



Achieving Authentic Youth Engagement: Core Values & Guiding Principles

Developed by Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

All young people should be active participants in directing their own lives and shaping their communities. This approach, known as authentic youth engagement, works only when young people and adults join together as true partners.

Effective partnerships between young people and adults provide many benefits. They allow young people to practice the problem-solving skills they will need in adulthood and give them opportunities to strengthen the parts of the brain that drive those skills. Effective partnerships with adults also help young people build their self-esteem and leadership skills, and increase their influence and personal stake in the community. The right kind of partnership benefits not only young people, but also the adults who believe in them¹.

As a [national expert in authentic youth engagement](#), the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative recommends the following core values and guiding principles to develop successful partnerships between young people and adults:

I. CORE VALUE: PREPARATION

Young people are effectively **prepared** and empowered to make informed decisions about matters that affect their lives.

Guiding Principles

- Effective preparation with and on behalf of a young person requires time, effort, patience, relationship-building and awareness of a young person's unique developmental needs.
- Young people need to learn self-advocacy skills, including when and how to seek advice and counsel from professionals and other caring adults, in order to be confident in making decisions and charting their future.
- Authentic youth-adult partnerships must undergird preparation activities and it is within this context of mutual trust that adults must help young people recognize their strengths, leverage their expertise, assess their level of understanding, address their knowledge deficits and assert their leadership in reaching decisions.

¹ ["Youth in Decision Making: A Study on the Impacts of Youth on Adults and Organizations."](#) University of Wisconsin-Madison Extension, 2000.

II. CORE VALUE: SUPPORT

Young people are provided with customized services and a network of **supportive** relationships that meet their needs and promote a healthy transition to adulthood.

Guiding Principles

- Young people need access to a service array that is comprehensive, flexible and capable of meeting their unique needs.
- Support systems should include formal resources and services from public and private providers as well as informal supports from within a young person's natural network of community relationships.
- Service systems should provide young people with equitable access to services that are culturally competent, outcome-focused and attentive to their overall well-being.
- Family is critically important in the lives of young people and their definition of family and network of supportive relationships should be explored, respected and appropriately included in life planning efforts.
- Young people should be monetarily compensated for their time, expertise, labor and products that contribute to systems change, program implementation, policy development and information sharing.

III. CORE VALUE: OPPORTUNITY

Young people are provided with an array of life **opportunities** that promote optimal growth and development; experiential learning; healthy risk-taking; and participation in normal everyday activities that contribute to social confidence and positive identity formation.

Guiding Principles

- Young people need to learn how to be financially capable and have opportunities to practice their financial skills as they manage assets, participate in the workforce and transact with mainstream banking institutions.
- Young people need to be safe and assessments of their safety should be contextually relevant, developmentally appropriate and free from variables that overstate risk and undervalue social experience.
- Young people in foster care should be provided with the same normal life opportunities afforded young people from intact families.
- Young people need to experience positive reciprocity in relationships within their family, peer and community groups and feel valued both in receiving supports and in giving back to their community.