

Youth Collaboration 102 Roadmap

Welcome

Welcome to the Youth Collaboration 102 Road Map. This outline is a continuation of [Youth Collaboration 101](#) and is designed for communities, agencies, individuals, or housing service entities that have already developed an understanding of the core principles of Youth Collaboration. Throughout this road map, we will discuss **funding**, **recruitment** and **retention**, **undoing adultism**, and **leadership from within**.

Lesson 1: Funding

Objectives

- Participants will understand how to collaborate with youth and young adults in securing grants.
- Participants will understand how to identify and respond to the funding needs of Youth Action Boards (YAB)¹.
- Participants will understand the importance of planning for and administering Youth Action Board compensation.

Grant Writing

One of the most critical points of youth collaboration is the planning process. Having young people involved at every level of the plan is essential. In order to do that, young people need to be intricately involved in recruitment of other youth and young adults (YYA)², the writing of any grant proposals that impact youth, and the development of the deliverables. This is a prime opportunity to begin developing a Youth Action Board.

¹ A Youth Action Board (YAB) is a council/group of young people with lived experience that are actively working to change the homelessness response system to become more person centered and equitable. These boards are generally sponsored by a community's Continuum of Care Boards.

² At times in this roadmap, we use the term YYA (youth and young adults). This is in reference to any youth/young adult partner.

It is strongly recommended that you provide grant writing skills building or learning opportunities for YYA so that they are able to meaningfully participate in the grant writing process.

It is important that YYA are compensated for the time that they contribute to the grant writing process.

Be sure that you bring youth to the table before there is “pen to paper”. This means you shouldn’t allow yourself or your team to begin any strategic planning without young people present. The only pre-work that should be done is recruiting youth and young adults (YYA), who should be paid to be involved in the grant-writing process. Be sure to have at least two YYA who could also serve as your first two YAB members. Having at least two YAB members initially not only creates balance but could also help ensure the YAB members are not becoming overwhelmed or feel isolated (see Lesson 2: Recruitment and Retention).

An important component of budgeting is considering compensation for the future YAB members. Stipends, hourly payments, and other necessary wages can be included in proposals prior to securing funds. In order to determine adequate pay for YYA in your community, consider your state’s livable wage and allow the YYA involved in the grant writing to determine if that makes sense. Be mindful of other social injustices in your community that could impact your definition of a livable wage (i.e. red lining, low income inequality, and/or limited access). This is the true meaning of economic justice.

During the planning phase, be sure to discuss the need for materials, food, and any other supplies and include this in the grant if it is an allowable cost. If the grant you are writing for does not allow spending on these items, be sure to secure the funds. It is always beneficial to diversify funding for the YAB. In order to understand the barriers YYA may face when attending in-person or virtual meetings, it may be helpful to survey potential YAB members.

Some line items you may need to secure funding for include food, technology, office supplies, meeting space, and transportation.

Please be mindful that pizza is not payment.

Private Funders

When surveying the YYA in your community, you may identify unique needs that cannot be funded through government grants, such as technology or child care. These needs may require you to approach private funders. Private funding is often less restrictive but solely relying on this may challenge sustainability.

Private funding is usually limited, but creating an ongoing platform for individuals to donate allows for continuous contributions. Consider creating a donation link for your YAB. While YAB members share their initiative with community members, encourage people to donate to the cause.

When looking for private funding start local. Coach YAB members on leading the conversations. The more opportunities you present for people to donate the better.

Remember that not all funding is a good fit for your initiative (government or private). As majority stakeholders, the YYA (YAB members) should decide whether or not the funding makes sense for them.

Some things to consider are the funders' historical relationship to social justice and the YAB's capacity to meet the funders' expected deliverables, deadlines, and other requirements.

Remember: funders need to fund, so don't be afraid to hold them accountable.

Something that often gets in the way of authentic collaboration is showy engagement or tokenism. In many cases, this showy engagement exists to impress funders.

When inviting funders to the table with young people, focus on developing a reciprocal relationship. Work with young people to show their vision for the future instead of focusing on their past traumatic experiences.

Paying YAB members

Work with YAB members, on a case by case basis, to determine which is the best method of payment (e.g. check, direct deposit, prepaid cards, cash, etc.) Transportation, food, and other in-kind services are not applicable or acceptable methods of payment for time/services.

YAB members should be able to access spreadsheets of the budget for each fiscal year that the YAB is being funded, including an itemized list.

Transparency is essential through every level of authentic youth collaboration. It is especially crucial that you share protocol for late payments, changes in pay, budget information, and missed meeting consequences well ahead of time.

YAB members should be paid reasonably/receive liveable wages depending on the communities' liveable wages.

Example: If min. wage in California is \$13/Hr, members should not get paid any less than that.

Your Continuum of Care Board should be proactively working to address any barriers to disbursement. Consider whether YAB members need to become employed by an agency or contractors/vendors for the county or city in order to be paid.

Community Example 1:

In one community, YAB members were not compensated until several months after the initiative began, due to a delay in determining who and how compensation would be administered. This caused a significant decline in YAB membership and engagement, created a barrier to recruitment of new members, and dissolved authentic youth collaboration at key points in the YHDP process.

Community Example 2:

Another community was delaying payments for YAB because funding directly from the CoC was arduous. A Youth Provider offered to step in and be the fiscal liaison. Instead of asking YYA to wait months to be paid, the organization was happy to pay young

people when they worked and, as an organization, wait for their reimbursement from the CoC.

Lesson 2: Recruitment and Retention

Objectives

- Participants will understand the basics of YAB recruitment and retention.
- Participants will understand the importance of promoting equity and inclusion in the YAB, to reflect communities disproportionately affected by homelessness.
- Participants will understand how to promote peer to peer connections for YAB sustainability.

Recruitment and Retention Basics

YAB recruitment can be a challenge, particularly in rural communities, but there are strategies to ease the process. Rural and some suburban communities may experience significant difficulty, not only with outreach to potential members but with meeting in person or with keeping the YAB members connected.

It's a good idea to begin your recruitment with young people who are accessing or have previously accessed services within your system. Peer to peer recruitment is also effective because young people know where other young people are.

As we covered previously, a crucial component of successful YAB recruitment and retention is securing funding. This should cover reliable compensation for YAB members and the following necessities for the YAB to function:

- Transportation assistance, to mitigate in-person attendance issues
- Technology support (wifi devices, cell phone service)
- Food during meetings
- Supplies for meetings
- Childcare for parenting YAB members

Develop a retention strategy in tandem with your recruitment strategy. Some key considerations for YAB retention are:

1. Ensuring that YYA are involved in the early formation of the YAB, including the recruitment process.
2. If you've had a YAB in the past, consider any past challenges retaining members.
3. Supporting YAB members with technology and/or internet access.
 - a. Since the onset of COVID-19, it's best to anticipate your YAB will work remotely at least sometimes. Seek out funding to provide laptops, monitors, headphones, etc for members who do not have access.

4. Ensuring that you are communicating with the YAB in ways that make sense and are accessible for all members (e.g. group chats, Zoom, private social media groups, or text).

The only plans adult collaboratorators should have for the YAB are how to recruit members and how to secure funding. Youth Action Boards should be entirely self-governed. Though adult partners and technical assistance providers can assist the YAB with goal-setting, YAB members should chart their own course forward.

Discussion Questions:

- Where are the opportunities in your system that incorporate youth voice?
- What are the steps necessary in order to secure timely and sustainable funding for a YAB?

YAB representation

The ideal YAB membership is reflective of communities impacted and disempowered locally. Your youth action board membership should primarily recruit young people with lived experience of homelessness.

A great place to start is with young people currently being served by local programs, as well as those who have recently transitioned out of services to self-sufficiency.

YAB membership should mirror the demographic make up of youth experiencing homelessness in your community. This means actively reviewing data and seeking out racial and gender diversity in your YAB.

It is also important to consider ability, HIV status, immigration status, justice involvement, and pregnancy or parenting when establishing your YAB.

Peer to Peer Connections

Cultivating peer to peer connections should go beyond recruitment. To help with retention, consider referring YAB members to a peer to peer support program to ensure they are feeling supported and heard. For example, in many cases, having more experienced members paired with new recruits creates buy-in, a sense of belonging, and helps prevent young people who are new from becoming overwhelmed. However, this model is still useful for entirely new YABs to establish good working relationships with their peers.

It's also important to understand that although models of intentional peer to peer connections may work for most of your YAB members, not every young person will want to participate in this way. Encourage peer to peer connections, but allow YAB members to opt in or out.

The youth homelessness response system has implemented many different peer to peer models. Many of these models are more structured and encompass support from the agency involved. Allow YAB members to decide the most appropriate peer to peer model for them or work with them to develop their own. Some examples of decision points for YAB members developing their own peer to peer support model include:

- Frequency of meetings

- Structure of meetings
- Length of actual connections

Discussion Question:

- Consider the peer to peer models that currently exist in your agency/community. What have been the benefits and challenges of these efforts?

Lesson 3: Undoing Adulthood

Objectives

- Participants will understand how to identify adulthood and the importance of addressing it among adult community partners, and within the local housing system, to promote authentic youth collaboration.
- Participants will develop their ability to receive and process various types of feedback from youth and young adults.
- Participants will understand transparency as crucial to successful collaboration with young people.

Teaching others Authentic Collaboration

Adulthood describes the systems of privileged attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors that adults have over those of young people. Adulthood is driven by behaviors and attitudes that are based on the assumption that adults are more knowledgeable, equipped, informed, etc. than young people and, therefore, entitles them to act upon or on behalf of young people without their agreement. We sometimes see this play out when youth and young adults are stereotyped and discriminated against on the basis of age.

Calling out adulthood whenever and wherever it shows up in working with young people is necessary for authentic youth collaboration, as it permeates housing systems and our culture. It often manifests in how meetings are planned and facilitated, as well as in designing and providing services to young people. Adulthood is not only systemic but cultural and, like with other isms, adulthood can be carried out through small or subtle ways, including microaggressions.

Authentic collaboration with young people requires a commitment to understanding how identity shapes experiences. Understand how racism and oppression has impacted your community. Young people come into this work with various and multiple identities (e.g. Black, Indigenous, LGBTQ+, different ability, etc.) which need to be acknowledged, accepted, and understood before authentic collaboration can truly take place

Historically, people experiencing homelessness have relied on systems that have taken their power away, like when a provider makes a housing decision for a young person.

We recommend that you analyze the demographics of your CoC decision making body, as well as your YAB, to determine if the communities experiencing homelessness locally are accurately represented.

The goal is to create a CoC informed by youth expertise and in which young people are making decisions. Here are two models of authentic and effective youth collaboration:

Community Example 1:

A youth action board in a YHDP community facilitated their own focus groups with service providers to determine local gaps in serving young people, informing the CoC's plan. This YAB also decided to connect with other YABs in the region for support.

Community Example 2:

The youth action board in a YHDP community determined that the best way for them to make decisions was to establish an elected executive committee to represent the youth voice with the larger CoC board. They play a crucial role in every step of the YHDP process and will work to ensure selected projects not only meet the needs of young people but are accountable to youth/young adults.

Listening Sessions

Processing Responses and Feedback

Listening Sessions are an effective way to ensure young people are providing necessary feedback to move your collaborative work forward in a way that is not adultist. In a Listening Session, young people discuss and provide feedback about their experiences without interruption. For this to be most effective and worthwhile, here are some tips:

- Be specific about the intention. Prior to engaging in a listening session with YYA, be sure they clearly understand the intentions of any adult partners and the potential outcomes.
- Include YYA in the development of the questions/feedback forms.
- Allow YYA to facilitate when/where applicable.

Processing feedback from Listening Sessions, surveys, etc., will require shifting from a defensive response to asking questions for clarity and actually seeking to understand the youth perspective. You should also expect to receive various types of feedback.

Types of feedback:

- **Observational Feedback**, in which any stakeholders/partners (including young people, of course) observe a challenge or opportunity but either don't provide or don't necessarily have a solution or plan.
- **Negative Feedback**, in which there is dissatisfaction or frustration with the process or system that needs to be expressed. Prepare for and accept it as an opportunity to create more buy-in or collaboration.

- **Constructive Feedback**, which suggests or provides solutions or plans.

Always uplift the impact of feedback you receive from young people by telling them exactly how their feedback has changed the work or moved it forward. All stakeholders should be aware of the source of these changes; it's important that people recognize that when young people are given opportunities to advocate, they can create effective solutions.

Follow up with YYA who participate in listening sessions or any other instances where they provide feedback, to thank them for their contributions and create a space that could initiate further collaboration by talking through their feedback. If interested, this group could serve as your YAB steering committee, working to recruit, develop, and sustain the YAB. Be transparent about any challenges that you may have faced in the past and work with them to strategize on a plan for the future.

Discussion Questions:

- Recall a time when you received feedback that challenged you in a way that was uncomfortable. Did you identify it as opportunity and respond with steps for improvement or did it become a barrier to collaboration?
- How have you or might you create opportunities for feedback in your work with young people?

Transparency and Honesty

Developing a positive rapport and committing to authentic collaboration with young people requires radical transparency and honesty that goes beyond budgets. The young people you collaborate with should understand the relationships between all stakeholders and partners, have clear details about their compensation, and be privy to any changes relating to time or deadlines.

Lesson 4: Sustaining an Equitable System

Objectives

- Participants will understand the best practices for creating equity within the CoC
- Participants will be able to identify opportunities within the current structure to advance equity efforts.

Equity and the CoC

It is imperative to have at least two seats for YYA with lived experience as part of your CoC decision making body. In most cases this will mean that it has to be in writing by updating or

creating a CoC charter. Write the delegation of these two seats into the CoC charter, bylaws, and agreement.

Taking your work a step further in equity, the CoC should be representative of the community experiencing homelessness. Consistently examine your data to ensure that this goal is met. A choice point may arise around older adult partners giving up their seat on the CoC Board and encouraging it to be filled with a young person.

Last but not least, hire young people at every level. Peer support positions have been designed for young people but in ways that have limited their voice and perspective. If this is an entry point to homelessness work for young people in your community, focus on offering training that will prepare them for more advanced positions.

Discussion Questions:

- How can you ensure that beyond this project, people with lived expertise will be informing both policy and practice?
- Identify the current opportunities to incorporate youth voice in your CoC structure. How can you ensure that youth voice becomes an essential part of this work?

Lesson 5: Leadership from Within

Objectives

- Participants will understand how to prepare and promote leadership among youth action board members.
- Participants will learn best practices for hosting or facilitating YAB meetings.
- Participants will learn how to sustain youth equity in their CoC and local homelessness system.

Preparing YAB Members for Leadership

Training and tools are essential to set YAB members up for success. It is helpful to develop a specific onboarding process with YAB members so that it is reflective of what they deem appropriate.

Be mindful that if adult partners are effective in recruitment, YAB members may be at a varying skill/learning level. Offer individual training sessions and support as needed.

Be sure to ask the YAB what they want to learn more about and pace yourselves so that you are sure each member fully grasps the work they are involved in.

Some key things to consider offering are:

1. SMARTIE Goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Time Bound, **Inclusive, Equitable**)
2. Homelessness systems

- a. Systems and Processes
- b. Language
- c. Funding streams
- d. Continuum of Care
3. Developing group agreement
4. Facilitation/ public speaking

YAB/CoC Meetings

YAB Meetings are intended to be youth led and operated. Any time YABs are together, they should feel that it is their space and any older adult partners are just an occupant. As an older adult partner, be conscious of the amount of space you are taking up during a YAB meeting. Let them lead the way.

Remember: YAB members should be establishing their own agendas and able to meet without older adult partners when necessary.

In the development stage of the YAB, there should be focus on the YAB's scope of work, as well as its mission and vision. The mission and vision should then be developed into specific goals that will be supported by the CoC Board.

Prior to the development of two seats for YAB members on the CoC decision making body, please . Be sure to revisit the Youth Collaboration 101 toolkit and don't be afraid to call out adultism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, and any other oppressive behavior when it happens.

Some quick tips for meetings:

1. Challenge oppression
2. Commit to continuing your personal and professional education on equity.
3. Include YABs when developing CoC Board meeting agendas
4. Include YAB on the development of CoC Board meeting agendas
5. Be sure to have supplies for everyone
6. Have a acronym sheet that includes local entities
7. Collectively create group agreements
8. Set clear deadlines
9. Be transparent
10. Give up your seat whenever necessary

Promoting YAB Members to Leadership Roles

Most YABs are full of natural leaders. If the YAB is interested in having officer positions (president, vice-president, etc) allow them to self select. Be sure that the YAB spends time defining these roles and develops a resource that details expectations for each position.

Challenge older adult partners to consider “choice points”. Choice points are opportunities for older adult partners to substitute themselves for a younger person. Be especially conscious of how choice points may present themselves in terms of social identity (race, sexuality, gender identity, gender expression, etc).

Ask yourself if you are the best person for that opportunity or if a young person should go in your place.

Advocate for youth to be involved in every level of decision making regarding the decisions related to:

1. Hiring
2. Budgeting
3. Planning
4. System and organization level changes