



Community Assessment Tool for Youth Advisory Boards

Introduction

This handbook contains four simple exercises which can be used with your youth advisory board (YAB) or another group of youth: a yearly calendar, a youth profile tool, a guide to resource mapping, and a program assessment. The goal of these exercises is to engage your youth board members, help them get to know each other, and help you better understand the youth in your community. These tools will be of particular use to new programs and programs with new YABs, but can also be used by any program exploring new ways to involve their YAB in youth recruitment efforts. The activities can be completed in any order and adjusted to fit the needs of your program. Each activity can be facilitated in-person or virtually. They are meant to serve as a starting point to facilitate productive conversations. The end goal is encourage you to think of your YAB as a tool for better understanding and connecting with youth in your community.

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Yearly Calendar

Understanding how the lives of youth shift throughout the year can help you better plan programming that engages them consistently. Some calendar events may be obvious, such as holidays or summer breaks, while others may not. This tool can be especially helpful for staff members (and youth) who are new to the community.

Materials: Large paper or white board, markers

Time: 1 hour

Objective: To gain a better understanding of how community events and seasonal changes affect the lives of youth in the community.

Steps:

1. Prior to the start of the activity, reflect individually on what you know, what you would like to know about the youth, and what occupies their time in your community. Spend 3-5 minutes creating a brainstormed list.
2. Explain the exercise objective and outline the activity. Encourage all youth to participate fully.
3. Draw a timeline representing the calendar year where all participants can see.
4. Begin to add to the timeline by taking suggestions from the participating youth. Be sure to include things like holidays, seasons, significant agricultural seasons (if relevant), the school year, school breaks, or other significant school or community events. Encourage youth to name events relevant to their lives and areas of interest, such as extracurricular activities, sporting events, voting days, and any local cultural days or events the community hosts.
5. Discuss results and the impact each event/time-period has on the lives and schedules of youth. Brainstorm questions as a group, such as:
 - What do youth do during the identified time periods?
 - Are there differences for youth of different genders? Middle schoolers and high schoolers? Public schools, private schools, and home schools?
 - Do participating youth think their yearly timeline is representative of a broader youth experience? What differences might there be?
 - How does YVC fit into this calendar? How could YVC programming fit into this calendar better?
6. After the activity, reflect individually as program staff member(s). Refer to the brainstorm list you created prior to the activity:
 - What assumptions did you have about the schedules of youth? Did any of those assumptions prove accurate? Did any of those assumptions turn out to be unfounded?
 - What did you learn? How might what you have learned be specific to this group of youth? How might it be used to extrapolate insights about youth who have not yet joined YVC? Did anything you learned surprise you?
 - How can you apply this new knowledge to programming and youth recruitment decisions?

Source: Geilfus, Frans. 2008. 80 Tools for Participatory Development. San Jose, Costa Rica: IICA.

Youth Profiles

This tool will help you understand how youth on your advisory board live in their community. You will gain a better understanding of their socio-economic, qualitative, and quantitative characteristics, and you can use their input to extrapolate insight about the larger youth population you want to reach.

Materials: Paper, markers, colored pencils

Time: 1 hour

Objective: To gain a better understanding of who the participating youth are and how they spend their time.

Steps:

1. Prior to the start of the activity, reflect individually on what you know and what you would like to know about the youth and their lives in your community. Spend 3-5 minutes creating a brainstormed list.
2. Explain the exercise objectives and outline the activity. Encourage all youth to participate fully.
3. Begin the discussion by asking the youth a simple question, such as “what do youth do in the community?” Record all the answers where they can be seen by everyone. In person, this might mean writing on a board or poster paper. Virtually you might use a Google document or Zoom’s whiteboard function.
4. Ask youth to review all activities listed and ask follow-up questions such as:
 - What activities do youth choose to do? What activities do they not have a choice in?
 - Do activities change on the weekend? Do they change over the summer? On school breaks?
 - Are activities the same for all genders or ethnic backgrounds? Are they the same for middle and high school youth?
5. As the discussion closes, ask each participant to indicate which activities they perform and to highlight characteristics relevant to them.

Tip: Whether this is facilitated in person or virtually, allow youth to self-indicate with markers or text to encourage participation.
6. Review the result with youth once all have participated. Look for discrepancies, unusual activities, and potential influences such as gender, age, and socio-economic background. Encourage youth to consider if their results are reflective of the broader youth population in their community. You may want to take notes during this discussion or record your thoughts shortly after the activity concludes.
7. After the activity, reflect individually as program staff member(s). Refer to the brainstorm list you created prior to the activity:
 - What assumptions did you have about youth? Did any of those assumptions prove accurate? Did any of those assumptions turn out to be unfounded?
 - What did you learn from your youth? How might what you have learned be specific to them? How might it be used to extrapolate insights about youth who have not yet joined YVC? Did anything you learned surprise you?
 - How can you apply your new knowledge to your programming and youth recruitment decisions?

Source: Geilfus, Frans. 2008. 80 Tools for Participatory Development. San Jose, Costa Rica: IICA.

Resource Mapping

Resource mapping allows you to gain insight into which community resources participating youth are already aware of and how they interact with those resources. This activity will guide youth in developing a diagram representing community institutions, organizations, and social groups which are important to them. This information can help you identify potential partner organizations and recruiting locations. You also will be able to better identify which, if any, resources you know of that might be new to YVC youth.

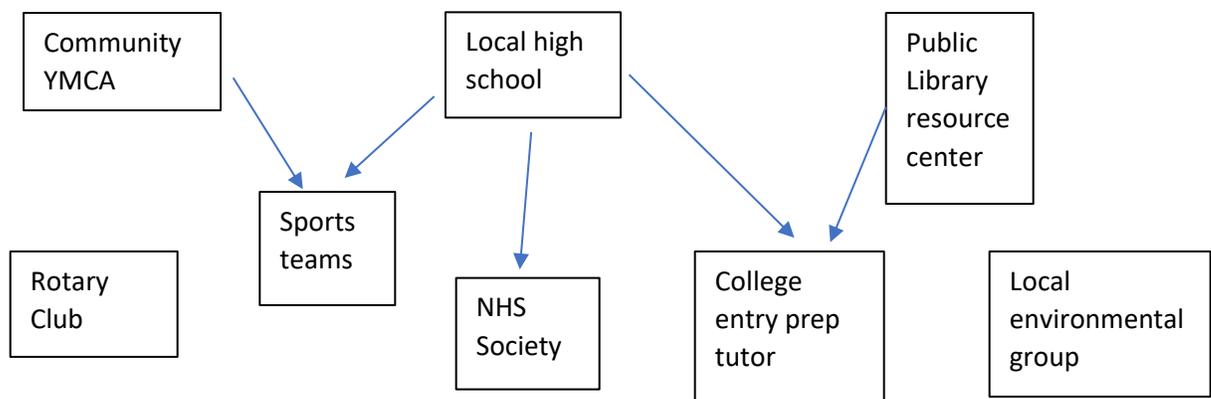
Materials: Paper or white board and markers

Time: 1 hour

Objective: To gain a better understanding of what resources local youth rely on and identify areas for expanding their knowledge of available resources.

Steps:

1. Prior to the start of the activity, reflect individually on what you know and what you would like to know about the youth and the resources available to them in your community. Spend 3-5 minutes creating a brainstormed list.
2. Explain the exercise objectives and outline the activity. Encourage all youth to participate fully. It may be helpful to define what is meant by “resource”.
3. Ask participating youth to draw a diagram of their community. Ask that they include locations of importance, institutions viewed as a resource or source of opportunity, and other places/people/groups where they receive support. Youth can draw these diagrams individually or work together in groups. The drawings can be made as literal maps showing physical locations, or more simply, as mind-map style diagrams showing the relationships between listed places/people/groups. For example, a simplified mind-map style diagram might look something like this:



4. Review the maps. If students made their own maps individually, it may be beneficial to create a list of common features. Discuss why the youth go to the places they listed. Is it to take advantage of resources? Is it to contribute to a resource? A combination? Try to find out more information about the places and groups listed and *how* they impact the lives of the youth. Add to your map or list of common features as necessary during your discussion.

5. After the activity, reflect individually as program staff member(s). Refer to the brainstorm list you created prior to the activity:
 - a. What assumptions did you have about what resources your youth were interested in? Did any of those assumptions prove accurate? Did any of those assumptions turn out to be unfounded?
 - b. What did you learn from your youth? How might what you have learned be specific to them? How might it be used to extrapolate insights about youth who have not yet joined YVC? Did anything you learned surprise you?
 - c. How can you apply your new knowledge to your programming and youth recruitment decisions?

Program Assessment

This activity will be most useful for programs that have been running for at least one program year. It is important youth are comfortable enough working with you and each other to provide honest feedback. The goal of this activity is to gain insight into the community you are creating with your program, from the youth perspective.

Materials: Printed assessment category cards, writing utensils, white board, and markers

If you are meeting in person and using the assessment cards, you will need to print and cut them in advance. If you are meeting virtually, you may want to type the statements on the assessment cards into a word document in advance.

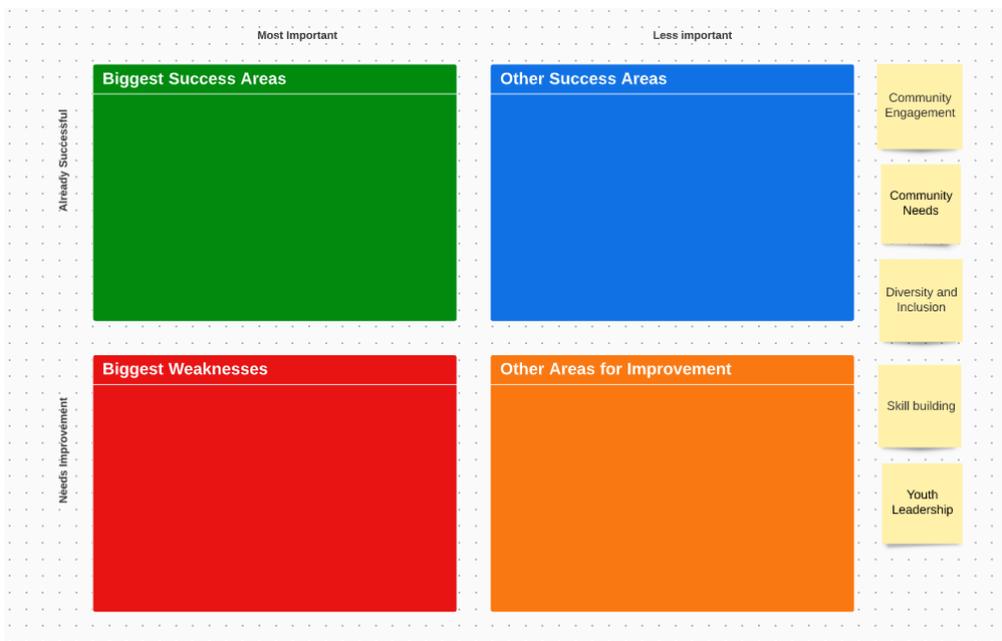
Time: 1 hour

Objective: To gain insight into how youth perceive your program and encourage a sense of program ownership for your youth leaders.

Steps:

1. Prior to the start of this activity, take a few minutes and complete the assessment activity individually. At the end of the activity you will reflect by comparing your personal assessment answers with the answers given by your youth leaders.
2. Explain the objective and outline the activity. Encourage all youth to participate fully. It is important to explain to youth how their feedback will be used so they have realistic expectations.
3. Provide the questions/statements to participating youth.
 - a. In person: Print out the assessment category cards on the next page. These cards show statements across different categories that may or may not apply to your program. Give each youth, or group, at least one card. Give youth a chance to review their cards and begin by asking one youth to read their card aloud one statement at a time. After each statement is read, ask youth to discuss whether they feel the statement applies to your YVC program. If it does, the youth will check the box next to the statement. If it does not, leave the box blank.
 - b. Virtual: To complete the activity virtually, you may need to take a more active role in facilitating the discussion. Instead of handing out printed cards for the students to read aloud, you can announce the category and read each statement yourself. The youth will then discuss and come to a consensus on whether the statement applies to your program. To record their answers, you may consider using screen share to show a word document with each statement typed out in the order they will be read and marking responses as you go.
4. Once complete, you can begin the process of identifying what categories are most important to youth. Feel free to adapt this step as needed, for example you may want to simplify by only asking the youth to sort the categories into groups of most important and least important. Youth should guide this discussion, but you should encourage them to share their logic and thought process so you can best understand their rationale.

- a. In person: Collect the cards into one pile. Write “Most important” and “Less Important” where all participants can see. Ask youth to place each category card under one of these columns. Once you have sorted each category card into a column, ask youth to go one step further and sort the category cards in each column into “Already successful” and “Needs improvement” sub-groups. Your end result will be a SWOT style grid that shows your biggest success areas (most important + already successful), other success areas (less important + already successful), biggest weaknesses (most important + needs improvement), and other areas for improvement (less important + needs improvement). See below for a visual example.
 - b. Virtual: One option is a template created specifically for this activity available for your use on a website called Lucid.app ¹. There are many other online tools which you can use to facilitate this section of the discussion by recreating the template pictured below. Share your screen and explain that you would like them to sort the category cards you discussed into the quadrant that is the best fit. As youth come to a consensus about each category card’s placement, move the card to the relevant box. If you would like to simplify this part of the exercise, you can alter the template to fit your needs.
5. Reflect with the youth and end the exercise on a positive note. Depending on their level of engagement, challenge them to provide suggestions for improvement.
 6. After the activity take a few minutes to reflect individually. How did your evaluation results compare to those of the youth? You may want to use this time to make a note of any meaningful insights shared by the youth.



¹ To use the template, follow the given link, create a free account as prompted, and once you are taken to the document click the red icon in the top left of the page to return to your account homepage. From your homepage you will be able to re-open the template, but this time it will open as a new document so that your changes do not affect the template itself. Link: <https://lucid.app/lucidspark/invitations/accept/75013ee7-5e33-4db3-87f3-1c85b98cdd44>

Assessment Category Cards

Community Needs		Our projects address unmet needs in the community.
		Our projects are diverse and interesting.
		Our projects help youth volunteers better understand the issues challenging our community.
Community Engagement		People in our community know about our YVC program.
		People in our community support our YVC program.
		Our YVC program does a good job of marketing and networking within our community.
Diversity & Inclusion		Our projects bring together people from different backgrounds.
		Youth volunteers represent the diversity of our community.
		Our YVC program helps our volunteers better understand the perspectives of others.
Skill Building		Our service-learning activities help youth volunteers learn valuable life skills.
		Our projects let youth volunteers learn and practice valuable life skills.
		Our projects and service-learning activities help youth volunteers reflect on and better understand their strengths.
Youth Leadership		Our YVC program provides youth volunteers with valuable leadership opportunities.
		Our YVC program helps youth volunteers better understand their leadership styles.
		Our YVC program reflects the voice and input of its youth volunteers.