

## The Magic at the Table: Building Your Youth Planning Team

Ending youth homelessness in any community requires significant planning. Assembling a team to lead an inclusive and far-reaching planning process is a key first step to success.

### Step One: Identify an Organization to Lead

The organization chosen to lead the planning process should ideally already be a leader and convener in the community. In many YHDP-awarded communities, the Collaborative Applicant has been best suited to lead this work. Utilizing existing CoC governance and planning structures can be useful because CoCs drive much of the long-term systems change and sustainability, so building CoC connections in early can be helpful. Organizations with convening power can also bring a wide array of stakeholders to the planning table early.

Inherent in the YHDP process is a commitment to youth collaboration and equity, and the lead organization should value and embody these principles. The lead organization will help to hold space for authentic youth collaboration in the community through Youth Action Board (YAB) recruitment and participation, and it will hold space for equity principles as the community explores the disparate impacts of homelessness on, for example, youth of color.

### Embedding Youth Collaboration

Previous YHDP-awarded communities have used various strategies to drive towards authentic youth collaboration throughout their planning processes. Some of those strategies include:

- Co-developing community agreements that guide discussions and establish appropriate terminology for discussions
- Prioritizing the stages of group formation – forming, storming, norming, and performing – and allowing the group time and space to work through each stage, rather than adhering to the ways the CoC has historically operated
- Ensuring support, preparation, and compensation for YAB members to fully engage in this process. This could include built in time for pre-work with YAB members, an older adult who is the point person for the YAB, and making sure YAB has time to fully engage with the content before making decisions. YAB members should always be compensated for their planning work (including transportation)
- Providing training to the planning team on creating and maintaining trauma-informed and -responsive spaces for all members to engage safely
- Offering opportunities for advancement for any interested YAB members, whether that includes ownership of group facilitation or career training at participating agencies

## Step Two: Think Big with the Youth Action Board (YAB)

At the same time the community is identifying an organization to lead the planning process, it should also be recruiting youth and young adults to join its YAB. Most communities begin with a few young people, and grow the YAB as more young people hear about the planning process that is taking place. Either way, the key step is for the community and the YAB to fully integrate with each other. The YAB should be a part of the planning team and should have decision making power, while also maintaining its own autonomy to identify and pursue goals that might be separate from YHDP.

## Step Three: Identify, Recruit, and Convene a Planning Team

Once the lead organization and YAB members have been identified, the next step is to convene a larger planning body to do the work together. Many CoCs recruit from their current membership and reach out to key stakeholders representing entities from the list below.

- Public Child Welfare Agencies
- CoC and ESG Program Recipients
- Local and State Government
- Runaway and Homeless Youth Program Providers
- Health, Mental Health, and Substance Abuse Agencies
- Juvenile and Adult Corrections and Probation
- Local and State Law Enforcement and Judges
- Public Housing Authorities
- Affordable Housing Providers
- Early Childhood Development and Child Care
- Local and State Educational Agencies
- Institutions of Higher Education
- Non-Profit Youth Organizations
- Landlords
- Privately Funded Homeless Organizations
- Local Advocacy, Research, and Philanthropic Organizations
- Community Development Corporations
- LGBTQ Organizations

Once stakeholders have responded to initial outreach and opted into the planning team, communities should review their planning team members to ensure that their partners represent the people who will be served. Consider elements like the race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and any other experiences of seated partners, and identify who is missing, and must be invited.

Additionally, when setting meeting schedules, ensure that those meetings are accessible to all involved – most importantly youth and young adults. The lead organization, or another organization that might be connected to the youth, should provide or reimburse youth and young adults for transportation to each meeting. If YAB members need childcare support to attend meetings, the planning team should help provide childcare. Additionally, communities should ensure meeting times do not prioritize the schedules of older adults over YAB members. This may mean that meeting times happen outside of business hours. The planning team should also ensure that the means of conducting meetings (e.g., the language or technology used) is accessible to YAB members whose native language may not be English, who may be unfamiliar with the acronyms and terminology homeless systems often use, and who may have never logged or called into an online conference call before.

### Step Four: Clarify Expected Roles and Responsibilities

At one of the first YHDP planning team meetings, the team should set roles, responsibilities, and meeting agreements. Throughout the planning process, various planning team members' roles may shift, and voicing this from the onset will help the entire team build trust and accountability with each other. The community may also decide to form different groups to meet the various needs of the planning process. For instance, there may be a smaller group that meets weekly, and brings decisions to a larger group that meets monthly.

Furthermore, the lead organization may need to work closely with cross-system partners at the table (e.g., stakeholders from the child welfare and education systems) to help them understand their role. To apply for YHDP funds, certain system partners will need to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), but once specific projects are funded, communities need to operationalize what was laid out in that MOU. Cross-system partners are frequently responsible for collecting and sharing data about youth in their systems, participating in system modeling, drafting and executing certain action steps, and bringing any additional resources from their system to the table.

### Step Five: Define a Clear Decision Making Structure

Once roles and responsibilities have been defined, the next step is to define a clear decision making structure. Most YHDP communities define a new decision making structure for their planning body, although it may be based on how the CoC usually makes decisions. Most communities rely on a consensus decision making model, with clear lines of communication between decision making bodies like the planning team, the YAB, and the CoC board. YAB approval is also required for major decisions, such as finalizing their CCP and determining which projects they will fund with the YHDP award.

Furthermore, because the YHDP planning process is a CoC effort, the lead organization or planning team should set communication expectations for how often communication will

happen with the CoC collaborative applicant, the CoC board, other policymaking entities and general membership in the CoC.

### Step Six: Leveraging Funding to Support Planning Activities

The YHDP process can use CoC and YHDP planning grants to support both YAB involvement and other organizational staff throughout the planning process – including hiring a consultant to support planning activities and writing a coordinated community plan. Under YHDP, an awarded community could apply to use up to 3% of their YHDP award for eligible planning activities. Additionally, some communities have used other government funding, as well as philanthropic and other sources to support these activities.

### Step Seven: Orienting the YHDP Planning Team Orientation

Once the YHDP planning team has been convened and the decisions detailed above have been made, it is critical to onboard the planning team to some key parts of the YHDP process. The planning team should understand the objectives, goals, and requirements of YHDP, including what information and decisions must be included in the coordinated community plan, what principles the planning and implementation process must include (e.g., authentic youth collaboration, equity, and trauma-informed and –responsive practices), and how systems thinking will inform the design and implementation of YHDP-funded projects.

### Potential Challenges

As YHDP lead organizations, YABs, and planning teams move through the YHDP planning process, they may face a number of common challenges. Time constraints may lead the team to push a planning process forward without a fully formed YAB. They should continue to focus on ensuring that authentic and non-tokenized youth voice informs their planning process and decisions while working to recruit and support a sustainable YAB body. It can also be challenging to cultivate buy-in from new partners unfamiliar with the homeless system, or from seasoned partners who are unwilling to shift how they operate in alignment with YHDP values and principles. The group should work to hold each other accountable to showing up fully to this work. Finally, the planning team may also face challenges in pivoting away from white-dominant norms, including any embedded barriers to innovations that exist within current CoC structures. The organizing body should strive to hold space for progress when this arises and should work with existing CoC entities and structures to negotiate feasible changes to improve outcomes from this work.