

Understanding the Continuum of Youth Involvement

PARTICIPATION ➡

VOICE ➡

LEADERSHIP ➡

ENGAGEMENT

	PARTICIPATION	VOICE	LEADERSHIP	ENGAGEMENT
YOUTH ROLES	Youth are involved in the “doing” of the activity but not in the planning, development or reflection.	Youth are part of conversations regarding planning and implementing an idea. Their input is considered, but they may or may not have an official “vote”.	Youth are involved at all levels of idea or project development and have formal and informal leadership roles in the process.	Youth are the primary drivers of the work from conceptualization to implementation and reflection. Youth “own” and understand the work deeply.
ADULT ROLES	Adults develop the idea, plan and organize all aspects of the activity or event which a cadre of young people will actually carry out.	Adults develop and set the agenda and facilitate the process. Adults include the input of youth in this process. This can be through consideration of youth input via focus group or meeting or through youth being involved in and having a formal vote.	Adults are involved in the full process and support the development of individual youth and the flow of the process, but in a way that balances power and leadership with youth. Adults allow youth to struggle and make mistakes in a safe environment.	Adults provide a support role and share ownership and commitment but with some deference to the youth. Adults hold one “vote” on the team.
DECISION-MAKING	Adults make all decisions.	Adults ultimately make the decision with the consideration of youth input. If youth have a vote, they are typically outnumbered or adults have ultimate veto power.	Youth and adults share decision-making power often requiring a specific and mutually agreed upon decision-making process.	Youth ultimately make the decisions with the inclusion of adult input and “vote”.
ACCOUNTABILITY	Adults are accountable for all aspects of the process and/or activity including whether or not young people are present. Youth have some secondary accountability to participate in the activity.	Adults maintain accountability for decision-making and actions. Youth may have specific accountability for smaller roles and activities that involve youth specifically.	Youth and adults share accountability at all levels of the work.	Youth have primary accountability at all levels of the work. Adults have secondary accountability for ensuring that youth are prepared and supported in a way that they can achieve success.
EXAMPLE	School leadership is holding a student assembly to raise awareness about how the school engages students with disabilities. A group of students is asked to pass out flyers and to serve as hosts and to introduce the special speaker for the assembly.	School leadership wants to improve how they engage students with disabilities in the classroom and broader school activities. They have invited two youth to participate on a task force of faculty and staff to develop a list of ideas for action.	Students want to raise awareness about challenges for students with disabilities in their school. They get an adult sponsor who gets the OK for them to have school assembly on the issue and have an expert speaker come. Youth participate and have voice in the planning and development of the assembly by serving on committees, as a committee chair, introducing the speaker, promoting the event etc.	Youth plan, organize all aspects of, and host a student assembly focused on more equitable schools for students with disabilities. They ask a supportive teacher to serve as an advisor. They know the issue deeply and have talked with their peers including students with disabilities to garner insight. They have developed ideas for school improvement that they message to their peers and to school leadership directly.