportunities for young people to be involved.
- Help young adults identify key messages they want to share.
- Make youth feel welcomed by engaging them when they walk in.
- Make space for young adults in leadership positions. Provide opportunities for young adults to mentor new members.
- Watch for sparks and strengths. Then, build them!
- Engage directly in discussion. Talk with the youth or family member not AROUND them.
- Be honest and upfront about information.

Your group wants to invite young adults into your effort. Fantastic! But. . .what does that mean?

Before you fling open the doors, it's important to know what young adult engagement means and the variety of formats that can take. Here's a cliff notes on levels of engagement and quick do's and don'ts for including young adults.

Do's and Don'ts: These quick tips were developed by young adults with experience in youth serving systems and/or behavioral health challenges. They want to be a partner. Here's how you can help.

DON'T

- Make assumptions or judge the young adults.
- Assume young adults understand.
- Accept that they can't understand or the topics, plans, etc. are too hard, complex, etc.
- Tell young adults what they need or what's important to them.
- Make decisions for the young adults.
- Fit young adults and young adults into projects or partnerships because it is convenient.
- Use acronyms and system-specific language without explanation.
- Be afraid to disagree or present the challenges with ideas.
- Assume they can't "handle" the information. It's their life. Be honest about system barriers.

Hart's Ladder: (on the reverse side) Roger Hart, a sociologist for UNICEF, developed a ladder of young adult engagement to guide how young adults can be involved. The Ladder illustrates different levels of engagement.

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