PRINCIPLES OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Tuesday, April 27 | 1:30-2:30PM Eastern
About SchoolHouse Connection

SchoolHouse Connection works to overcome homelessness through education. We provide strategic advocacy and practical assistance in partnership with schools, early childhood programs, institutions of higher education, service providers, families, and youth.

- Website: http://www.schoolhouseconnection.org
- Newsletter: https://www.schoolhouseconnection.org/sign-up/
- Federal and state policy advocacy
- Q&A from our inbox
- Webinars and implementation tools
- Youth leadership and scholarships
Today’s Panelists

Jordyn Roark
Director of Youth Leadership and Scholarships
SchoolHouse Connection

Irene Sauceda
Peer Leader
SchoolHouse Connection

Destiny Dickerson
Scholar
SchoolHouse Connection
Why is it important to engage youth with lived experience?

- Strongest partners and our greatest resource.
- Invaluable perspectives, innovative ideas, and critical feedback

If we want to improve our programs, policies, and practices, we must engage as many youth as we can, as often as we can.
Step #1: Draft a Partnership Description

What is your agency or organization’s intention for this partnership?

- Learn about/improve practices
- Gather feedback about a program, resource, or concept
- Gather an impact statement or story

What role or combination of roles do you envision?

- Youth Voice: Having the youth share their stories and expertise in public forums
- Expert Participants: Engaging youth as participants in decision-making, policy-making, planning, etc.
- Youth Leadership: Providing positions of power and decision-making responsibility
Step #1: Draft a Partnership Description

- What type of lived experiences are you looking to learn from?
- What types of activities will be requested from the youth?
- Are there any restrictions you will have around age, location, and scheduling availability?
- How will this opportunity benefit the youth participating?
  - Whenever possible, pay youth either hourly or by a stipend in an amount that is a living wage (or more). If we believe that youth are the experts in the room, we need to value and pay them as such.
Step #2: Build Community Partnerships to Identify and Engage Youth Participants

- Share the opportunity and partnership description with your community partners, programs within your organization, advisory councils, etc.
- Engage local providers who know the youth they are working with very well, and who can match you with a youth who is in a position where they have the time, interest, and capacity to partner.
- Whenever possible, use your partnerships to provide warm-transfer referrals when connecting with new youth.
Step #3: Build Relationships and Rapport

- Get to know you call with the point person in the organization
- Follow-Up email or text with next steps
- Regular one-on-one check-in calls where feedback and brainstorming new ideas is encouraged
- Diversify communication platform options (text, video, phone, social media)
- Follow-up on commitments in a timely manner and communicate immediately if there are changes or if you’re unable to follow-through with something.
Step #4: Make an Effort to Understand and Value Youth as Individuals

- Learn about the youth as an individual, outside of their experience of homelessness.
- As you learn more about the youth’s experiences of homelessness, identify where the youth is at in their experience, and how that may shape their self awareness and ability to draw conclusive thoughts and perspectives.
- Use this knowledge to guide what you’re asking of the student
- Separate the relationship from the organizational benefit

Show that you understand that homelessness is a traumatic experience, not an identity.
“Sometimes a student may feel obligated to participate in events asked of them simply because resources were provided (such as any kind of support: financial, emotional, etc.) It’s important to make sure that students understand that you (or the organization you represent) won’t be upset with or disappointed in them if they don’t participate in these potential opportunities, and that they aren’t obligated to do so simply because resources were provided. Demonstrate that your relationship with them is important in and of itself, and not dependent on what the student has to offer you or the organization. You don’t want to make the student feel like you’re using them for your (or your organization’s) own gain, as it would risk any rapport built with the student, and dramatically alter the power balance of the relationship.”

- Irene, SchoolHouse Connection Peer Leader
Step #5: Provide Information Regularly and in a Timely Manner

- Consider acronyms and abbreviations in conversations
- Respect the youth’s time and send all event information as early as possible
- Check-in prior to any speaking engagement/event and provide a debrief and follow-up space after
- Ask what their communication preferences are
"From my experience speaking at events and on panels, it is immensely helpful to be provided materials, questions and information ahead of time. As a college student you have a lot on your plate so being able to digest and prepare on your own time, prior to the presentation, can greatly reduce anxiety about participating."

- Destiny, SchoolHouse Connection Scholar
Step #6: Provide Support During In-Person Events

- Snack and drink preferences
- Where can I stand in the room during the event to best support you?
- Do you want a “5 minutes left” warning, to have hand signals, or other non-verbal cues between us?
- Let them know that it might be hard to brainstorm these things on the spot, but that they can email or text you if they think of other things.
Step #6: Provide Support During In-Person Events

- Be reliable and do what you said you would do.
- Provide a comforting debrief space after the event and acknowledge how intense it can be to share your story and speak in front of a group of people.
- If it’s not possible to leave and debrief immediately after the event, pull the youth to the side and provide immediate praise and reassurance and ask them how they’re doing and if they need anything.
- Offer the option for the youth to go have some alone time to debrief or to have a companion during the next part of the event.
Questions?
Step #7: Moderate Panels Intentionally

- Introduce the student(s) to all panelists prior to the speaking engagement
- Send the questions that will be asked prior to the speaking engagement whenever possible
- Let the student(s) know how the panel will be moderated.
- Let the student know the level of engagement you would like to see. Panels can be tricky due to time constraints, so let the student know if there are questions that will be asked specifically for them to answer or if you would like them to provide feedback or responses to all or most questions.
- Provide a general time suggestion for responses to questions
- Provide a debrief space after the event
Step #8: Audience Boundaries and Q&A Times

- Ask that no photos or videos be taken during the event.
- State that if the students feel comfortable, they will remain at the foot of the stage/by the podium after the presentation to meet attendees, but that if the student is not there, we are asking that attendees refrain from approaching the student.
- State that as an organization you emphasize asking what people are comfortable with before engaging in physical greetings, such as hugs or handshakes, and that you ask attendees to do the same.
- Ask that attendees avoid leaving and re-entering the space as much as possible, especially if the student will be sharing their stories.
- Let attendees know that there will be a designated Q&A time at the end of the session and during the Q&A, help moderate it and help the student navigate any uncomfortable/unwanted questions.
Step #9: Engage Multiple Youth Over Time to Provide Diverse Perspectives

One youth’s experience and perspective cannot provide the sole perspective, or be generalized to represent a diverse population’s needs. Work to partner with multiple youth over time so that your organization can hear and learn from diverse perspectives. Tips for providing diverse youth perspectives include:

- Consider the types of homeless experiences that youth have
- Consider the demographics of the youth you are partnering with
“To better understand the world around us, every student's stories, experiences, and memories need to be heard when organizations partner with diverse youth. There is no singular background and you can’t assume all students have had the same experience. The collective stories of all students can aid the bigger picture.”

- Diego, SchoolHouse Connection Scholar
Step #10: Gather Feedback to Inform Future Partnerships

At the conclusion of the youth’s contract/partnership, provide them with the opportunity to reflect on their experience and provide insight as to how processes can be improved for future partnerships. Be open to what they have to say and use it to guide your next youth partnership.
Step #11: Engage Seasoned Youth Partners as Mentors/Peer Leaders

- Having get to know you chats with students that have similar interests
- Providing support to students during in-person events
- Reading through written resources and providing grammar and content feedback for students, or help with brainstorming and any questions that students may have.
- Planning and coordinating events for the other youth in the program or designing ways to honor them and thank them for their work.
“I’ve been a part of School House Connection since 2011, first as a scholar and now as a peer-mentor. The past ten years with this organization have been more rewarding and impactful than I ever could have imagined. Year after year I’ve had students confide in me and trust me with some of the most fragile and personal details of their life. In turn, I’ve been able to intact positive change and help them through some of these situations because they trusted me to do so. I believe the presence of peer mentors who have gone through similar experiences and who are close in age creates a sense of safety and unity and allows for a more open and welcoming atmosphere for students to truly open up.”

- Tia, SchoolHouse Connection Scholar
“Peer leaders matter. We have shared lived experiences, and I’d trust a peer leader like a friend. I’m willing to trust and lean on them in a way that I wouldn't with anyone else. Their recent experiences and willingness to support me makes me want to give back and do the same for other students.”

- Christian, SchoolHouse Connection Scholar
Questions?
Contact Information

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