

Youth-Adult Partnerships

“Youth-adult partnerships ... are youth and adults coming together in a positive, mutually respectful environment with the recognition that each group contributes unique strengths to the relationship.”

—UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

Practicing youth-adult partnerships...



CREATES A SENSE OF BELONGING

Youth voices are heard, enhancing ownership and responsibility.



BUILDS RELATIONSHIPS

Youth are seen as capable partners, taking active leadership roles working alongside volunteers and staff.



EMPHASIZES LEARNING BY DOING

Youth and adults gain hands-on experience learning from each other.

How to practice youth-adult partnerships

Through communication

- Talk with all club members and families and understand their preferred communication mode. Some may not have email, text, or social media. Be sure whatever communication strategy(ies) you use help everyone feel included. You may need more than one communication strategy! Ask youth and adults for help!

Through mentoring

- Pair new staff/volunteers with seasoned youth.
- Set measurable goals for mentorship.

Through leadership

- Recruit youth to lead or co-facilitate group meetings and events.
- Host youth discussion panels at professional development trainings.



How to implement youth-adult partnerships

YOUTH

- Challenge your biases.
- Provide feedback often.
- Think about your skill sets and abilities. Where can you share them?
- Learn from other youth and adults. Make sure all voices are heard.
- Ask questions. Share your ideas!



STAFF & VOLUNTEERS

- Remember your role is a **partner**. Connect and engage with youth.
- Provide opportunities for young people to lead and teach.
- Treat youth as individuals.
- Challenge your biases.
- Identify champions to advocate for and model youth-adult partnerships.



WORKING TOGETHER

- Provide choices and options for everyone to be included and involved.
- Establish clear roles and expectations.
- Practice patience.
- Encourage collective mentoring (youth mentor adults, adults mentor youth).
- Remain thoughtful about how to advance youth-adult partnerships.

Strategies to implement youth-adult partnerships

- Host a youth-adult social to welcome new members and get re-acquainted with returning members.
- Conduct a brainstorming session to review goals of youth-adult partnerships and identify what it looks like in your group.
- Create a mission or vision statement that inspires and energizes the group to practice youth-adult partnerships.
- Have youth and adults write down skill sets and interests to assist with matching of mentors.
- Build on group strengths and abilities to identify projects that youth and adults can share in overseeing.
- Track progress with regular meetings to celebrate success stories and address challenges.



Youth benefits

- Gain confidence, responsibility, and independence
- Build critical thinking, teamwork, public speaking, and leadership skills
- Strengthen commitment to community service into adulthood
- Enhance sense of belonging

Staff and volunteer benefits

- Strengthen sense of community connectedness
- Enhance understanding of young people and their developmental needs
- Build skills in collaboration and teamwork

Organization benefits

- Gain new energy, perspective, and ideas
- Become more connected and responsive to the needs of young people in the community
- Better enhance overall mission to better serve children and youth



Resources

- Act for Youth actforyouth.org/program-toolkit/youth-engagement
- Advocates for Youth advocatesforyouth.org/resources/fact-sheets/building-effective-youth-adult-partnerships
- Making it Work—A Guide to Successful Youth-Adult Partnerships www.yparticipate.global/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Making-It-Work_A-Guide-to-Successful-Youth-Adult-Partnerships.pdf
- Youth-Adult Partnership Rubric cerc.msu.edu/yaprubric
- Youth-Adult Partnership for Youth Empowerment fyi.uwex.edu/youthadultpartnership

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