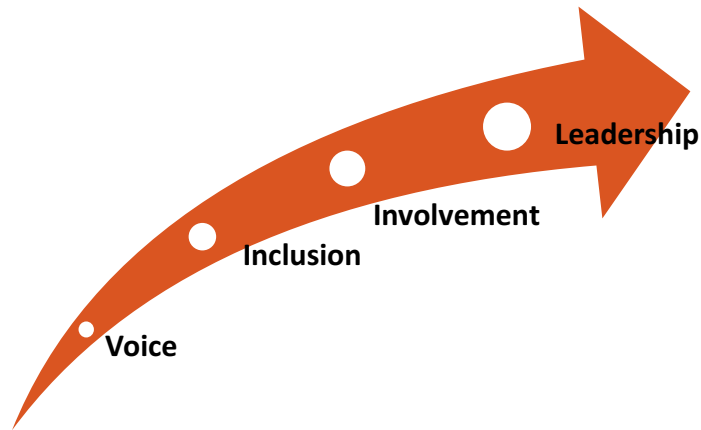




Engaging young people who have been or are currently involved in the juvenile justice system is a priority to achieve the desired results of deep end system reform, including eliminating racial disparities, eliminating the unnecessary use of out-of-home placements, and improving outcomes for youth. Youth engagement is not achieved by simply having a youth voice at the table; it's achieved by creating space to learn from and work in partnership with youth who have been impacted by the justice system on the development of policies, practices, and programs. This requires adult decision makers to allow youth to have an equal voice, power, and opportunity to influence reform. Young people who have been impacted by the justice system should not only advise on the work, they should be partners in leading it as well. Below you will find Do's and Don'ts to achieve meaningful youth engagement, as well as suggested frameworks to help your jurisdiction grapple with what youth engagement means.



DO:

- ▶ Be willing to listen and learn.
- ▶ Be mindful of how much adults are talking compared to youth to allow for shared “air time”.
- ▶ Be open to new ways of doing things.
- ▶ Keep it real and be transparent about what is possible.
- ▶ Distribute power equally with youth. They should not just be a voice, they should be a partner.
- ▶ Create a safe space where youth will feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and opinions.
- ▶ Allow youth to facilitate and co-facilitate. Youth should be able to lead a group of adults as well.
- ▶ Take chances. Support and invest in youths’ ideas for system reform.
- ▶ Support youth to be effective leaders in the field, not just another voice at the table.
- ▶ Acknowledge and respect the experiences, expertise and insights youth carry.
- ▶ Educate youth on how policy and practice works in your jurisdiction or organization, and who the key stakeholders are.
- ▶ Provide incentives and compensation for youth
- ▶ Have adults serve as mentors for youth.
- ▶ Acknowledge that there are age gaps between youth and adults and find meaningful ways to engage both sides in conversation. Team building exercises help.
- ▶ Recognize that “young people” as a group are very diverse –they have different levels of education, racial/ethnic backgrounds, and lifestyles.

DON'T:

- ▶ Do not come into a meeting thinking you know it all.
- ▶ Share the power. Power should not be concentrated amongst a few adults, it should be equally distributed.
- ▶ Do not create a space where adults set the agenda and youth are only there to provide advice. This creates an atmosphere for “tokenism”.
- ▶ Do not put down the ideas of youth.
- ▶ Do not give youth hope where none exists.
- ▶ Do not include youth as just another “agenda” item.
- ▶ Do not disrespect youth or use their stories against them.
- ▶ Do not shut youth out from important information and/or conversations
- ▶ Do not allow one youth to be the voice for all youth in the form of a “youth representative”.
- ▶ Do not take away money from youth-led initiatives.
- ▶ Do not dismiss youth because of their different levels of education, ethnic/racial background, or lifestyle.
- ▶ Do not limit yourself to the “way things are always done.”

Roles for Youth

- Youth as Facilitators
- Youth as Researchers
- Youth as Planners
- Youth as Organizers
- Youth as Decision-Makers
- Youth as Advocates
- Youth as Evaluators
- Youth as Experts

Benefits of Engaging Youth

- Development of well-informed policies, practices, and programs
- Fresh perspective
- Bridges data and research with individual perspectives
- Catches blind spots
- Supports youth empowerment and confidence
- Builds the next generation of leaders
- Builds bridges between youth, families, and practitioners
- Challenges stereotypes
- Credible messengers for juvenile justice reform
- Increases relevancy of reform efforts

Ladder of Youth Voice



8. Youth/Adult Equity
7. Completely Youth-Driven
6. Youth/Adult Equality
5. Youth Consulted
4. Youth Informed
3. Tokenism
2. Decoration
1. Manipulation

Adapted by Adam Fletcher (2011) from work by Roger Hart, et al. (1994)
