Evidenced Based Strategies Series

Youth Engagement

Learning Objectives

Participants will learn about:

- Youth Engagement Models
- Youth Engagement Strategies
- The Spectrum of Youth Engagement Practices
- Assessment of Youth Engagement Readiness
- Engage with Other Participants to Share Ideas and Experiences on Engaging Youth
- Provide Resources to Further Enhance Youth Engagement

Poll: Youth Engagement

Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF)

The five steps and two guiding principles of the SPF offer prevention planners a comprehensive approach to understanding and addressing the substance misuse and related behavioral health problems facing their states and communities.

The SPF includes these five steps:

1 . **Assessment:** Identify local prevention needs based on data. What is the problem?

2 . **Capacity:** Build local resources and readiness to address prevention needs. What do you have to work with?

3 . **Planning:** Find out what works to address prevention needs and how to do it well What should you do and how should you do it?

4 . **Implementation:** Deliver evidence-based programs and practices as intended. How can you put your plan into action?

5 . **Evaluation:** Examine the process and outcomes of programs and practices (Is your plan succeeding?)

The SPF is also guided by two cross-cutting principles that should be integrated into each of the steps:

Cultural Competence. The ability of an individual or organization to understand and interact effectively with people who have different values, lifestyles, and traditions based on their distinctive heritage and social relationships.

Sustainability. The process of building an adaptive and effective system that achieves and maintains desired long-term results

CT's Evidenced Based Workgroup

PURPOSE OF CONNECTICUT'S EVIDENCE-BASED WORKGROUP

- Connecticut's Evidence-Based Workgroup (EBW) exists to increase the use of and fidelity of evidence- based prevention practices and programs in Connecticut. The work complements national efforts by the substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration and the Centers for Disease Prevention and Control to promote the use of evidence-based practices and evidence-based strategies.

THE MEANING OF EVIDENCE BASED

- Evidence-based prevention strategies refers to programs, policies, or other strategies that have been evaluated and demonstrated to be effective in preventing health problems based upon the best-available research evidence.

PROCESS

- The Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) Prevention and Health Promotion Unit assembles a diverse group of prevention and health promotion subject matter experts (SMEs). DMHAS takes a leadership role in identifying candidates to serve as SMEs. The composition of the EBW varies depending on the topic. The SMEs volunteer their time to review and/or develop resources and tools to increase the use of and fidelity of evidence-based prevention practices and programs. The group meets formally several times per year and receives staffing support from the Connecticut Prevention Training and Technical Assistance Service Center (TTASC).

EBW AREAS OF FOCUS

- DMHAS supports a robust, statewide prevention infrastructure. This includes a commitment to support local prevention councils as well as prevention coalitions that may receive additional funding.

- Environmental strategies aim to change the context in which substance use occurs. This includes community conditions, standards, institutions, structures, systems, and policies.

- Social Norms Campaigns, Enforcement Strategies, Youth Engagement, and Community Coalition Capacity Building

What is Youth Engagement?

Youth Engagement refers to the intentional and meaningful participation of youth in all parts of a campaign or program, from ideation and design to implementation and evaluation. This happens by creating an environment where youth voices are heard without stigma or judgement.

Meaningful youth engagement integrates the experiences and ideas of young people into program design while also building on their skills and strengths.

Youth Engagement Models

Youth Engagement Models common in the prevention field include *youth as resources* and *social development model*; they are distinct and complementary.

Taken together, these engagement models suggest that youth benefit from opportunities to develop their personal strengths and contribute to the strengths of their communities with a group of pro-social peers.

- **Youth as Resources** aims to engage youth in positive alternatives to the behaviors traditionally prioritized by prevention programs. For example, youth might take leadership roles in program design or offer meaningful guidance on a coalition's priorities. Strength based model and mindset.

- **Social Development Model** demonstrates the impact of peer groups on behavior, positing that stable membership in a pro-social group of peers can positively influence an adolescent. This means providing spaces for whole peer groups to form, gather, learn, and create.

Youth Engagement Models

Youth as Resources	Social Development Model
- Shifts from framing youth as being or having problems that need fixing to framing youth, families, and communities as having strengths to develop - Prevention efforts should be focused on environmental, rather than individual, change - Provide youth with alternatives that consist of a nurturing context and opportunities to participate meaningfully	- Youth membership in a pro-social group results in pro-social behaviors, just as membership in an anti-social group results in anti-social behaviors - Membership requires bonding with a group which is defined as youth having a role, having skills to fulfill that role, and receiving positive signals for fulfilling that role

Youth as Resources and Social Developmental Model In Practice

Youth as Resources

- Youth are problem identifiers and problem solvers, designers, and producers rather than consumers.

- Providing a higher level of engagement that enhances skill and leadership development.

Social Development Model

- Provides an intentional structure for forming those pro-social groups, creating opportunities, teaching the necessary information and skills, and providing recognition to reinforce participation.

- Has the outcome of helping youth bond, or develop a sense of belonging to family, schools, peers and community when these groups practice this model. When youth bond, they are more likely to subscribe to healthy norms and behaviors.

- These are concepts that need to be reinforced otherwise people can slip into a cycle of creating activities for youth as consumers rather than problem solvers or producers.
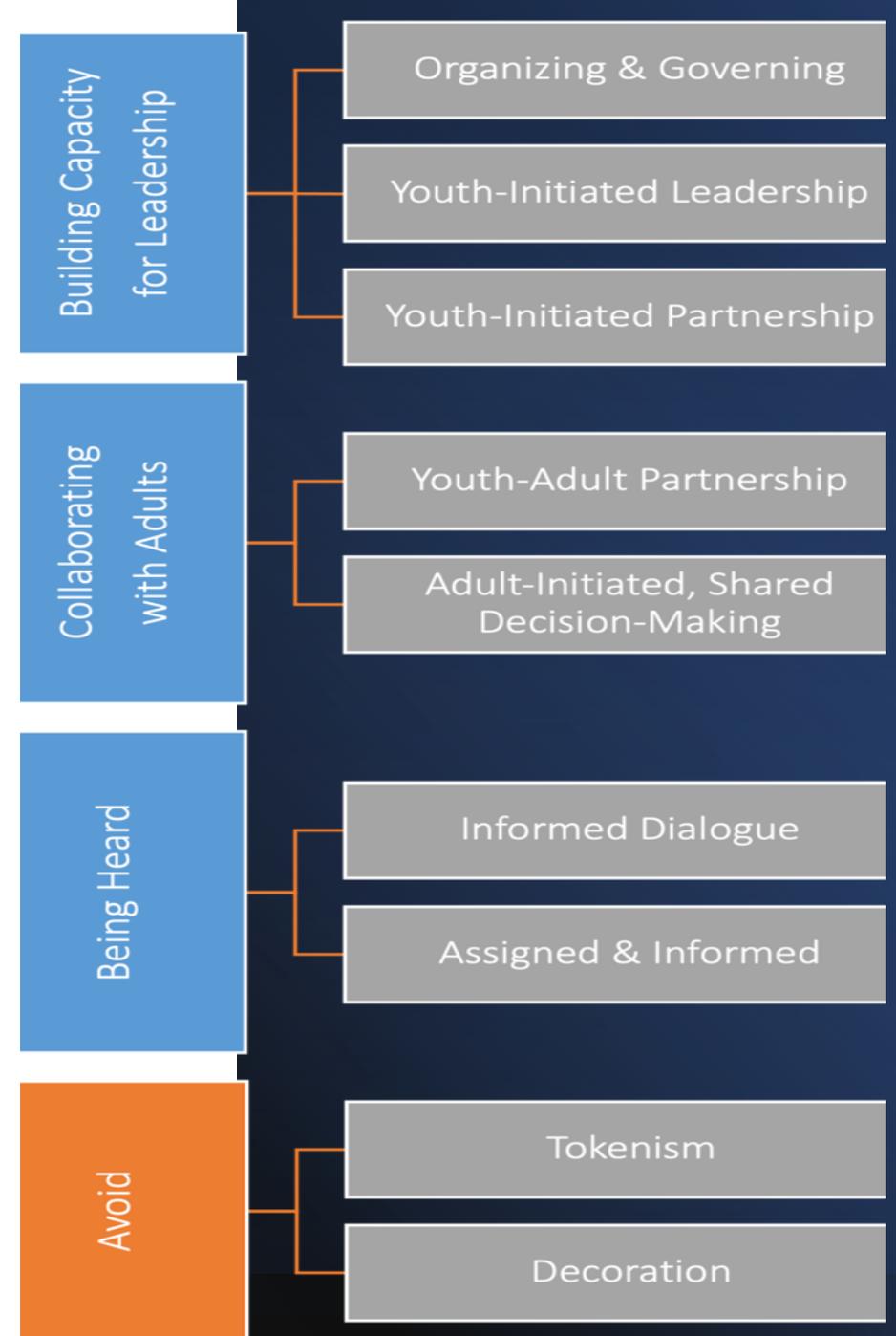
Youth Engagement Strategies

- <u>Youth peer advocates</u> are paid, part-time, professionals who support coalition coordinators and act as a liaison between the program, its youth participants, and community partners.

- <u>Youth-adult partnerships</u> bring youth and adults together in partnership to learn the requisite skills to meet their shared goals.

- <u>Youth leadership within the formal coalition</u> structure can be scaffolded to support full involvement while youth develop leadership skills.

- <u>Youth councils or youth coalitions</u> may act as a subcommittee within the coalition and offer excellent leadership development opportunities.

- <u>Informal youth engagement</u> strategies such as events, outreach, and providing nurturing spaces where youth can spend time can also yield insights and guidance.

Youth As A System

- **Thinking of Youth Engagement as a System** precludes relying on one-off engagement or feedback opportunities and focuses on offering expansive involvement for youth that brings them progressively closer to, and eventually positions them as, organizational and community leaders.

- The *Youth Engagement Ladder* to the right visualizes a spectrum of youth engagement practices that can be taken separately but are best viewed as a progressive structure which youth ascend through active participation and interest in leadership opportunities. Remember that the key to effective youth engagement is *meaningful* participation. Adolescents are highly motivated by peer relationships and social status, making leadership opportunities an excellent context for meaningful participation. ([Nowicki & Hart, n/d](#))

- Youth might start *Being Heard* as participants at outreach events or in teen spaces and be pulled into dialogue or shared responsibilities. Next, youth may begin *Collaborating with Adults* by informing decisions or embarking on learning experiences together. *Building Capacity for Leadership* must have reliable and formal structures, beginning as youth-initiated partnerships or youth-initiated leadership - that is, youth broaden the community by bringing new people or organizations to the table or create and lead project or program plans with minimal support – and culminating in youth-governance structures with substantive decision-making power.

- Just as there are aspirational ways of engaging youth, there are problematic ways. Those include using youth solely as decoration or entertainment, exploiting their stories for publicity or resources, or offering only symbolic decision-making authority.

Building Capacity for Leadership
- Organizing & Governing
- Youth-Initiated Leadership
- Youth-Initiated Partnership

Collaborating with Adults
- Youth-Adult Partnership
- Adult-Initiated, Shared Decision-Making

Being Heard
- Informed Dialogue
- Assigned & Informed

Avoid
- Tokenism
- Decoration

Examples of Youth Engagement Ladder:

Organizing & Governing – Youth on their own or with adults serving as coalition or committee co-chair. Leadership positions within the youth coalition. Youth have decision making authority.

Youth Initiated Leadership – Youth designing and implementing youth committee or larger coalition prevention initiatives. Example – STEPS youth council creating liquor stickers. Youth committees creating their own PSAs and social media posts, youth determining which key survey data should be shared.

Youth Initiated Partnership – Collaborating with youth from another coalition or community organization. Example - youth council planning a statewide youth summit or conference with other youth councils. Youth bringing in new groups to the coalition or outreach to non represented groups.

Youth Adult Partnerships – Youth and adults collaborating on freshmen forum for new freshmen and their parents. Youth and adults as coalition or committee co-chairs – planning and facilitating agenda together. Youth working with adults or marketing firm on a social norms campaign.

Adult initiated, shared decision making – Adults identify a project and ask youth for input and collaborate on planning.
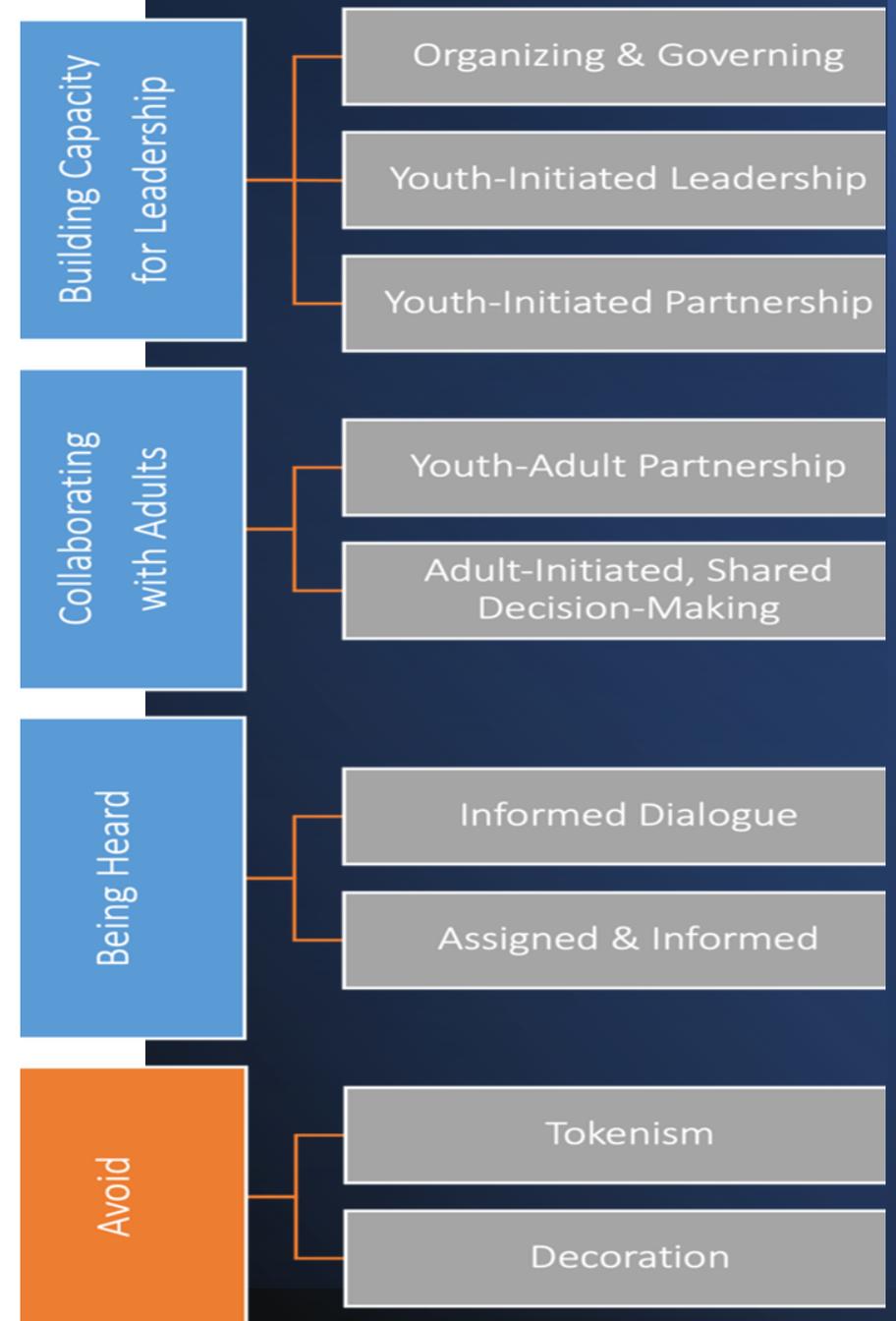
Informed dialogue – Asking youth for their input on issues, data discussions, and potential prevention initiatives. Youth participating in focus groups.

Assigned and informed – Providing youth information about issues and data, giving them assignments or tasks to complete.

Tokenism – One or two youth serving on a coalition, its advisory board or a committee. Support for their input or skill development is often not considered.

Decoration – Utilizing youth to show community youth are involved but not giving them a meaningful role or voice. One time event presence. No thought or application to relationship building or leadership development.

Poll: Level of Engagement

Building Capacity for Leadership
- Organizing & Governing
- Youth-Initiated Leadership
- Youth-Initiated Partnership

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Youth Engagement Readiness Assessment

• Utilize a framework for highlighting key insights about your stakeholders' current capacity, how a hopeful youth engagement initiative might take shape or how a current initiative might be strengthened

In what activities will youth participate?
- ❑ Program design
- ❑ Facilitation
- ❑ Program evaluation
- ❑ Budgeting
- ❑ Researching
- ❑ Policy-making
- ❑ Board of Directors
- ❑ Advocacy
- ❑ Strategy and planning
- ❑ Other

Which youth will participate?
- ❑ Existing participants
- ❑ New participants
- ❑ System-involved youth
- ❑ Unsheltered youth
- ❑ Parenting or pregnant youth
- ❑ Multiple communities
- ❑ Historically-oppressed youth
- ❑ Other

How many youth will participate?
- ❑ A few (2-15)
- ❑ A medium group (16-50)
- ❑ A large group (51-100)
- ❑ Very many (100+)
- ❑ Whole community
- ❑ Multiple communities
- ❑ Statewide
- ❑ Nationwide
- ❑ Global
- ❑ Other

Who will support youth and with what funding?
- ❑ An older youth
- ❑ Volunteer
- ❑ One paid staff
- ❑ Multiple paid staff
- ❑ Other
- ❑ Grant funding
- ❑ Donations
- ❑ Operational budget
- ❑ No funding
- ❑ Other

What roles will youth have?
- ❑ Contract stipend
- ❑ Paid staff
- ❑ Advisor
- ❑ Voting Member
- ❑ Participant
- ❑ Intern
- ❑ Peer mentor
- ❑ Other

Are adults ready?
- ❑ Respect for youth
- ❑ Willing to part with power/control
- ❑ Enjoys being with young people
- ❑ Comfortable with chaos
- ❑ Patient
- ❑ Listens carefully
- ❑ Willing to admit when wrong
- ❑ Likes trying new things

Are youth ready?
- ❑ Willing to partner with adults
- ❑ Willing/able to take on more responsibility
- ❑ Want to try new and different things
- ❑ Open to guidance
- ❑ Listens carefully
- ❑ Willing to ask questions
- ❑ Willing to admit when wrong

Breakout session

Sharing Ideas, Experiences, and Questions

At what level of the ladder do you currently engage youth? How may you increase your level of engagement with youth?

What are the ways that you recruit youth to participate?

What other groups, organizations, or sectors may you reach out to engage youth in prevention efforts?

What skills and perspectives do youth bring to your work?

What objectives and goals of your coalition or organization do youth assist in meeting?

What have been some challenges and successes in working with youth?

Engaging Youth

- Create a youth recruitment flyer and interest form. Remember consent forms as well.

- Invite youth to attend and speak at community meetings and events. Prepare them prior to event.

- Leverage youth knowledge of technology and social media for event promotion and messaging

- Host youth-based focus groups on substance use prevention initiatives and for their insight on current trends.

- Ask for their insight on policy provisions.

- Seek to set schedule for youth that contemplates their school calendar and other time commitments.

- Provide youth with prevention and leadership trainings. (Mental health first aid, QPR, coalition data and analysis, leadership opportunities)

- Extend invitations to attend future prevention events and activities.

- Maintain relationships by keeping youth informed of prevention activities and progress made through regular communication between meetings, provide recognition, ask for input, etc.

- Anticipate and overcome roadblocks – scheduling, transportation, need for skill development.

- Share youth's ideas and projects with the coalition and other sectors to interconnect them.

Reminders

- The youth you engage are typically minors, meaning they need parental consent and often have school or extra-curricular activities that affect their availability.

- Good engagement requires competent staff, structured supports, and interested youth. If no young people want to help lead your program, perhaps they'd like to help redesign it or create something new.

- Make sure your participation numbers are supported by sufficient staff, youth leaders, and volunteers – for safety and fun.

Why Youth Engagement?
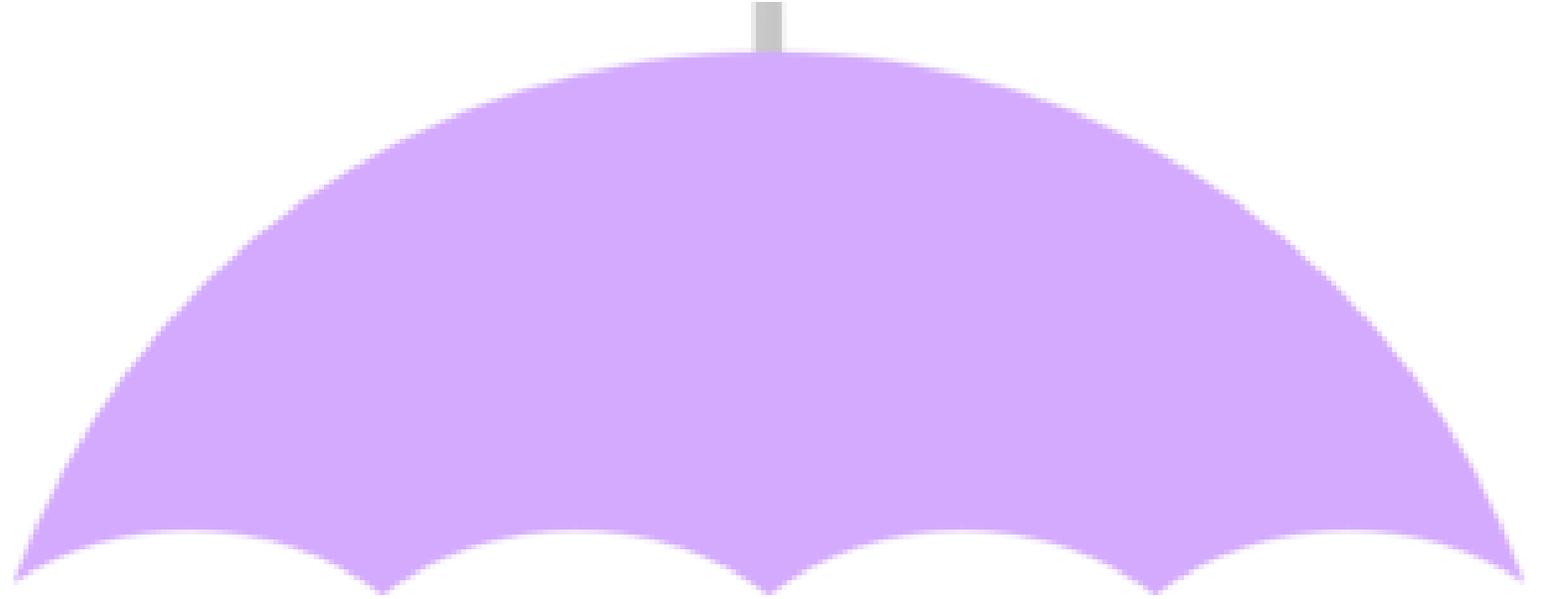
To:

- Increase community knowledge and awareness around substance use and behavioral health impacting youth

- Decrease stigma and reduce barriers to access of care

- Provide skill development and nurture leadership among young people

- To keep adults abreast of current and emerging trends that are impacting and important to youth

- Utilize an evidenced based strategy to decrease substance misuse and increase overall health and well-being of youth and community

Resources

- [TTASC Evidenced Based Strategy Guide on Youth Engagement](#)

- [Youth Engagement Assessment Checklist Tool](#)

- [Evidenced Based Strategy Youth Engagement Video Recording](#)

- [12 Sector Series: Engaging the Youth Sector](#)

- [12 Sector Series: Engaging the Youth Sector Video Recording](#)

- [Youth Peer Advocates Onboarding and Resources](#)

- [NAF Youth Engagement Assessment Tool Kit](#)

- [Evaluation Survey](#)

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