



ADVANCING YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIP: A TOOL KIT FOR SHARED LEADERSHIP ACROSS GENERATIONS

ABOUT THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private philanthropy that creates a brighter future for the nation's children and youth by developing solutions to strengthen families, build paths to economic opportunity and transform struggling communities into safer and healthier places to live, work and grow. For more information, visit the Foundation's website at www.aecf.org.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This tool kit reflects years of collaboration between young people and adults who believe communities are strongest when different generations lead together, including youth leaders, adult partners, organizational leaders, facilitators and technical assistance providers.

The Casey Foundation thanks the organizations that participated in the Intergenerational Learning Collaborative and pilot process: BRIDGES USA, Community Leaders in Action (CLIA), Gente Organizada, Mirror Group LLC, National Collaborative for Transformative Youth Policy, Partnership for Southern Equity, Point Source Youth, The Lighthouse | Black Girl Projects, Voices for Virginia's Children, Youth INC and Youthprise. The Foundation is also grateful to the additional organizations, partners and contributors whose wisdom and experiences helped strengthen this work.

This tool kit would not exist without the young people who brought honesty, creativity and leadership to every stage and the adults who committed to learning, listening and building alongside them. Together, these intergenerational teams demonstrated what meaningful partnership can look like in practice.

Photography © Tafari Melisizwe

© 2026 THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION, BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

Permission to copy, disseminate or otherwise use information from this series is granted with appropriate acknowledgment. For more information, visit www.aecf.org/copyright.

CONTENTS

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

2 About This Tool Kit

PART I: INTERGENERATIONAL PARTNERSHIP SPECTRUM

6 Spectrum Overview

8 Defining the Stage

10 Building Collaboration

12 Sustaining the Work

14 Measuring Change

PART II: ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS

19 Organizational Readiness Assessment Instructions and Scoring

22 Organizational Readiness Assessment

PART III: CORE INSIGHTS AND PRACTICES

34 Core Insights

41 Core Practices

APPENDIX: FACILITATION GUIDE AND SESSION RESOURCES

50 Facilitation Guide

54 Sample Summary

55 Understanding Your Scores

BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION



ABOUT THIS TOOL KIT

Communities and organizations across the country are partnering with young people to help shape programs, policies and systems that affect their lives, taking on priorities such as establishing peer-led advocacy networks, co-designing grant-funding processes and creating paid staff roles for youth leaders. Youth engagement can take many forms — from providing input and feedback to serving in advisory roles and sharing personal experience to inform decisions.

Youth-adult partnership, also referred to as intergenerational partnership, reflects a particular depth of engagement where young people and adults share responsibility, learning and leadership in shaping decisions and direction together. Organizations may pursue different forms of youth engagement based on their mission, context, capacity and readiness.

This tool kit aims to help strengthen approaches to youth-adult partnership by:

- clarifying what distinguishes engagement from partnership;
- providing a shared language for intergenerational practice;
- offering tools to assess organizational readiness for partnership;
- highlighting core insights about what enables authentic youth-adult collaboration; and
- supporting reflection on decision making, culture and leadership across generations.

HOW THE TOOL KIT WAS DEVELOPED

To ground this framework in practice, the Casey Foundation launched the Intergenerational Learning

Collaborative — a two-year pilot network bringing together youth leaders, adult allies, technical assistance providers and community organizations across the country. Through real-world application, reflection and iteration, this collaborative examined the internal organizational conditions that support or constrain shared leadership, identifying common structural tensions and turning points. The resulting framework and resources capture common themes that emerged across these diverse pilot sites, rather than representing a single organization's experience.

To learn more about the background, participating cohorts and broader goals of this national pilot, see the Foundation's blog post "[Deepening Intergenerational Partnerships in Community Work](#)."

BUILDING ON THE ENGAGEMENT CONTINUUM

The tool kit builds on the Casey Foundation's previous continuum of youth engagement strategies, which established that organizations can operate effectively at various points along a continuum based on their mission and capacity. That core premise remains true: There is no single "correct" way to engage young people, and consultative or input-driven models are vital, valid components of a healthy youth ecosystem.

Meaningful youth-adult partnership gets stronger when organizations commit not only to programming, but also to internal structures, norms and leadership practices.

While the original continuum mapped out the overall landscape of engagement, this tool kit focuses specifically on organizations choosing to shift into deep, intergenerational shared leadership. It isolates the internal administrative systems, cultural norms and governance structures required to safely anchor and sustain true youth-adult partnership over the long term. It does not replace previous models; rather, it demystifies the operational mechanics required for those pursuing joint decision-making authority.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

The tool kit contains three parts. Together, they provide conceptual grounding, a structured assessment process and lessons drawn from practice. While each section can stand on its own, they are designed to build on one another — moving from mutual understanding to organizational reflection to applied insight.



Part I: Intergenerational Partnership Spectrum

A developmental framework. The spectrum describes how youth-adult partnership matures over time, helping teams establish a common language and recognize operational patterns across decisions, responsibility and culture.



Part II: Readiness Assessment

A structured, score-based diagnostic. This section evaluates organizational capacity, helping cross-generational teams measure systemic alignment and identify structural bottlenecks.



Part III: Core Insights and Practices

Actionable patterns and illustrative practices. Distilled from the two-year pilot of the Casey Foundation's Intergenerational Learning Collaborative, this section offers practical guidance for making shared authority a reality.

The **Appendix** of this tool kit includes a facilitation guide and supplemental materials for processing results through intergenerational dialogue.

THE PARTNERSHIP PATHWAY

Organizations come to this tool kit with varying levels of knowledge and experience in intergenerational practice. No matter where your team is on the partnership spectrum, the Organizational Readiness Assessment is designed to help you set a clear baseline.

To navigate these resources for the first time, select the description below that best matches your team's current focus.

NEW TO INTERGENERATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

If your organization is new to intergenerational partnership and focused on building a baseline ...

STEP 1. Read **Part I: Intergenerational Partnership Spectrum** to establish a shared, cross-generational vocabulary and gain a conceptual understanding of the five developmental stages.

STEP 2. Have team members independently complete the assessment in **Part II: Organizational Readiness** and calculate your overall baseline score and youth/adult score comparison to pinpoint which specific structural, cultural or leadership conditions are completely new to your organization. Then use the **Facilitation Guide (Appendix)** to talk through the results together.

STEP 3. Read **Part III: Core Insights and Practices** to learn about the real-world tensions and lessons other organizations experienced, so you can prepare your team for the human and relational shifts ahead.

EXISTING YOUTH PROGRAMS

If your organization has existing youth programs and wants to evaluate or deepen current systems ...

STEP 1. Move directly to **Part II: Organizational Readiness** to have youth participants, program staff and leadership independently complete the assessment to evaluate your current day-to-day operations.

STEP 2. Use the **Facilitation Guide (Appendix)** to hold a structured, 90-minute cross-generational workshop to safely process your results, paying close attention to where youth and adult scores vary.

STEP 3. Review **Part I: Intergenerational Partnership Spectrum** to study the specific Progress Indicators, Success Metrics and Red Flags for your scored stage, then read **Part III: Core Insights and Practices** for patterns and practices other organizations have used to navigate common roadblocks.

FULLY EMBEDDED SHARED LEADERSHIP

If your organization has fully embedded shared leadership and wants to prevent backsliding ...

STEP 1. Run the assessment in **Part II: Organizational Readiness** as a routine pulse-check, focusing on the **Red Flag Checklist** at the end of Part II to ensure that high performance isn't masking youth burnout or lapses in adult accountability, and use the **Facilitation Guide (Appendix)** to process results across generations.

STEP 2. Review the thematic tables in **Part I: Intergenerational Partnership Spectrum** to audit your infrastructure and ensure your shared structures can withstand leadership transitions or funding shifts.

STEP 3. Read **Part III: Core Insights and Practices** as a continuous learning tool to help your mature team navigate the most complex relational dynamics of long-term partnership, such as managing pacing tensions and leaning on agreements under pressure.



PART I: INTERGENERATIONAL PARTNERSHIP SPECTRUM

INTERGENERATIONAL PARTNERSHIP SPECTRUM

Youth-adult partnership develops over time, and the path is rarely smooth. The Intergenerational Partnership Spectrum offers teams a common language for that journey. The stages are distinguished by patterns in how decisions are made, how responsibility is shared and how consistently collaboration is supported by systems and culture. Organizations may recognize themselves in more than one stage at the same time.

Across the learning collaborative, young people described being included but not consistently shaping decisions. Adults wanted deeper collaboration yet felt unsure how to navigate disagreement or shift established roles. Program staff carried the work without full departmental support, and leadership teams struggled to translate intergenerational values into operational systems.

THE CHALLENGE WAS ALIGNMENT, NOT COMMITMENT.

The spectrum clarifies decision-making structures between youth and adults and highlights the organizational conditions necessary to deepen and sustain intergenerational collaboration.

Each stage reflects a different way young people and adults are working together inside an organization. In earlier stages, young people may be present in conversations, but final decisions remain largely in the hands of adults. In intermediate stages, youth influence begins to grow, though systems and adult preparation may still be catching up. In more advanced stages, shared decision making becomes less dependent on individual champions and more integrated into governance, budgeting, hiring and strategic planning processes.

Organizations want to know where they are on the spectrum, what defines each stage, what signals movement, what risks accompany advancement and what conditions need to be in place before advancing.



SPECTRUM OVERVIEW



THE DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

The Intergenerational Partnership Spectrum includes five developmental stages:

- Foundational
- Emerging
- Thriving
- Integrated
- Transformational

These five stages present a high-level view of how intergenerational partnership takes shape over time. It is common for organizations to operate on several stages at once. That complexity is expected.

USING THE SPECTRUM

The spectrum provides a framework for intergenerational partnership that teams can use to orient themselves as they navigate the work. While the

diagnostic assessment in Part II pinpoints an organization's baseline level, exploring the stages first helps teams recognize where their daily practices, structures and cultural norms may be out of alignment with their leadership-sharing goals.

Reflecting on these stages calls for honest dialogue between youth and adults, who experience partnership differently across roles. Young people, program staff, operational teams and leadership may have distinct perspectives on how collaboration is functioning. Creating space for those perspectives to be expressed and compared strengthens understanding and alignment.

This work also requires tolerance for tension. As patterns become visible, internal gaps may feel more pronounced before they stabilize. Expanding responsibility without strengthening infrastructure can create strain, and strengthening systems without expanding youth influence can lead to stagnation. Sustainable intergenerational partnership depends on both moving together.

A CLOSER LOOK AT EACH STAGE

On the following pages, each stage of the spectrum is examined through four thematic tables — defining the stage, building collaboration, sustaining the work and measuring change. Together, they show what a stage looks like in practice.

DEFINING THE STAGE	DESCRIPTION		FOCUS AREAS	
	A practical definition of the stage, including real-world examples of common pitfalls		The specific priorities an organization needs to address before trying to advance further	
BUILDING COLLABORATION	KEY CHAMPIONS		REFLECTION QUESTIONS	TRANSPARENCY MARKERS
	The key roles (such as executive and youth leaders) needed to actively support, model and sustain collaborative leadership		Guiding questions to help intergenerational teams honestly assess their alignment and capacity	The specific level of information sharing expected to develop trust, from meeting updates to full budgetary access
SUSTAINING THE WORK	SUSTAINABILITY REQUIREMENTS		ANTICIPATED COSTS	
	The administrative and cultural infrastructure (such as stable payment systems and dedicated staff time) needed to support youth-adult partnership		Estimates of the financial resources required to fund stipends, training and resources for the stage	
MEASURING CHANGE	PROGRESS INDICATORS		SUCCESS METRICS	RED FLAGS
	The qualitative shifts, emerging practices and observable behaviors that signal an organization is translating values into practice		The quantifiable targets, formalized structures and embedded policies required to measure and sustain the partnership	The early warning signs of superficial partnership, burnout or systemic misalignment

DEFINING THE STAGE

	DESCRIPTION	FOCUS AREAS
 FOUNDATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION	Organizations are setting the foundation for intergenerational partnership. The priority is creating the conditions for trust, readiness and operational follow-through. This includes compensating youth for time, orienting both youth and adults and identifying clear champions who can sustain the effort. Intergenerational partnership is more intention than habit; youth are present and occasionally contribute ideas, but real decision-making authority still sits with adults. <i>A common pitfall: A community nonprofit begins inviting youth to monthly leadership meetings. Youth share ideas, but agendas are preset by adults and follow-up with the young people rarely happens.</i>	▪ Establish clear and mutual understanding of why youth voice matters. ▪ Strengthen administrative systems such as human resources (HR), finance and communications so youth participation is logistically possible and equitable. ▪ Create basic feedback loops to ensure youth receive clear updates on how their input is used. ▪ Begin to build relationships rooted in trust, transparency and respect.
 EMERGING PARTNERSHIP	The organization moves from intention to early integration. Youth begin co-facilitating meetings, joining advisory groups and testing out joint decision-making roles. Adults are learning to let go of control and redesign spaces to be more accessible by using plain language, explaining context and creating room for youth-led innovation. In this stage, organizations experiment with shared leadership and encounter real-time lessons about equity, feedback and pacing. <i>A common pitfall: A city program lets youth help hire new staff but doesn't train them in interview skills. Adults quietly make the final hiring decision.</i>	▪ Develop and document youth and adult roles. ▪ Ensure feedback loops close consistently and visibly. ▪ Support adults with training in collaboration, facilitation and conflict navigation.
 THRIVING IMPLEMENTATION	Intergenerational partnership is operational. Youth co-lead major organizational initiatives, help shape budgets and hiring and collaborate with adults as trusted colleagues. Adults are supporters and co-learners, implementing youth-driven ideas and holding each other accountable to shared agreements. In this stage, organizations often see the most visible culture change: Meetings feel different, decision making is more inclusive and both youth and adults start identifying as intergenerational leaders. <i>A common pitfall: A youth council helps redesign a budget process, but decisions bottleneck with senior leadership who hesitate to fully shift authority.</i>	▪ Strengthen accountability systems and peer-to-peer feedback. ▪ Embed youth-adult partnership language in job descriptions, evaluations and policies. ▪ Support youth in longer-term leadership pathways such as mentorship and paid roles.

INTEGRATED PARTNERSHIP

DESCRIPTION

Intergenerational partnership has become part of the organization's identity. Systems now reflect shared leadership: Onboarding includes intergenerational training, budgets are transparent and alumni are in paid or governance roles.

The organization operates with maturity and confidence, but must stay vigilant against backsliding if champions leave or funding shifts. Integration at this stage means building mechanisms that outlast individuals such as codified policies, embedded training and intergenerational leadership pipelines.

A common pitfall: An organization's youth alumni become paid facilitators, but new hires without intergenerational partnership training begin reverting to traditional norms.

FOCUS

- Maintain alignment across leadership transitions and staff turnover.
- Use data and evaluation to track the impact of intergenerational practice.
- Continue supporting alumni as leaders, staff and mentors.

TRANSFORMATION ACHIEVEMENT

Intergenerational partnership spreads beyond the organization, influencing peers, funders and systems to adopt similar approaches. Alumni mentor new youth leaders, the work attracts external recognition and community outcomes demonstrate the power of shared leadership.

Transformation requires continuous reflection, learning and adaptation to avoid stagnation or a focus on appearances. The focus shifts from internal implementation to field leadership, coalition building and sustainability across generations.

A common pitfall: A coalition earns national recognition for its youth-adult governance model but stops adapting practices or engaging new youth voices.

- Model authentic intergenerational leadership for the field.
- Share tools, lessons and data externally to strengthen the movement.
- Build feedback mechanisms with community and partners to stay accountable.

BUILDING COLLABORATION

	KEY CHAMPIONS	REFLECTION QUESTIONS	TRANSPARENCY MARKERS
 FOUNDATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION	▪ Executive and senior leadership, to champion youth engagement as a strategic priority ▪ Finance, HR and administrative staff, to operationalize stipends, scheduling and communication systems ▪ Program managers, to model openness and learning alongside youth	▪ Do youth understand how decisions are made and where their input fits in? ▪ Are our basic systems (payments, communication, scheduling) reliable and timely enough? ▪ Is our youth compensation structure fair, transparent and sustainable given our current capacity? ▪ What minimum investments (staff time, budget, onboarding) are required to stabilize this stage before moving forward?	▪ Basic information is shared. ▪ Youth are notified of meeting updates, summaries and decisions after they are made. ▪ Adults control what information is distributed and when. ▪ Youth have some insight into organizational constraints, processes or reasoning.
 EMERGING PARTNERSHIP	▪ Midlevel managers and program staff, to implement partnership practices day to day ▪ Youth participants, to define and navigate expectations, boundaries and leadership opportunities ▪ Adult champions, to model humility and vulnerability in shifting authority	▪ Are youth and adults clear about roles, decision-making authority and expectations? ▪ Are we consistently closing feedback loops and showing how youth input shaped decisions? ▪ What kinds of support (training, context, redesign of technical spaces) do youth need to participate confidently? ▪ What financial or staffing resources must be increased to advance toward shared leadership?	▪ Adults clearly explain how decisions will be made and how youth input will be used. ▪ Adults share timelines and goals ahead of time. ▪ Youth understand organizational context and what is or is not flexible.
 THRIVING IMPLEMENTATION	▪ Cross-departmental leaders, to integrate partnership across all programs ▪ Communications and development teams, to align storytelling and funding strategies with intergenerational values ▪ Youth leaders and alumni, to mentor peers and hold adults accountable for equitable collaboration	▪ Are youth receiving enough support to avoid burnout as responsibilities increase? ▪ How effectively are we navigating conflict, tension or differing generational expectations? ▪ Are our systems (HR, budgeting, onboarding) keeping pace with cultural shifts toward shared leadership? ▪ What long-term structures or leadership pathways do we need to sustain this level of partnership?	▪ Drafts, budgets, agendas and planning documents are jointly accessible. ▪ Youth and adults review information together before decisions are made. ▪ Influence becomes more visible because information flows both ways: Adults share context, and youth share analysis.

INTEGRATED PARTNERSHIP

KEY CHAMPIONS

- Board members, to formally adopt and monitor intergenerational goals in governance
- HR and senior management, to institutionalize training, onboarding and evaluation
- Alumni and long-term youth partners, to sustain organizational memory and culture

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Can our intergenerational practices withstand staff turnover, leadership changes or growth?
- Is transparency consistent and paired with the right level of youth preparation?
- Are alumni and youth leaders compensated, trained and supported in equitable ways?
- What multiyear funding or staffing commitments are needed to maintain integrated partnership?

TRANSPARENCY MARKERS

- Full operational transparency across departments.
- Budget information, hiring processes, evaluation data and strategic decisions are accessible and explained in plain language.
- Youth and adults co-lead internal updates and decision reviews.

TRANSFORMATION ACHIEVEMENT

- External partners and funders, to invest in and amplify intergenerational models
- Policy influencers, to integrate youth-adult partnership principles into systems-level change
- Youth alumni and community members, to keep the organization grounded and evolving

- How do we continue learning and adapting rather than becoming stagnant or focused on appearances?
- Are our transparency practices supportive, not overwhelming or misaligned with youth authority?
- What long-term financial strategies (funding streams, earned revenue, partnerships) will sustain this model?
- How do we ensure strong alumni pathways so leadership continues across generations?

- Transparency becomes a cultural signature.
- Youth and adults jointly communicate decisions, trade-offs and outcomes to the organization and the wider community.
- Participatory budgeting and open evaluation are standard.

SUSTAINING THE WORK

	SUSTAINABILITY REQUIREMENTS	ANTICIPATED COSTS
 FOUNDATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION	▪ Consistent youth compensation budget and reliable payment systems ▪ Staff time allocated for relationship building and onboarding ▪ Minimal but stable administrative capacity to support youth logistics ▪ Early relationships and networks: a few adult champions and trusted youth representatives	Typical Expenses ▪ Youth stipends for initial meetings or advisory contributions ▪ Staff time for coordination and onboarding ▪ Logistical accessibility (food, transportation, basic technology) ▪ Initial training for adults on basics of youth engagement Areas Requiring Investment ▪ Establishing basic readiness systems ▪ Building reliable payment and communication infrastructure ANNUAL COST RANGE: \$10,000–\$40,000
 EMERGING PARTNERSHIP	▪ Increased staff capacity to coach, co-facilitate and manage feedback loops ▪ Dedicated program coordination time to maintain momentum ▪ Financial resources for youth stipends, training and meeting accessibility (food, transportation, technology) ▪ Growing relationships and networks: cross-department buy-in and youth participation in multiple programs	Typical Expenses ▪ Youth stipends for regular engagement and co-facilitation ▪ Staff time for relationship and process management ▪ Minigrants for youth-led projects ▪ Training for both youth and adults (conflict navigation, shared leadership) ▪ Advanced accessibility (interpretation, tailored tech, meeting design) Areas Requiring Investment ▪ Launching feedback loops ▪ Starting youth involvement in technical spaces like hiring or budgeting ANNUAL COST RANGE: \$40,000–\$85,000
 THRIVING IMPLEMENTATION	▪ Budget for youth leadership pathways such as peer mentorship, paid roles and training ▪ Capital investments in technology, meeting spaces and communication tools that support co-leadership ▪ Sufficient staffing to maintain feedback loops, implement youth-led ideas and document shared decisions ▪ Strong relationships and networks: trusted interpersonal connections across the organization, consistent adult practice and emerging alumni support	Typical Expenses ▪ Paid youth leadership roles (such as youth advisory councils and youth co-facilitators) ▪ Stipends for youth engaged in hiring, budgeting and curriculum design ▪ Dedicated staff support (0.25–0.5 full-time role) ▪ Professional development for youth leaders in areas such as budgeting, public speaking and facilitation ▪ Operational support for implementing youth-driven ideas Areas Requiring Investment ▪ Increasing youth influence ▪ Launching or developing multiple youth-led or co-led initiatives ▪ Strengthening accountability systems and documentation ANNUAL COST RANGE: \$85,000–\$150,000

INTEGRATED PARTNERSHIP

SUSTAINABILITY REQUIREMENTS

- Intergenerational partnership integrated into general operating budgets
- HR infrastructure that embeds partnership in onboarding, evaluations and staffing
- Relationships and networks ingrained in organizational culture: alumni in staff roles, intergenerational norms shared across teams
- Capital investments in durable systems (databases, communication frameworks, evaluation tools)

ANTICIPATED COSTS

Typical Expenses

- Alumni and youth staff or board roles (part time or full time)
- Intergenerational onboarding system, training modules and staff development
- Fully participatory budgeting process
- Technology systems for communication, evaluation and strengthening organizational culture
- Dedicated intergenerational partnership staff (0.5–1 full-time role)

Areas Requiring Investment

- Embedding intergenerational partnership across departments
- Building sustainable HR and administrative systems
- Formalizing alumni pathways and long-term leadership structures

ANNUAL COST RANGE: \$150,000–\$250,000+

TRANSFORMATION ACHIEVEMENT

- Multiyear funding (public, philanthropic and earned revenue) explicitly dedicated to youth-adult partnership
- Ability to attract and mobilize external capital through field leadership, consulting and partnerships
- Deep relationships and networks: a recognized alumni network, cross-sector coalitions and strong community trust
- Organizational capacity to support replication, coaching, field-facing communications and continuous innovation

Typical Expenses

- Full youth-adult co-leadership staffing structure
- Alumni leadership pipelines and mentorship stipends
- Field-building public communications and documentation
- Travel and speaking opportunities for intergenerational leaders (for dissemination, visibility and partnership development)
- Organizational learning, evaluation and research collaborations

Areas Requiring Investment

- Serving as a “model site” with external demand
- Hosting site visits, advising partners and producing tools
- Sponsoring innovation, evaluation and deep community engagement

ANNUAL COST RANGE: \$250,000–\$500,000+

MEASURING CHANGE

	PROGRESS INDICATORS	SUCCESS METRICS	RED FLAGS
 FOUNDATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION	▪ Youth are present in some decisions; adults show early openness. ▪ Basic systems for payments, communication and onboarding are in place. ▪ Basic feedback loops are established; youth get clear updates on how their input shaped decisions. ▪ Early budget allocations are made for youth engagement.	▪ Youth compensation systems function reliably. ▪ At least 60% of youth feel heard or somewhat influential. ▪ Adults show 70% comfort with youth-led contributions. ▪ Youth understand what was decided and why. ▪ A small, predictable budget line exists for youth stipends and meeting access.	▪ Youth tokenism (representation without real influence) ▪ Delayed or weak administrative systems ▪ Limited transparency; youth informed only after decisions ▪ Adults unclear on youth roles or readiness; early signs of adultism (biases or practices that prioritize adults' authority over young people) ▪ Ambition exceeding staffing or budget capacity
 EMERGING PARTNERSHIP	▪ Youth co-facilitate meetings and serve in early advisory roles. ▪ Roles, expectations and decision pathways are documented. ▪ Processes and timelines are explained in advance (process transparency). ▪ Youth receive consistent stipends; staff time is allocated to partnership work.	▪ Youth co-lead 25–30% of meetings. ▪ Youth understand decision timelines, criteria and constraints. ▪ Feedback loops close consistently and visibly. ▪ Youth are compensated for facilitation, preparation and advisory work. ▪ Organization demonstrates sustainability through dedicated staff time and training resources.	▪ Inconsistent follow-through and weak feedback loops ▪ Youth in technical spaces without support or context ▪ Adults defaulting to final decision making despite shared process ▪ Over-reliance on a few high-capacity youth (potentially leading to youth fatigue) ▪ Disconnected departments slowing or blocking cross-team adoption
 THRIVING IMPLEMENTATION	▪ Youth influence major decisions and co-lead core processes. ▪ Adults implement youth recommendations or explain why they were not implemented. ▪ Drafts, budgets and plans shared for joint review (collaborative transparency). ▪ Youth leadership pathways and dedicated staff capacity are in place.	▪ 80%+ youth report meaningful influence on decisions. ▪ Adults implement 75%+ of youth recommendations and provide transparent rationale when they don't. ▪ Youth have shared access to draft agendas, budgets and planning documents. ▪ Youth are retained 6–9 months with consistent leadership opportunities. ▪ Sustainability is evident through paid youth leadership pathways and 0.25–0.5 full-time staff support.	▪ Youth taking on too much without adequate support or compensation ▪ Uneven transparency across departments ▪ Culture shifting faster than systems (HR, budgeting and onboarding) ▪ Staff capacity strained as expectations increase

INTEGRATED PARTNERSHIP

PROGRESS INDICATORS

- Youth and adults share ownership across departments.
- Intergenerational norms are embedded in HR, onboarding and evaluation.
- Full budget context is accessible, and youth participate in fiscal planning (operational transparency).
- Alumni leadership pathways are supported.

SUCCESS METRICS

- 100% of staff job descriptions and performance evaluations contain specific skills for sharing authority and intergenerational performance indicators.
- 100% of new staff receive onboarding that includes intergenerational partnership expectations.
- Youth or youth alumni participate in at least 75% of organization-wide strategic planning, budgeting and governance processes.
- Mature sustainability systems include recurring operating budget lines, participatory budgeting processes and intergenerational HR infrastructure.

RED FLAGS

- Practices regressing during staff or leadership turnover
- Insufficient funding or staffing to sustain shared leadership
- Inconsistent adoption across programs or teams
- Excessive transparency without support, creating confusion or anxiety
- Administrative burden outpacing system capacity

TRANSFORMATION ACHIEVEMENT

- The organization is recognized as a model site; youth and adults co-lead externally.
- Participatory budgeting, evaluation and communications are fully shared (transformative transparency).
- Alumni networks and strong cross-sector partnerships are sustained.
- Work is funded through stable, long-term investment.

- At least two external organizations annually seek the organization's guidance, tools or technical assistance to strengthen their own intergenerational partnership practices.
- 75% of external communications reflect youth-originated ideas or priorities.
- Multiyear funding commitments are secured at the organizational level.
- Strong sustainability structure includes alumni mentorship networks, external partnerships and evaluation systems.

- Stagnation; external recognition without continuous adaptation or new youth engagement

PART II: ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS



ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS

While the Intergenerational Partnership Spectrum provides a conceptual framework for understanding the stages of partnership, an Organizational Readiness Assessment helps teams identify where their partnership currently stands in practice and whether the conditions required to sustain or advance it are actually in place. Without this assessment, organizations may unintentionally proceed before they are able to support the partnership, leading to confusion, frustration or diminished trust among youth and adults.

Teams can take the assessment to calculate their readiness score, then use that score to plot their organization on the spectrum to see which of the five stages they are currently in. Once the assessment is complete, they can use the facilitation guide in the Appendix of this tool kit to navigate a structured group conversation about their results.



Young people and adults need to be ready to share leadership. **The organization must be ready to prepare and support them both.**

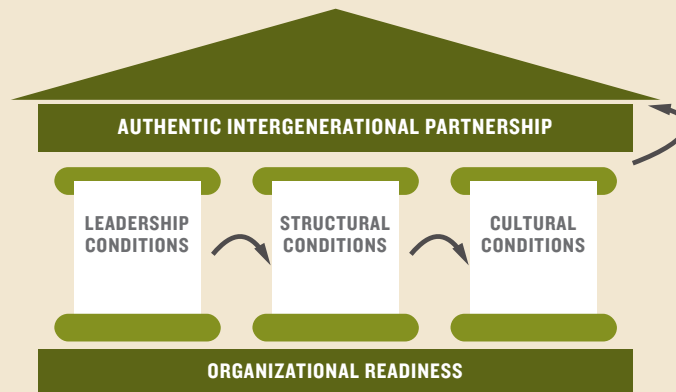
Organizational readiness requires actively preparing the environment, the adults and the young people to share leadership meaningfully and effectively. Youth readiness grows through exposure and support and not by being held to adult-defined standards of maturity or professionalism. Adults shape the environment youth walk into, so their readiness is essential for the partnership to feel authentic and safe.

THREE PILLARS OF ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS

Organizational readiness is built on three interdependent domains: leadership conditions, cultural conditions and cultural conditions. Together,

these domains shape whether an organization can support authentic intergenerational work, overcome the natural tensions that arise and sustain the partnership over time.

Sustainable partnership requires an organization to build the operational systems that support youth — such as reliable compensation, clear onboarding, mentorship and leadership pathways — while intentionally equipping adults with the skills to share authority and conversational space and to navigate discomfort. Instead of viewing youth and adults as separately responsible for their own readiness, a successful organization embeds the support for both groups directly into its core infrastructure.



Leadership **activates** structure, structure **enables** culture and culture **sustains** partnership.

LEADERSHIP CONDITIONS

Leadership conditions focus on the commitments, behaviors and decisions made by senior leaders, managers and others in positions of authority. Leaders set priorities and control resources. Their actions, clarity and consistency determine whether intergenerational partnership is an organizational priority or an optional program. Leadership conditions include modeling shared leadership, allocating resources, setting expectations and aligning organizational strategy with intergenerational goals.

STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS

Structural conditions refer to the tangible operational systems that enable youth and adults to participate effectively. Even when motivations are high, insufficient structural support is one of the most common reasons intergenerational partnerships falter. Structures determine whether youth can be compensated on time, whether communication is clear and whether organizational processes and meeting formats are accessible. Organizational values are important, but structures determine whether those values are lived out consistently.

CULTURAL CONDITIONS

Cultural conditions describe the norms, relationships, habits and shared expectations that shape how people experience the organization. Culture influences whether youth are respected and trusted, whether adults recognize youth as partners and whether there is space for authentic dialogue, conflict and reflection. Culture is what makes partnership feel safe, meaningful and equitable. Without supportive cultural conditions, even strong systems can become unwelcoming or hollow.

ONGOING READINESS PRACTICE

Readiness is an ongoing organizational practice that evolves as youth roles change, adults grow in their partnership capacity and organizational structures shift. A readiness practice includes:

- regular pulse-checks to assess whether systems, culture and communication remain supportive;
- quarterly review and recalibration to adjust roles, clarify expectations and strengthen structures;
- feedback loops that show youth and adults how their insights are being used; and
- intentional onboarding for new youth and adults entering the work.

This ongoing practice allows the organization to develop alongside the partnership instead of falling behind it.

USING THE ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS ASSESSMENT TOOL

The tool is designed to help organizations gauge their readiness across the leadership, structural and cultural conditions previously described. It is not a test to pass or fail. Instead, it is a practical resource to foster honest inquiry, mutual understanding and strategic decision making. The tool can help organizations identify areas of strength, areas that require attention and the support they need to achieve deeper and more sustainable intergenerational partnership.

Organizations can use this tool before launching new youth-adult partnerships, during periods of transition or as part of recurring self-review.

ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS ASSESSMENT

INSTRUCTIONS AND SCORING

The Organizational Readiness Assessment uses a behavior-based frequency scale to measure how consistently key intergenerational partnership practices occur in your organization. Scores are meant to support reflection and placement on the Intergenerational Partnership Spectrum, not to evaluate performance or prescribe next steps.

The assessment is designed to capture multiple perspectives on the realities of intergenerational partnership within an organization. Because readiness shows up in systems, culture, leadership and day-to-day practice, no single individual is likely to fully see and understand every aspect of the organization.

For this reason, organizations are encouraged to have several people complete the assessment independently before discussing results together. At a minimum, participation should include:

- youth participants who regularly engage with the organization;
- program staff who support intergenerational work;
- operational or administrative staff, where applicable; and
- organizational leadership, both youth and adults.

Variations in responses should not be viewed as inaccuracies. They are often valuable indicators of how organizational practices are experienced differently across roles and can help teams locate areas where perceptions, communication or implementation may be misaligned.

RESPONDING TO QUESTIONS OUTSIDE YOUR DIRECT EXPERIENCE

Not every participant will have direct knowledge of every practice addressed in the assessment. When responding to questions outside your immediate experience, answer based on what you know rather than making assumptions.

If a question relates to a policy, process or practice that is unclear, note that uncertainty and discuss it during the group review. In many cases, uncertainty itself is a useful data point, particularly when it reveals that information is not consistently shared across the organization.

USING INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP RESPONSES

After individuals complete the assessment, teams should review the compiled results collectively. The goal is not to reach perfect consensus. Instead, the discussion should focus on understanding why perspectives differ and what those differences reveal about organizational readiness. The goal of the assessment is to support collective inquiry and dialogue, not produce a single “correct” organizational answer.

INSTRUCTIONS

FREQUENCY SCALE	
1 – NEVER	The practice does not occur or exists in name only.
2 – RARELY	The practice occurs sporadically or only in exceptional circumstances.
3 – SOMETIMES	The practice occurs occasionally or informally and is not reliable.
4 – OFTEN	The practice occurs regularly and is generally expected, though gaps remain.
5 – ALWAYS	The practice is consistent, reliable and embedded in systems, policy or culture.

STEP 1: COMPLETE THE ASSESSMENT

For each indicator, select the score that best reflects current practice, using both the frequency scale and the interpretation guidance provided with each question to support shared understanding.

Respondents should score based on currently observable behaviors and systems, not intentions, values or isolated examples.

STEP 2: CALCULATE DOMAIN SCORES

For each domain:

1. Add the scores for all questions in that domain.
2. Divide the total by the number of questions in the domain.

Your domain average score will be between 1.0 and 5.0.

STEP 3: CALCULATE THE OVERALL READINESS SCORE

1. Add the domain average scores from domains 1 through 8.
2. Divide by 8.

All domains are weighted equally.

STEP 4: FIND THE ORGANIZATION'S STAGE ON THE PARTNERSHIP SPECTRUM

Use the overall readiness score to identify your organization's current placement on the Intergenerational Partnership Spectrum:

SCORE RANGE	STAGE	DESCRIPTION
1.0–1.99	Foundational	Core conditions for partnership are not yet in place.
2.0–2.99	Emerging	Early practices exist but are inconsistent and fragile.
3.0–3.69	Thriving	Partnership practices are present but not yet reliable.
3.7–4.49	Integrated	Shared leadership is common and supported.
4.5–5.0	Transformational	Partnership is embedded, stable and resilient.

IMPORTANT SCORING NOTES

WHAT YOUR SCORE MEASURES

Your score is a snapshot of current practice. Each indicator is rated on a Never-to-Always scale, so your score simply reflects how consistently these conditions are in place today — not readiness for a future stage:

- A high score means these conditions are consistently in place across the organization now.
- A low score means many of these conditions are absent, or happening only sometimes, now.

Read the individual domains to see where conditions are strong and where they happen least reliably. That is where your attention goes next.

WATCH FOR RED FLAGS

If any red flag conditions are present — for example, delayed youth payments, lack of real youth influence or reported harm — the organization should not be placed above the Emerging stage, regardless of its numeric score.

ANALYZE DOMAIN VARIATIONS

Review domain scores alongside the overall score. Large gaps between domains often point to structural or cultural misalignment that affects readiness.

COMPARE PARTICIPANT PERSPECTIVES

When possible, youth and adults should complete the assessment separately and compare results. Differences in scoring are valuable data and often signal unequal authority or uneven practice.

APPLY THE RESULTS

This assessment provides a measure of readiness. It does not generate individualized recommendations or action plans. Your team may use results internally to reflect on where you stand and discuss how to increase alignment between your practices and intergenerational partnership.

ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS ASSESSMENT

PILLAR I: LEADERSHIP CONDITIONS

DOMAIN 1: LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT AND STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

This section focuses on how the organization's leadership prioritizes, communicates about and aligns to support youth-adult partnership, setting clear direction at the highest levels of the organization. As you respond, consider how consistently leadership commitment shows up across decisions, messaging and resource allocation.

INDICATOR	NEVER 1	RARELY 2	SOMETIMES 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
Senior leaders can clearly articulate the purpose and value of intergenerational partnership. Leaders should be able to explain why the work matters and how it strengthens mission and outcomes — not just express generic support — to ensure organizational buy-in.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Board members understand and support youth-adult partnership principles. Governance bodies must actively endorse the work. Skepticism or lack of understanding undermines implementation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Leaders model shared transparency and vulnerability. Sharing decision rationale, inviting critique and being open about uncertainty helps dismantle traditional hierarchies.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Leadership allocates resources (budget and staffing) to intergenerational partnership. Commitment requires tangible resources to be sustainable. Verbal support without financial and operational backing reduces partnership to an unfunded mandate.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

PILLAR I: LEADERSHIP CONDITIONS

DOMAIN 2: SHARED LEADERSHIP AND DECISION MAKING

This section examines how leadership is shared and decisions are made within the organization, including the extent to which youth have real influence. As you respond, focus on who actually holds decision-making authority in practice. Consider whether youth input meaningfully shapes outcomes.

INDICATOR	NEVER 1	RARELY 2	SOMETIMES 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
Youth have documented authority in specific decision-making areas. Documenting youth roles in areas such as hiring and budget decisions ensures their decision-making authority is institutional and protected, not conditional or dependent on adult discretion.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Youth influence budgeting, hiring, strategic planning and/or program design. Influence must be visible and traceable — not symbolic participation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Decision-making pathways are transparent, structured and understood. Young people cannot effectively exercise their authority or advocate for their positions if they do not understand who holds the final decision.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Feedback loops are consistently closed. Consistently explaining how feedback was used — or why it was not — validates youth expertise and sustains their investment in the work.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Youth contributions visibly shape organizational direction. Visible shifts in policy, priorities, roles, culture or strategy are the clearest evidence that youth influence is authentic.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

PILLAR 2: STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS

DOMAIN 3: INFRASTRUCTURE AND ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEMS

This section examines how the organization builds and maintains the operational systems, policies and administrative capacity necessary to support authentic partnership. As you respond, consider how well systems function across teams and over time.

INDICATOR	NEVER 1	RARELY 2	SOMETIMES 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
HR, finance and legal systems can fully support youth roles. Youth cannot be integrated as true partners unless operational structures are in place to handle stipends, onboarding, background checks, scheduling, consent forms and other administrative requirements without workarounds.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Meeting spaces and communication platforms are accessible to youth. Logistical barriers, such as transportation limits, inflexible timing or inaccessible technology, prevent equitable participation; meeting structures must actively accommodate youth needs (rather than defaulting to adult convenience).	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Policies exist for compensation, transportation, safety and role clarity. Written policies — not verbal agreements — set clear protections and expectations for youth participation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Technology and communication tools are youth-friendly. Platforms must be familiar, intuitive and accessible, avoiding adult-centric communication norms (such as sending long emails to correspond) that create barriers to engagement.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

PILLAR 2: STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS

DOMAIN 4: TRANSPARENCY PRACTICES

This section focuses on how the organization communicates information, explains decisions and makes processes visible to all partners. As you respond, consider how consistently transparency is practiced across different levels and groups. Reflect on whether people have access to the information they need to participate fully.

INDICATOR	NEVER 1	RARELY 2	SOMETIMES 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
Youth access materials such as drafts, budgets and agendas early enough to influence outcomes. Young people cannot meaningfully shape organizational outcomes if they are structurally excluded from the drafting and planning phases.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Decision timelines, criteria and constraints are clearly explained. Youth need clarity on fixed constraints versus flexible opportunities to effectively strategize and direct their energy where it will have an actual impact.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Youth understand the full context behind decisions. Youth cannot co-lead if they are insulated from the risks and limitations that govern the work; without that context, their decisions can't be structurally sound.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Transparency is consistent across teams and departments. Inconsistent transparency signals that shared leadership is a departmental experiment rather than a core organizational value, undermining the authenticity of young people's role.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Transparency is matched to youth preparation and actual authority. Too much information without support can overwhelm youth; too little restricts their ability to participate meaningfully.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

PILLAR 2: STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS

DOMAIN 5: SUSTAINABILITY AND CONTINUITY

This section examines how the organization sustains partnerships through long-term planning, dedicated resourcing and the integration of these practices into core operations. As you respond, think about whether efforts depend on short-term funding or individual champions, or whether they are embedded into the organization's ongoing structures and priorities.

INDICATOR	NEVER 1	RARELY 2	SOMETIMES 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
The organization dedicates staff time (0.25–1 full-time role) to intergenerational partnership. Sustainability requires structural support; dedicated staff ensure the work is treated as a core operational priority.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Budgets include recurring funding for youth leadership. Sustaining youth leadership through core operating funds safeguards youth roles and demonstrates the work is an organizational fixture.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Alumni pathways, such as paid roles and mentorship, are established. Alumni carry institutional memory and reduce disruption when youth become too old for the program or move on.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Intergenerational practices are embedded in HR, evaluation and onboarding. While individual champions are valuable, systems must carry the work; embedding intergenerational practices into core HR and evaluation institutionalizes the shift to shared leadership.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The organization can sustain partnership through transitions or crises. Durability — the capacity to hold partnership steady when champions leave or funding shifts — protects young people from suddenly losing leadership or decision-making status when change occurs.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

PILLAR 3: CULTURAL CONDITIONS

DOMAIN 6: ADULT PREPARATION AND MINDSET

This section focuses on how the organization prepares adults to engage in authentic youth-adult partnership, actively developing their skills, beliefs and willingness to shift practice. As you respond, reflect on typical adult mindsets and behaviors across the organization. Consider whether preparation is widespread and ongoing, not limited to a few individuals or isolated trainings.

INDICATOR	NEVER 1	RARELY 2	SOMETIMES 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
Adults understand traditional hierarchies and generational bias. Biases shape adult assumptions about youth competence and authority. Without understanding these dynamics, adults may unconsciously dominate the space and reduce the partnership to tokenism, where youth are present but do not have real influence.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Staff demonstrate openness to youth feedback without defensiveness. Adults must receive critique as part of shared leadership; defensiveness reinforces traditional hierarchies and shuts down collaboration.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Adults are trained to facilitate intergenerational meetings and navigate conflict. Skills like co-facilitation, conflict navigation and emotional regulation must be intentionally developed, not taken for granted.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Adults actively adapt or co-design processes (such as budgeting, hiring and agenda creation) to ensure youth accessibility. Sharing authority means using plain language, giving context and explaining procedures so youth can participate meaningfully.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Adults demonstrate vulnerability and a willingness to unlearn old patterns. When adults admit mistakes and acknowledge discomfort, it creates the psychological safety needed for youth to speak honestly.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

PILLAR 3: CULTURAL CONDITIONS

DOMAIN 7: YOUTH PREPARATION, SAFETY AND SUPPORT

This section examines how the organization prepares, supports and protects young people throughout the partnership. As you respond, consider whether the right support is consistently in place to ensure meaningful, safe and inclusive participation. Focus on the typical experience of youth across the organization, not exceptional cases.

INDICATOR	NEVER 1	RARELY 2	SOMETIMES 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
Youth receive clear onboarding on roles, expectations and decision-making pathways. Transparent onboarding prepares young people to successfully navigate the organization and exercise real authority.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Youth have access to coaching, mentorship and leadership development. Youth need structured support — not a “sink or swim” approach — to grow into leadership roles confidently.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Youth feel emotionally and psychologically safe speaking up. Young people who fear adult retaliation or judgment will default to compliance rather than honest disagreement, collaboration and partnership.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Youth are not overextended in their roles or expected to represent all youth. Over-reliance on youth leads to burnout and superficial partnership; roles must be distributed and supported.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Youth leadership pathways, including facilitation and paid roles, are clear and supported. Clear pathways for the evolution of youth involvement support their long-term capacity and embed their ongoing value into the organization.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

PILLAR 3: CULTURAL CONDITIONS

DOMAIN 8: INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS AND CULTURE

This section focuses on how the organization intentionally fosters high-quality relationships and a collaborative culture between youth and adults. As you respond, think about day-to-day interactions and norms. Consider whether trust, respect and collaboration are consistently present across settings.

INDICATOR	NEVER 1	RARELY 2	SOMETIMES 3	OFTEN 4	ALWAYS 5
Community agreements or shared norms explicitly guide the group. Establishing shared norms through explicit agreements protects equity and disrupts traditional hierarchies.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Youth and adults have structured opportunities to build trust. Trust grows through repeated relational practices — not just task-based meetings.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Conflicts or tensions between youth and adults are acknowledged and addressed. Avoiding conflict means that someone doesn't feel safe to speak up. Navigating tensions together shows that a partnership can withstand honest disagreement.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Participants experience the environment as respectful and psychologically safe. Youth are more likely to participate meaningfully over time when adults consistently listen to and consider their experience without interruption or judgment.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Differences in role and authority are acknowledged, not ignored. Clearly defining and discussing each person's authority and expertise — personal or professional — lets everyone participate fully and see how their contributions fit.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

RED FLAG CHECKLIST



The presence of one or more red flag conditions overrides numeric scores and caps the organization's readiness placement at **Emerging**. If any of the boxes below are checked, current organizational practice is insufficient to sustain or expand youth-adult partnership.

☐

YOUTH ARE PRESENT BUT NOT INFLUENTIAL.

☐

YOUTH STIPENDS ARE DELAYED OR INCONSISTENT.

☐

ADULTS RESIST OR UNDERMINE YOUTH LEADERSHIP.

☐

CONFLICT AVOIDANCE IS THE DEFAULT HABIT ACROSS THE ORGANIZATION.

☐

NO ACCOUNTABILITY EXISTS FOR ADULT BEHAVIOR.

☐

YOUTH REPORT HARM OR LACK OF SAFETY.

☐

NO BOXES CHECKED

Your overall score stands. Place the organization at its calculated stage on the spectrum.



ANY BOX CHECKED

Red flag condition(s) should be reviewed and strengthened before proceeding with partnership.

Red flags signal where practice needs to catch up with intention, not whether partnership is possible.

PART III: CORE INSIGHTS AND PRACTICES



CORE INSIGHTS AND PRACTICES

The Annie E. Casey Foundation's Intergenerational Learning Collaborative started with a simple idea: Communities already have the knowledge to strengthen partnerships between young people and adults, and the role of a national foundation is to bring people together, listen, learn and support the organizations doing this work every day.

Over the two-year pilot, four organizations along with youth and adult leaders and technical assistance partners tested ways to strengthen how young people and adults work together and share decision making. They reflected on what worked and made improvements. This led to a clearer understanding of what it takes to build and sustain strong youth-adult partnerships in real organizations with real-world challenges.

Through this continuous process, a set of seven core insights and six core practices emerged. The core insights identify the systemic barriers and relationships organizations must navigate to build authentic partnerships. The core practices outline the foundational actions organizations must take to anchor shared leadership between youth and adults. Together, these insights and practices offer realistic, field-tested guidance for creating and improving systems that are mutually beneficial for youth and adults and sustainable for organizations.

SEVEN CORE INSIGHTS



Influence over invitations. Youth engagement grows strongest when young people shape budgets, redesign curricula, participate in hiring and co-facilitate key conversations.



Readiness gap. Many organizations enter the work with strong values yet lack the systems, staffing structures and processes needed to put them into practice.



Adult preparation bottleneck. Adults in established roles often struggle with navigating conflict, exchanging feedback, sharing facilitation and letting go of long-held assumptions about authority.



Theory-to-practice gap. Intergenerational principles must be translated into step-by-step processes across daily operations to prevent defaulting to traditional norms.



Pace of change tension. Youth and adults have different experiences of time and urgency that can be bridged by planning timelines together and being transparent about constraints.



Nonlinear reality of intergenerational work. Organizations advance, pause, reverse and advance again; cyclical development is the nature of intergenerational partnership.



Systems and relationships balance. Without strong systems, youth cannot lead. Without strong relationships, adults may not trust the process of change.

SIX CORE PRACTICES



Compensating youth. Pay young people reliably and transparently to affirm them as legitimate contributors rather than secondary participants.



Establishing goals and agreements. Create explicit shared norms to prevent groups from defaulting to existing hierarchies or individual habits.



Recruiting and retaining youth leaders. Build intentional pathways that expand access and support long-term youth growth and institutional memory.



Navigating conflict productively. Equip teams to safely identify and resolve tensions rather than avoiding conflict, which reinforces hierarchy.



Facilitating intergenerational conversations and meetings. Redesign meeting structures, pacing and language to actively enable youth influence.



Setting success metrics and learning goals. Track structural shifts in decision making, and use data to drive continuous learning and accountability.



CORE INSIGHTS

» INFLUENCE OVER INVITATIONS

Across organizations in the collaborative, young people consistently described authentic partnership as having real influence over outcomes that affected their communities and organizations. Many organizations began by creating opportunities for youth participation, but the most significant shifts occurred when youth moved beyond consultation into shared decision making that shaped organizational direction.

These experiences revealed an important distinction: Young people do not need more seats at the table — they need meaningful authority over what happens there.

KEY LESSONS

- **Youth influence is strongest when it shapes consequential decisions.** Partnership deepens when it shifts from simple participation to actual influence — when young people help determine structural direction, staffing and program design, rather than just discussing them.
- **Decision-making authority requires access to information.** Young people cannot influence decisions they do not fully understand; open access to budgets, resources, tradeoffs and financial constraints is a critical test of shared leadership.
- **Influence begins upstream, not downstream.** Youth experience genuine ownership of outcomes when they are involved early enough to define problems and co-create curricula and strategy, rather than being brought in after decisions have already been framed.
- **Leadership pathways strengthen influence over time.** Influence remains sustainable when it is embedded in a clear developmental pathway — allowing youth to grow from participants to facilitators, advisors, staff and decision makers.

The shift from presence at the table to influence over decisions and direction is where strong intergenerational partnerships begin.

»» READINESS GAP

Across the collaborative, organizations believed deeply in youth voice but underestimated the infrastructure required to support young people as compensated leaders and decision makers. The collaborative identified administrative, structural, relational and cultural readiness gaps — a predictable outcome of attempting to implement or advance youth-adult partnership within existing nonprofit structures that were not originally designed to share leadership with young people.

KEY LESSONS

- **Readiness precedes implementation.** Assessing internal capacity before launching partnerships prevents harm, confusion and unequal working relationships between youth and adults.
- **Dependable systems are prerequisites.** Youth involvement succeeds when basic operational capacity — particularly compensation, communication and onboarding — is reliable, even when that means building infrastructure before accelerating engagement.
- **Infrastructure requires cross-departmental alignment.** Youth interact differently with finance, HR, program teams and leadership, so structural readiness requires investment across the entire organization.
- **Readiness is an ongoing practice.** Maintaining organizational capacity takes discipline and periodic reassessment as roles, cohorts and teams inevitably change.

Readiness is not optional — it's the foundation for everything that follows.

» ADULT PREPARATION BOTTLENECK

Adults emerged as the most significant bottleneck across all pilot sites because intergenerational partnership requires adults to unlearn ingrained habits and assumptions. Adults in the collaborative had to navigate vulnerability, uncertainty and changes to their identity as professionals, mentors and leaders.

KEY LESSONS

- **Adult preparation is a core investment.** Youth leadership stagnates when adult readiness lags, making ongoing adult development a foundational requirement for success rather than an optional component.
- **Skill building precedes engagement.** Adults need training in shared leadership, conflict resolution and meeting facilitation before youth are involved — not after problems emerge.
- **Discomfort requires practice and modeling.** Staff need spaces to safely navigate the vulnerability of shared leadership, and supervisors must model this humility without prioritizing their own emotions over youth needs.
- **Accountability relies on feedback loops.** Intergenerational work requires structural accountability for adults, including formal mechanisms for receiving feedback directly from youth.

Adult preparation is central to youth-adult partnership.

» PACE OF CHANGE TENSION

Across the learning collaborative, a recurring tension emerged between youth and adult experiences of time and urgency. Youth brought excitement and impatience; adults moved through bureaucratic processes at a slower, more deliberate pace.

Different experiences of urgency are predictable — and manageable.

KEY LESSONS

- **Pacing tensions are predictable.** Naming, normalizing and planning for the friction that arises from different operational speeds prevents organizations from misinterpreting tension as resistance.
- **Youth urgency is a strategic asset.** When recognized as a strength rather than an unrealistic or immature expectation, young people's impatience for change can bring important momentum to the work.
- **Shared planning bridges the transparency gap.** Aligning expectations across generations requires co-creating timelines and providing youth with full transparency into organizational constraints, such as budget cycles, decision timelines and compliance processes.
- **Early wins sustain engagement.** Larger structural shifts often move at slower speeds, but visibly achieving small, early goals can help to maintain youth investment and trust.

» NONLINEAR REALITY OF INTERGENERATIONAL WORK

The learning collaborative made clear that organizations do not evolve through intergenerational partnership in a straight line. Growth is cyclical — new cohorts, staffing changes and organizational shifts regularly call organizations back to foundational practices, and progress in one area does not guarantee progress in another.

KEY LESSONS

- **Cyclical development is the norm.** Revisiting core practices is a normal part of long-term change, not a sign of failure. Organizations should measure progress over time rather than expecting immediate or linear results.
- **Adaptable plans accommodate uneven progress.** Given that change happens at different speeds across various teams, successful partnerships rely on flexible planning rather than rigid timelines and fixed entry points.
- **Relationships restart with each cohort.** Even when strong systems are in place, relational progress does not move in a straight progression. The work loops back with each new group of young people, who need dedicated time and effort to build relationships anew.

Cyclical development is the nature of intergenerational partnership.

» SYSTEMS AND RELATIONSHIPS BALANCE

Closing the gap between values and operations is necessary but insufficient on its own. Organizations in the collaborative found that operational infrastructure alone does not produce genuine partnership. Relational infrastructure must be developed alongside it: the trust, vulnerability and psychological safety that allow youth and adults to work together authentically.

KEY LESSONS

- **Systems and relationships are interdependent.** Systems without relationships produce compliance, not transformation. Organizations must invest in both.
- **Relational work is an ongoing practice.** Building relationships is an intentional, continuous effort rather than a one-time launch activity.
- **Structures should reinforce relational values.** Operational changes should be designed to support and embed values like care, respect and mutual accountability.
- **Adults are responsible for the emotional conditions of partnership.** Acknowledging the weight this work places on young people, modeling relational courage and building genuine psychological safety are prerequisites for meaningful engagement.

Structures and relationships both matter. One without the other will not build strong youth-adult partnership.

» THEORY-TO-PRACTICE GAP

Organizations in the learning collaborative readily embraced the principles of intergenerational partnership but struggled to implement them into daily operations. While they genuinely believe in youth voice and shared leadership, their commitment did not automatically lead to the concrete tools and processes that transform values into institutional practice. Under pressure, teams defaulted to adult-centric facilitation, decision-making and communication practices.

KEY LESSONS

- **Values take root through operational tools.** Intergenerational principles are insufficient without tools and step-by-step processes that embed those values into daily operations, including meetings, hiring, budgeting, evaluation and decision making.
- **Policies dictate group norms.** Unless organizational policies and job descriptions explicitly integrate intergenerational expectations, the practice inevitably defaults to individual commitment rather than established institutional habits.
- **Design shapes participation.** Expecting young people to adapt to existing adult norms is ineffective; meetings and processes should be redesigned to enable full youth participation.
- **Behavioral shifts depend on continuous support.** Teams may revert to previous patterns under pressure, so one-time orientation is not enough; success relies on ongoing coaching, modeling and adapting tools in real time.

Implementing youth-adult partnership is operational. Without concrete processes, intergenerational values remain aspirational.

CORE PRACTICES

» COMPENSATING YOUTH

Youth compensation is foundational in intergenerational partnership because it directly reflects how an organization values youth expertise, labor and time. Reliable and transparent compensation affirms youth as legitimate contributors rather than secondary participants. Across the learning collaborative, compensation became an early indicator of readiness: When payment systems were strong, trust grew quickly. When they were inconsistent or unclear, youth interpreted it as a sign that the partnership lacked seriousness or stability.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Pay consistently and on time.** Reliable payment builds trust and shows the organization is prepared to support youth leadership.
- **Design accessible, youth-centered onboarding and payment systems.** Decentralized structures built specifically for young people prevent bottlenecks and reduce administrative hurdles that often arise from default adult employee systems.
- **Define and compensate all forms of labor.** Clear definitions of paid work — including invisible contributions like preparation time — ensure young people understand expectations and feel fairly valued.
- **Ensure pay equity.** Fair and consistent compensation across similar roles eliminates confusion and protects against perceptions of favoritism.
- **Secure sustainable funding.** Consistent compensation relies on planned, stable budgetary commitments rather than short-term or unpredictable financial sources.
- **Normalize questions about compensation.** Making it safe and easy for young people to raise concerns about their pay without fear of judgment reinforces transparency and mutual respect.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. Where do breakdowns in payment, access or clarity put trust at risk, and how are we addressing them at the system level?
2. What structural changes would be required to make youth compensation reliable, equitable and sustainable — not dependent on individuals or short-term funding?
3. How are we using compensation practices to reinforce (or unintentionally undermine) our commitment to shared leadership?

IN PRACTICE

One pilot organization co-created a youth-friendly payment guide that explained timelines, preparation expectations and technical troubleshooting. Automated reminders and cross-departmental coordination improved reliability. Youth reported feeling respected and more invested in leadership roles as payment systems stabilized.

» ESTABLISHING GOALS AND AGREEMENTS

Intergenerational partnership cannot thrive on assumptions. Youth and adults enter shared spaces with different experiences, expectations, communication norms and levels of positional authority. Without intentional agreements that articulate how people will work together, teams default to existing hierarchies or individual habits. Agreements create the operating system for collaboration.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Co-create shared agreements.** Frameworks developed directly with young people reflect actual needs and experiences rather than adult assumptions.
- **Define agreements in practice.** Detailed descriptions of what norms look like in action prepare teams with behavioral guidance for key moments.
- **Embed agreements structurally.** Applying norms uniformly across teams and explicitly integrating them into onboarding ensure expectations remain stable through organizational turnover.
- **Lean on agreements under pressure.** Established norms provide a reliable map for navigating challenges and regulating responses during moments of stress.
- **Build safe, transparent repair protocols.** A secure environment where young people can speak up about broken agreements — coupled with a clear process to address those moments — maintains trust and accountability.
- **Update agreements regularly.** Routinely revisiting frameworks prevents them from becoming outdated as needs and conditions evolve.

IN PRACTICE

One pilot organization opened every major meeting with a “norm of the day,” chosen by a youth or adult, and reflected on how the group would embody it. This ritual deepened shared commitment and equipped youth with language to reference agreements during difficult conversations.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. To what extent do our agreements actively shape behavior and decision-making, rather than exist as aspirational statements?
2. Where do we see gaps between what our agreements say and how people operate, especially under pressure?
3. How are youth able to use agreements as tools for accountability in real time and what happens when they do?
4. What mechanisms ensure agreements evolve alongside the partnership rather than becoming outdated?

» RECRUITING AND RETAINING YOUTH LEADERS

Recruitment determines who has access to leadership and whose perspectives shape organizational decisions. Retention reflects whether youth feel valued, supported and influential. Organizations must intentionally design recruitment to reach beyond the most confident or connected youth and create structures that allow a diverse set of young leaders to thrive.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Recruit broadly to prevent burnout.** A wide, diverse group of young people distributes the workload and expands access to leadership opportunities.
- **Set clear, developmentally appropriate expectations.** Matching transparent organizational demands to young people's needs and stages of development keeps them secure, engaged and clear on their roles.
- **Reduce logistical barriers.** The elimination of practical hurdles — such as transportation, scheduling and technology — allows more young people to participate.
- **Provide roles with meaningful influence.** Substantive positions, rather than superficial roles, guarantee that young people have a genuine impact on organizational decisions.
- **Build long-term leadership pipelines.** Mentorship, clear pathways for advancement and dedicated roles for alumni allow young people to continuously build skills while preserving institutional knowledge.
- **Equip adults to share decision-making authority.** Adult readiness and support to actively share decision making is essential for young people to take part in meaningful choices.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. Who has access to leadership in our organization, and whose perspectives are still missing or underrepresented?
2. How intentionally are we building pathways that support youth growth, continuity and long-term leadership?
3. What would need to change for youth retention to be driven by the support they receive and the impact they make, rather than their individual resilience?

IN PRACTICE

One pilot organization mapped a leadership progression from participant to facilitator to coordinator to alumni mentor, with clear competencies and supports for each stage. Youth reported a better understanding of how they could grow and what their roles meant within the organization.

» NAVIGATING CONFLICT PRODUCTIVELY

When youth feel safe enough to voice tensions or disagree with adults, the partnership is functioning as intended. Avoiding conflict, however, reinforces hierarchy and undermines trust. Organizations need clear structures, shared language and supportive practices that make conflict generative rather than harmful.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Address conflict directly.** Open and honest conversations prevent issues from building up and undermining trust.
- **Equip adults to receive feedback without defensiveness.** When adults are open to critique and disagreement, young people feel heard and respected.
- **Protect against relational or operational retaliation.** A truly secure environment ensures that young people can speak honestly without the fear of losing opportunities or relationships.
- **Acknowledge identity dynamics.** Race, class, gender, language and age fundamentally shape how individuals experience and work through conflict.
- **Set clear roles and conflict protocols.** Explicitly defined roles — such as who leads, mediates and supports — and consistent resolution frameworks reduce the risk of subjectivity in responses to conflict.
- **Follow through on repair.** Full acknowledgment of harm and committed action toward repair are necessary to rebuild trust.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. To what extent is conflict identified, engaged with and resolved in ways that strengthen rather than erode partnership?
2. How effective are our repair processes at restoring trust, accountability and relationships across differences?
3. What would it take for conflict to be experienced as a normal and supported part of shared leadership in our organization?

IN PRACTICE

At one pilot organization, a youth member shared feeling dismissed during a technical discussion. Rather than moving forward, the group paused and activated their conflict protocol, redistributing facilitation roles, clarifying decision pathways and adjusting meeting design so youth had time to prepare.

» FACILITATING INTERGENERATIONAL CONVERSATIONS AND MEETINGS

Meetings are where intergenerational partnership becomes real. They show whether adults step back, whether youth step forward and whether shared leadership is practiced rather than just discussed. Effective intergenerational meeting design includes transparent agendas, clear decision points, plain language, intentional pacing and shared facilitation.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Ensure adults share conversational space.** Intentional space for youth to speak, combined with adults actively stepping back, encourages young people to take an active role and prevents adults from dominating the conversation.
- **Simplify language and intentionally pace meetings.** Clear, jargon-free communication and deliberate pacing ensures that young people can follow along and have time to process, think and respond.
- **Share preparation materials in advance.** Early access to materials and context allows young people to adequately prepare for discussions.
- **Provide diverse participation and access options.** Offering logistical support like virtual access and translation alongside alternative engagement methods — like writing, small groups and chat — removes barriers to attendance and participation.
- **Embed youth input into decision making.** Clear pathways for youth feedback to actively influence choices prevent their participation from becoming a performative exercise.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. To what extent are our meetings designed to enable youth influence, rather than simply accommodate youth presence?
2. How do meeting structures, language and pacing either encourage or limit meaningful participation across generations?
3. What preparation, context and support do youth need to fully engage in complex or high-stakes conversations?

IN PRACTICE

One pilot organization redesigned its meetings to include youth-only prep sessions, time-stamped agendas, simplified language and rotating co-facilitation roles. Youth participation increased, and adults reported feeling more confident sharing facilitation responsibilities.

» SETTING SUCCESS METRICS AND LEARNING GOALS

Success metrics ensure that intergenerational partnership is assessed honestly and not based on assumptions or anecdotes. They help organizations understand whether youth influence is increasing, whether adults are shifting behaviors and whether structural changes are taking hold. Metrics bring transparency and accountability to deeply relational work that is otherwise easy to misinterpret.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Co-define success metrics.** Establishing measures collaboratively with young people ensures they accurately reflect youth priorities and experiences.
- **Track and act on youth impact.** Tracking how young people actually influence decisions — along with sharing what changed based on their feedback — builds and maintains trust.
- **Align goals with organizational capacity.** Realistic targets help prevent teams from overcommitting or setting expectations they cannot meet.
- **Keep transparent records for continuous learning.** Clear, consistent documentation allows teams to track progress over time and supports honest reflection, even when the data reveal difficult truths.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. How aligned are our definitions of success between youth and adults, and where do they differ?
2. What do data reveal about gaps between our intention and young people's personal experiences, and how are we acting on it?
3. What would it take for our metrics to drive continuous learning and accountability, rather than simply measuring progress?

IN PRACTICE

One pilot organization implemented a monthly “You Said, We Did” report that connected youth feedback to specific organizational actions. This transparency strengthened trust and reinforced youth influence on decision making.

CONCLUSION

Intergenerational partnership takes more than good intentions. Organizations must rethink how they make decisions, whose voices are heard and how people work together. It takes time to build trust, shift roles and create shared purpose.

This work requires revisiting core practices, making adjustments and staying committed to the course. Organizations will face tension and uneven progress, and will need to find new ways to support both adults and young people.

The insights in this tool kit help teams understand what to expect, while the practices offer clear ways to take action. Together, they reflect the foundational principle that strong youth-adult partnership grows when systems and relationships develop side by side.

For organizations that invest in this work, the benefits are real. When young people have a meaningful role in decisions and adults share responsibility, teams make stronger choices, deepen trust and expand leadership. Solutions that come from intergenerational partnership work better because young people helped build them.

Intergenerational partnership is not a one-time effort or a standalone program — it becomes part of how an organization works. The path takes patience, but the payoff is worth the investment.



A close-up, profile view of a woman with long dark hair and bangs, wearing a brown knitted sweater. She is smiling and looking down. In the background, another person is blurred, also looking down. A blue banner is at the bottom of the image.

APPENDIX: FACILITATION GUIDE AND SESSION RESOURCES

APPENDIX

FACILITATION GUIDE AND SESSION RESOURCES

After completing the Organizational Readiness Assessment, use these tools to turn your results into a shared, cross-generational conversation.

FACILITATION GUIDE

A 90-minute session plan designed to foster honest, intergenerational dialogue about your results, with accompanying resources to guide and ease the process

SAMPLE SUMMARY

How to prepare a one-page results summary, with a worked example

UNDERSTANDING YOUR SCORES

The scoring reference chart for reading what the scores mean, stage by stage

FACILITATION GUIDE



SESSION TIME: 90 MINUTES

PARTICIPANTS

- Youth participants
- Adult staff across roles, including organizational leadership

IDEAL GROUP SIZE

- 8–25 participants
- For larger groups, plan to use breakout groups

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Summary of assessment results
- Understanding Your Scores chart
- Flip chart or shared digital board
- Markers or virtual collaboration tools
- Timer

The purpose of this session is to support youth and adults in their shared understanding of the Organizational Readiness Assessment results. The assessment provides a snapshot of current organizational conditions and is not a measure of performance or a roadmap for action.

By examining the data together, teams can identify patterns, differences in experience, and areas of alignment or tension across roles and generations. The group's focus should be on exploring what the results reveal about readiness, capacity and organizational realities.

FACILITATOR'S ROLE

The facilitator fosters the conditions for honest, balanced reflection across generations. This is not a content-expert role — the facilitator does not need to be an expert in youth-adult partnership or organizational readiness. More important is their capacity to hold space, maintain boundaries and guide the process.

HOW TO SHOW UP

Remain neutral. Support the group in exploring the results without interpreting, defending or evaluating the data.

Facilitate balanced participation. Create intentional opportunities for both youth and adults to contribute while remaining attentive to differences in institutional authority.

Be comfortable with uncertainty. Allow questions, differing perspectives and moments of productive tension to emerge without rushing the group toward premature solutions or false consensus.

Stay grounded in the purpose. Keep the discussion strictly focused on understanding current organizational conditions rather than slipping into action planning or problem solving.

Alongside these intentions, active management of the session includes **setting and reinforcing boundaries** about the session's scope, **managing the timeline** to keep the group moving through the agenda, and **activating community agreements** at the start of the session and returning to them throughout.

FACILITATION PRINCIPLES

This session is designed for reflection, not action planning. The facilitator's role throughout is to hold that boundary and help the group stay in inquiry. Here are important principles to apply throughout the session:

- ◆ **Keep the group grounded in curiosity.** When urgency, defensiveness or solution seeking surfaces, slow the conversation and return to purpose.
- ◆ **Use community agreements** — not individual authority — as the primary tool for maintaining balance and navigating tension.
- ◆ **Actively attend to whose voices are taking up space.** If adult perspectives are dominating, create openings for youth to speak.
- ◆ **Support the group in noticing patterns** without interpreting or diagnosing results.

COMMON PITFALLS

Watch for these signs that the session is moving off course:

- ❗ Pushing for immediate solutions, action planning or commitments
- ❗ Explaining away low scores — or defending differences in scores — rather than exploring what they reveal
- ❗ Expecting individual youth participants to speak on behalf of or represent all young people
- ❗ Treating the spectrum placement as a grade or a verdict

SESSION AGENDA

OPENING AND FRAMING (10 MINUTES)

COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

Community agreements are collectively held expectations for how participants engage with one another. They often include commitments such as listening with curiosity, speaking from experience, honoring different communication styles, and resisting the urge to fix or defend. If your organization already has standing community agreements, use them here. Display the agreements where all participants can see them and remind them that these agreements were created to support conversations exactly like this one.

If your group does not have standing community agreements, take a few minutes to name shared norms for how people will engage.

In this session, community agreements are active tools. When the conversation becomes uncomfortable, uneven or tense, the facilitator should lean on the agreements rather than individual authority to guide the group back into alignment.

FACILITATOR'S NOTE

Before moving into content, ensure community agreements are acknowledged and displayed where all participants can see them.

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION (10 MINUTES)

REFLECTION PROMPTS

Distribute or project the summary of assessment results and the chart for understanding readiness scores. Invite participants to review the results and respond in writing:

- What stands out to me most in these results?
- What feels accurate based on my experience?
- What feels surprising, uncomfortable or unclear?
- Where do I notice my role influencing how I interpreted the questions?

FACILITATOR'S NOTE

This portion of the session is intentionally quiet and individual. Encourage participants to resist the urge to discuss or compare responses at this stage. Emphasize that reflection is private and that participants will choose what, if anything, they want to share later.

SMALL-GROUP PROCESSING (25 MINUTES)

SUGGESTED GROUPING

Create mixed youth-adult groups of 4–6 people. If traditional hierarchies are noticeable, consider starting with brief youth-only and adult-only conversations before moving into mixed groups.

SMALL-GROUP QUESTIONS

- What patterns do we notice across the domains?
- Where do scores feel most aligned across people?
- Where do scores vary the most, and what might that tell us?
- Which domains feel strongest right now?
- Which domains feel most fragile or inconsistent?

FACILITATOR'S NOTE

If a group drifts toward solutions or defending scores, gently steer it back to understanding current conditions. The overall placement is also visible on each summary, so expect it to come up early — when it does, acknowledge it and note that the group will discuss the overall stage together near the end.

WHOLE-GROUP SHARING (20 MINUTES)

REPORTING OUT

Invite each small group to share:

- One pattern they noticed
- One question the results raised

Capture responses visibly without interpretation.

FACILITATOR'S NOTE

Pay attention to who is speaking most and whose perspectives may be getting less airtime.

OPTIONAL PROBING PROMPTS

- Where do youth and adult experiences appear most different?
- What do those differences suggest about decision-making authority, access or information flow?
- Are there domains where our aspirations may be outpacing our current systems or capacity?

READINESS ASSESSMENT REFLECTION (15 MINUTES)

Return to the organization's placement on the Intergenerational Partnership Spectrum and consider it together, now in light of the discussion.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Does this placement feel accurate based on what we discussed? Why or why not?
- What does being in this stage help explain about our experiences so far?
- What expectations or pressures might we need to release given this placement?
- What does this stage make possible right now?

FACILITATOR'S NOTE

Normalize discomfort if it arises. Reinforce that readiness stages are descriptive, not evaluative, and encourage participants to focus on what the placement explains rather than whether it feels positive or negative.

CLOSING AND INTEGRATION (10 MINUTES)

CLOSING REFLECTION

Invite participants to respond to one prompt, either aloud or in writing:

- One insight I am leaving with ...
- One thing I understand differently now ...
- One question I want us to continue thinking about ...

AFTER THE SESSION (OPTIONAL)

- Share a brief written summary of themes but not decisions or commitments.
- Offer optional youth-only or adult-only follow-up spaces if strong emotions surfaced.
- Avoid immediately scheduling an action-planning meeting unless trust and readiness support it.

HOW TO PREPARE A READINESS ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

Before your group reflection session, an evaluation staff member (ideally, if available) or facilitator should prepare a neutral, one-page snapshot of your results. Keep the summary objective to support honest dialogue — avoid evaluating the organization, ranking individuals or recommending actions. Save interpretation for the collective session, and direct participants to the scoring chart for stage details.

The summary should include the following:

- **Participants:** Total count broken down by role (youth and adults)
- **Overall Score:** The overall readiness score, youth and adult averages, and the gap between them
- **Domain Scores:** Overall and group-specific scores for each domain, noting which group scored lower
- **Current Spectrum Placement:** The stage name and score band (1.0–5.0) where the overall score lands
- **Red Flag Checklist Results:** Any identified red flags, explicitly listing which group (such as youth or staff) identified them

SAMPLE SUMMARY

ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

The same sample scores are used in both columns, identical except for the Red Flag Checklist results, which limit the spectrum placement. Your actual summary will reflect only one scenario.

Scenario A: No Red Flags

Participants: 18 — Seven youth (participants, leaders); 11 adults (program and operational staff, organizational leaders)

Overall Score: 3.3 (youth 3.1 / adult 3.5 / 0.4 gap, youth lower)

Current Spectrum Placement: Thriving (3.0–3.69)
— matches score-based stage

Red Flag Conditions: None identified

Scenario B: Red Flags Present

Participants: 18 — Seven youth (participants, leaders); 11 adults (program and operational staff, organizational leaders)

Overall Score: 3.3 (youth 3.1 / adult 3.5 / 0.4 gap, youth lower)

Current Spectrum Placement: Emerging (2.0–2.99) — below score-based stage, held by red flags

Red Flag Conditions:

- **Adults resist or undermine youth leadership (identified by program staff).**
- **Conflict avoidance is the default habit across the organization (identified by youth).**

ASSESSMENT SCORES

The assessment evaluates eight key readiness areas (domains) on a scale of 1.0 to 5.0. Scores map directly to the five stages of the Intergenerational Partnership Spectrum, with higher scores indicating more consistently established conditions. To see what each stage looks like, refer to the scoring chart in Understanding Your Scores.

Readiness Area	Overall	Youth	Adult	Difference
OVERALL ORGANIZATIONAL BASELINE	3.3	3.1	3.5	0.4 (youth lower)
1. Leadership Commitment and Strategic Alignment	3.2	2.9	3.5	0.6 (youth lower)
2. Shared Leadership and Decision Making	3.3	3.0	3.6	0.6 (youth lower)
3. Infrastructure and Administrative Systems	3.0	2.8	3.2	0.4 (youth lower)
4. Transparency Practices	2.8	2.3	3.3	1.0 (youth lower)
5. Sustainability and Continuity	2.6	2.5	2.7	0.2 (youth lower)
6. Adult Preparation and Mindset	3.5	3.2	3.8	0.6 (youth lower)
7. Youth Preparation, Safety and Support	4.0	4.2	3.8	0.4 (adult lower)
8. Intergenerational Relationships and Culture	3.9	4.1	3.7	0.4 (adult lower)

Note. Overall scores are the equal-weighted average of the youth and adult group averages. Difference is the gap between them, followed by the group that rated the area lower; larger gaps may signal that practices are experienced differently across roles and generations.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR SCORES

Instructions: Review your one-page results summary. Use the chart below to locate your team's overall baseline stage on the spectrum. Then find where each of your eight domain scores lands to see what your operations look like in action. Remember, each score reflects how consistently and dependably these conditions are in place today, not readiness for a future stage.

READINESS AREA	FOUNDATIONAL (1.0–1.99)	EMERGING (2.0–2.99)	THRIVING (3.0–3.69)	INTEGRATED (3.7–4.49)	TRANSFORMATIONAL (4.5–5.0)
OVERALL ORGANIZATIONAL BASELINE	Early, inconsistent exploration; focus is on preliminary learning rather than operational changes.	Deliberate but uneven youth engagement; progress relies on isolated staff champions rather than systems.	Consistent collaboration with clear roles; individuals involved are increasingly identified as intergenerational leaders.	Partnership built into how the organization operates; formal policies ensure predictable, daily shared authority.	Shared leadership completely shapes decisions and direction; partnership is fully embedded, resilient and continuously evolving.
OPERATIONAL DOMAINS					
1. Leadership Commitment and Strategic Alignment	Leadership views youth engagement as a programmatic add-on.	Leadership verbally supports youth voice but provides minimal budget allocation.	Leadership sponsors youth-led policies and actively protects program budget lines.	Leadership structurally embeds youth authority into organizational bylaws.	Leadership models joint governance; executives are accountable to youth.
2. Shared Leadership and Decision Making	Youth participation is passive or superficial; adults hold absolute authority.	Youth are consulted for input, but adults make final operational decisions.	Youth hold formal voting power in specific programs or committees.	Youth co-design strategy and govern significant resources.	Governance is fully shared; youth hold structural executive authority.
3. Infrastructure and Administrative Systems	Infrastructure is built entirely for adults; severe administrative barriers prevent youth participation.	Adult-built systems rely on ad-hoc workarounds (gift cards, cash apps) and individual staff rather than reliable processes.	Dedicated youth-friendly payroll and onboarding workflows are established.	Infrastructure treats youth labor as equal to adult labor with seamless processes.	Organizational policies are co-designed to eliminate all systemic barriers.
4. Transparency Practices	Information is tightly held by leadership; youth informed on a strict need-to-know basis.	Information is distributed but arrives too late for youth to influence the final outcome.	Agendas and materials are distributed early in accessible formats with explicit contextual clarity (“the why”).	Budgets, financials and strategic drafts are openly co-edited alongside youth partners.	Management is open book; youth have unrestricted access to all organizational data appropriate to role.

READINESS AREA	FOUNDATIONAL (1.0–1.99)	EMERGING (2.0–2.99)	THRIVING (3.0–3.69)	INTEGRATED (3.7–4.49)	TRANSFORMATIONAL (4.5–5.0)
OPERATIONAL DOMAINS					
5. Sustainability and Continuity	Partnership work relies entirely on temporary grants or volunteers and is highly vulnerable to disruption or crisis.	Funding is secured year-to-year; partnership is highly dependent on individual staff champions to survive.	Dedicated core budget line and informal tracking protect continuity during transitions.	Compensation is a permanent budget line item; formalized alumni pathways preserve institutional memory.	Entire financial and organizational models are structurally dependent on shared leadership.
6. Adult Preparation and Mindset	Adults receive no training on traditional hierarchies or youth partnership.	Adults attend one-off trainings but default to traditional hierarchies under stress.	Adults receive ongoing coaching on authentic youth partnership and facilitation.	Adult performance reviews evaluate their ability to share leadership effectively.	Unlearning the assumption that adults always know best is a core, continuous part of adult professional development.
7. Youth Preparation, Safety and Support	Youth are invited to the table with no prior context, onboarding or safety considerations.	Youth receive basic orientation but lack the deep context adults have.	Youth have dedicated prep spaces and mentors to help build leadership skills.	Youth lead their own onboarding, co-maintain safety boundaries and have full access to strategic context.	Youth are given direct resources to design their own training and safety systems.
8. Intergenerational Relationships and Culture	Conflict is avoided or suppressed; adult comfort dictates the culture.	Agreements exist but are abandoned during moments of tension.	Teams actively use protocols to navigate conflict and unequal authority safely.	Conflict is viewed as generative; identity dynamics are openly discussed.	Restorative repair is the baseline; deep trust allows for radical honesty.



THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

701 ST. PAUL STREET, BALTIMORE, MD 21202 | 410.547.6600

 www.aecf.org |  [@annieecaseyfdn](https://www.facebook.com/annieecaseyfdn) |  [@annieecaseyfdn](https://www.instagram.com/annieecaseyfdn)