Youth Lead the Way

A guide for working with youth
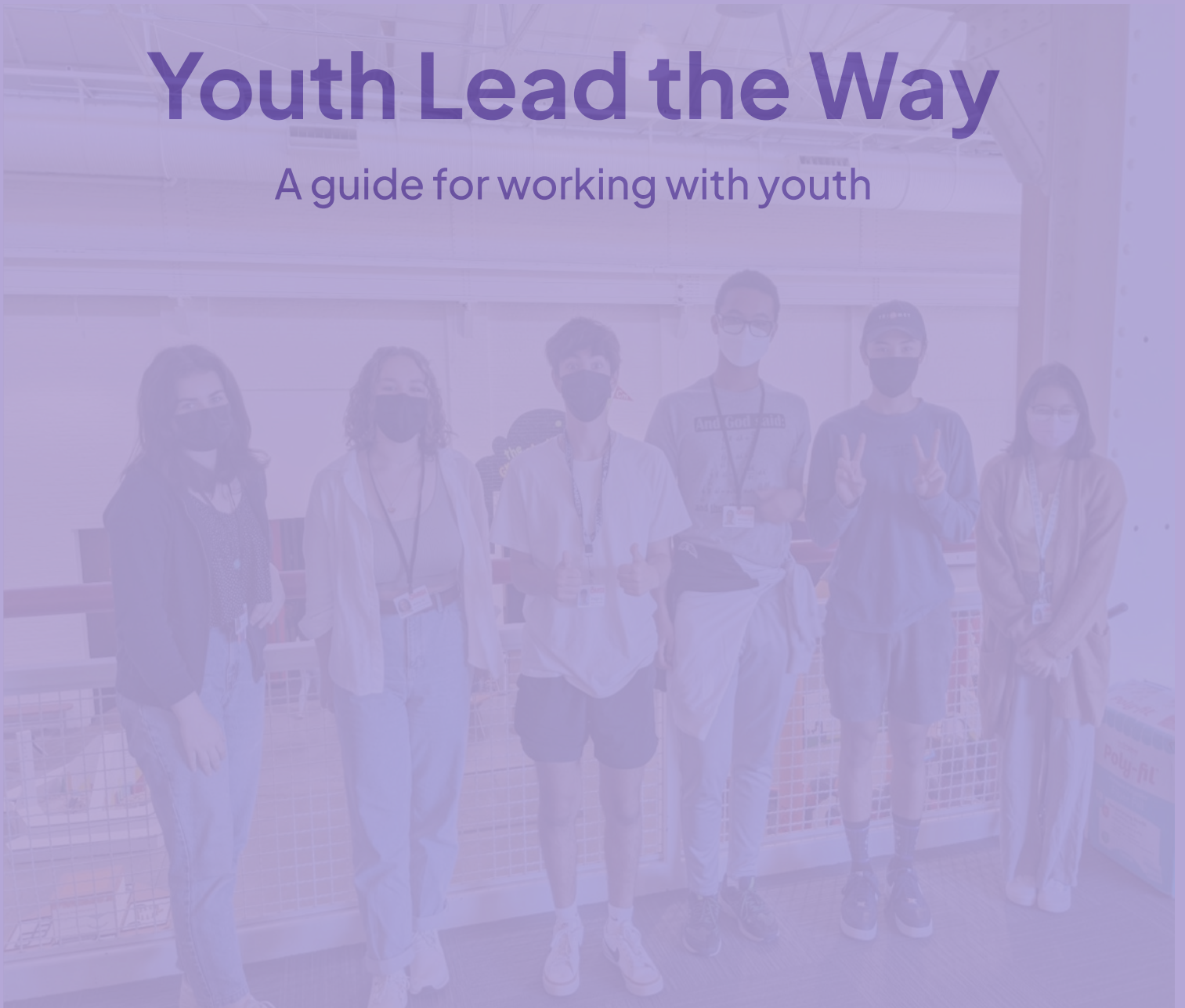
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How to Work with Youth

How to Work With Youth is a guide to help navigate the intricacies of adult-teen interaction. This guide outlines how to tackle potential gaps in communication, engagement, scheduling, and work styles, as well as provide different ways to incorporate youth input and voice into projects. This guide is divided into four sections: Youth vs. Adults, Youth Engagement, Communicating with Youth, and Advising. The Youth vs. Adults section looks into how differences between teens and adults may affect interactions in professional situations, and how to help youth adjust to a standard work environment. The Youth Engagement section examines how to get youth involved in work in a manner that will make them interested in the project. This section will also consider project structure and some ways to help youth feel like they're making a difference. The Communicating with Youth section describes the various modes of teen-adult communication and how to navigate the inherent power dynamic within these relationships. It also provides insight into understanding youths' schedules, timelines, and limitations. The final section, Advising, discusses appropriate methods for overseeing and encouraging youth to voice their ideas about issues that impact them.

All of these sections will also include personal examples of experiences that exemplify successes and failures. This guide was written for youth mentors/future youth advisors who are struggling to figure out how to connect with youth working in central or support roles on a project. This guide provides helpful tips on how to avoid potential communication pitfalls brought on by difficulties faced when professional systems clash with adolescents navigating a mentored environment, especially within a museum. The authors hope that this guide will give practitioners insight on how to improve their ability to work and communicate with youth effectively.

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Youth vs Adults

There are a number of important factors to keep in mind when building interpersonal relationships between adolescents and adults. Particularly, differences present between generations can sometimes make building connections difficult. This section will help mentors understand what it's like to be a teen working in a room full of adults, and how to appropriately manage the inevitable disparity in opinions. Teens and adults can work together effectively, but in order for that to happen, both parties must realize how each differs and how they can include each other's differences to create a product that encompasses ideas extending through generations.

Teens in the Workplace

Youth generally have a lot of ambition for internships and summer jobs, with many considering these opportunities as an escape from school or a way to advance their professional repertoire. Whatever their reason, it is universally important for youth to be seen as normal coworkers and to be granted the same respect that is given to their adult counterparts.

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However, consideration should also be given to the workload placed upon adolescents. Many teenagers are not yet equipped to deal with high-intensity workloads which may be common practice for adults in these professional environments. An over-emphasis on rigorous busy work may deter youth and lead to burnout. The type of conversations that happen with youth should be different from ones with adults, as adults don't typically understand how teens converse. For example, when in meetings, teens may have difficulty understanding certain terminology that adults are used to using in the workspace. It is important to remember that teens do not have much work experience, which makes it harder for them to interpret what an adult might be saying. A summer job should not feel like summer school, it is a place to learn responsibility and create meaningful relationships with the community and co-workers.

When I first started looking for jobs I was very nervous. I was looking at what jobs I would feel most comfortable in. I wanted to work in a place where I would not be judged or looked down upon for being a teenager. I remember my first day of work, looking around and walking into my new workspace with other teens and feeling a sense of relief. I felt like in this workspace I would be able to be me without worrying about being perceived as immature or childish. The adults I worked with already had experience working with teens. They did a lot of things right, such as asking for our opinions and making sure that we all felt valued and happy with the workspace. I have worked with other adults and some things that can be improved on are: making activities that keep youth engaged, and limiting the time youth spend working at a desk. These are a few things that if improved on can make a big difference.

Professional Stamina

Often, teens do not possess the same attention span as adults, so it is key to consider this when deciding how to debrief and instruct teens on projects. A mentor can take this into account by minimizing the time spent on meetings and considering the disparity in professional stamina between many youths and adults. Professional stamina is the ability to sustain physical or mental effort for long periods of time within a professional environment. The professional stamina required by many workplaces is something that most teens do not naturally have, but it can be developed. In order to increase this stamina, it is crucial to structure the workplace in a way that teens will understand the information being presented to them accurately and quickly. While many workplaces adhere to strict protocols for presenting information, teens need a space where they feel they can be creative and think outside the box without being penalized for it. By teaching and training teens to follow professional protocols, but also allowing them to exercise creativity, it is possible to teach teens how to coexist within the parameters of a working environment.

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As previously mentioned, adolescents of today do not have an attention span that is equivalent to their adult counterparts. While adults typically spend 6 to 8 hours at work, the average attention span for teens is closer to 30 minutes. This drastic difference means that mentors need to modify tasks and meetings for their teens. Making presentations more didactic, splitting tasks between coworkers, and issuing reasonably spaced breaks are ways that mentors can address this attention-span gap. Slowly and deliberately merging teens with adult responsibilities is a great way for teens to prepare for adulthood and can help create professional stamina and fight the attention span gap.

The biggest issue I ran into when I first started work was that I saw that my attention span was really bad. The first couple weeks of work were filled with trainings and seminars. During each of the trainings I found myself dozing off, doodling, and fidgeting just to keep myself awake. This is due to the lack of experience in meetings in a traditional workspace. During the whole school year teens are in the classroom hearing lectures for 6 hours a day. The last thing teens want is to be stuck in more monotonous meetings. I remember talking with my coworkers after many of the meetings or trainings and talking about how boring they were. This was not the presenter's fault, those presentations were set up for adult trainings and were given to a different audience. The one tip that would help adults the most when meeting with or presenting to teens is to know that teens are not the same as adults and thus, their presentation should be adjusted for a teen audience. Teens love interactive presentations, videos, activities, things to get their brains active. These are things that will keep teens engaged and allow for interaction.

Tone and Communication

Teens often communicate differently from adults. The most important detail to understanding teens' communication preferences is that they want adults to be direct and straightforward while maintaining a friendly tone. Adults can still maintain an assertive tone, but they should never seem threatening. Adults are there to guide and support teens as the workplace is a learning experience for all. Teens deal with a lot going into new environments, and they really appreciate when adults give honest constructive criticism and pointers with good intentions. Passive aggressiveness only makes teens want to do the task less and does not grow the connection between co-workers. Teens have a hard time understanding passive aggressiveness, so clarity is needed. Talking to a teen requires a friendly, collected, and direct tone where both parties feel satisfied and heard. Many tones can come off as scolding or give the idea that teens aren't taken seriously or that their genuine mistakes aren't welcomed. Building a safe space to ask for help and learn requires incredible patience and clear communication.

Tone and communication is very important when working with teens. In my personal experience, the workspace was a very positive space. But there were a lot of things that I realized about how adults communicate. Many of the adults that I worked with did not know how to talk with teens. There were many times that I remember the room being tense because a question was asked and nobody would respond. Teens are so used to doing this in school that it naturally happens at work. If adults ask us questions by name it will be a lot more successful in getting answers. Another thing I realized was the tone in which I was spoken to. Many adults, when I messed up doing something, would talk in a passive aggressive tone to make me feel like they were being nice, but it felt worse. I'd much rather someone truthfully told me how something was and that way I'd know their intentions are to help me be better.

Leading by Example

Teens in the workspace want to be able to reach out for advice without being faced with negativity. One helpful thing is when adults share stories of times they've succeeded and times they've failed. These stories provide comfort to teens as they can feel better about making mistakes as part of a learning process. These ideas give teens good examples of how they can be a positive influence in the workspace, and how they can act

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professionally to those around them. Teens, like any adult, want to give it their all when it comes to their jobs, but the contrasting mindsets create issues. Understanding how a teen's mind works in comparison to an adult will help both parties work effectively toward a common goal.

Leading by example is crucial to help teenagers in the workspace. Never being in a working environment before this job made me nervous as I had walked in not knowing what to expect. Some of the most helpful things during these times were the adults around me setting the examples and constantly asking me how they could help. The way they talked, how they were during meetings, how they researched and worked were all things that helped me out. This approach helped me be a better employee. That's how I found the most success at work, simply by observing the adults around me setting good examples.

Different Perspectives

The way teens have been raised, and adults' additional life experience, give the two different perspectives on the world. It is important to hear teens and attempt to understand their points of view. Teens want to be respected and

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feel like their opinions and ideas are making an impact in the workspace. There may be differences between adults and teens but it does not mean that they cannot co-exist.

In today's society, teens have a more modernized view of the world that comes from many influencers, such as social media and peers around them. This same view translates to the workspace, where many ideas exist such as alternative types of meetings or other advising activities. Teens have a very modern view on the workspace that they want to apply, but when their ideas contrast with adult's ideas, it is hard to implement them.

In the world, different perspectives are bound to happen as we all come from different places and have different opinions, but it is very important to note how we share them. I noticed throughout my work that the teens around me were open to many ideas but the adults would usually be stuck on doing something a certain way. I think a way adults can improve in this, is just to relax a bit and hear what the teens have to say. The idea might be good and can help the project move in a positive direction. I feel like if both teens and adults put their minds together we can truly work together effectively.
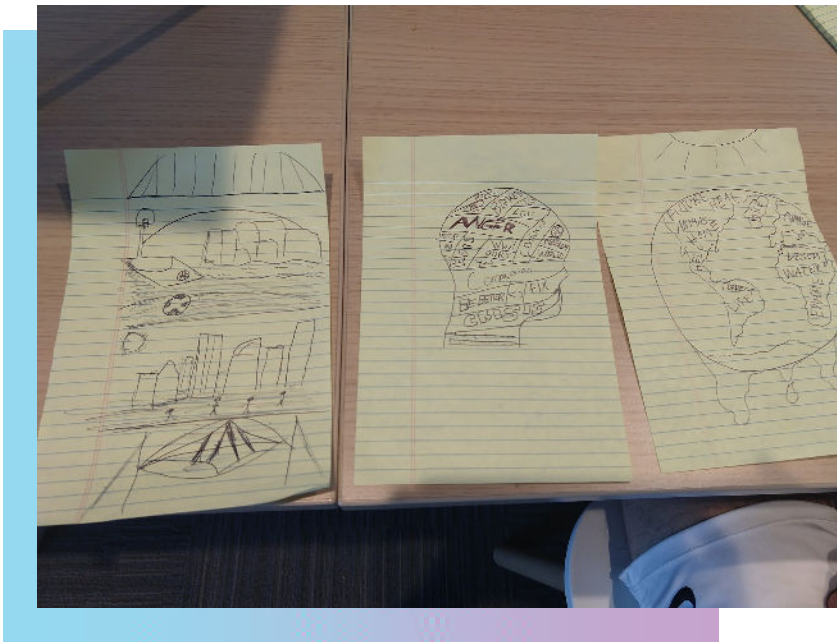
Adults have a more grounded and traditional view on the workspace. American society sets up jobs to be very monotonous and most adults grew up with this image. Although it is not wrong to believe this way, teens can struggle to make a connection with adults.

A solution can be simply discussing the needs of each party, creating a way where work can be done effectively while also maintaining a comforting work environment.

Although difference in perspectives is often seen as a challenge, a wider range of perspectives can be a beneficial force in a setting that is willing to take advantage of a youth's voice and ideas. Museums are an excellent example of a creative space that can benefit from collaboration with youth.

Youth Engagement

One way to determine a person's impact in a work environment is their engagement. For this guide, engagement can be defined as effectively involving oneself in a project without external pressure. When people are engaged in their work, they can contribute the most. With youth, work is most meaningful when they are excited to dedicate their time towards something without needing reminders or supervision. At a first glance, it may not be possible to tell if a youth is engaged in a project or situation. They may not directly communicate their enthusiasm, or may not allude to the difficulties they are having. In some cases, engagement is only noticeable through the work that is completed. If the quality of work and time spent on the work is meeting or exceeding expectations, that is a good sign for the youth's engagement. On the other hand, if work is not being completed as expected, that might be a sign that engagement is low. This is not to say that adults shouldn't communicate with youth to gauge their engagement: they should. However, it is not necessarily the most holistic measurement. One way to navigate the ambiguity of youth's engagement is to use a combination of communicating via surveys or check-ins and reviewing their progress on work. A simple yet useful way to check-in is to provide the youth with a set of questions that are answered weekly, such as *What progress have you made this week? What have you struggled with? What will you continue to work on?* and *What support do you need?* These questions allow teens to reflect on the work they have completed and seek help when needed.

Although sustaining youth engagement can be a challenge, it is vital to the success of a project. In short, the more a teen is engaged in their work, the more they can accomplish. A group of highly motivated and involved teens will be much more productive than a group that is resistant or impartial to the work. That being said, it can be difficult to channel the youth's energy into a productive work environment.

Factors that Affect Engagement

Several factors dictate a teen or youth's engagement with a project, including expectations, commitment, presentation, and the format of the project. Mentors and advisors should focus on these aspects to maximize youth engagement. However, it is important to note that not all forms of work that youth are involved in can be limited to the types of projects described below.

There should be a balance between providing youth with enough guidance to complete work effectively and micromanaging a project. If a

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task is left too flexible or open-ended, teens may not have an idea of where to start, which can be demotivating. Conversely, too many specific and thought-out tasks can be overwhelming. It is important to think about how much is expected of the youth and try to find a workload to which youth will be willing to commit. Managing expectations is best done with transparency, as youth should have a say in the amount and type of work they partake in. Additionally, the amount of input and support one person needs could be very different from another. Some youth may prefer to have projects that are more up in the air with room to make decisions on their own, while others need a specific path to follow or help finding a place to start. In these situations, communication is key so everyone knows what types of projects fit a specific teen the best. As a general rule of thumb, youth operate well in a project when there are specific action items to complete, consistent check-ins, and flexibility for them to come up with things on their own.

In one project I was advising for, my mentor had an idea for the desired end product, but I was expected to complete the brainstorming, content creation, formatting, and finalizing/editing. Essentially, I was expected to take on an entire project with minimal guidance. I spent the majority of my time brainstorming and creating content, but when the time came to put it in the correct format for later use, I couldn't figure out how to make it work. My mentor initially gave me advice when I approached them with the problem, but I didn't get additional help even when more issues came up. The lack of support and specific tasks to complete left me unmotivated, and I began to procrastinate with my work. I would have much preferred a situation where I was checking in weekly with my advisor to update them on progress and issues that I had.

Presentation refers to how a mentor communicates the project and workload to the youth. Framing work in a way that sparks the youth's interest can be as important as how engaging the project is. There seems to be some agreement among youth as to what forms of presentation are the most interesting. Lectures and presentations, while informative, tend to be less engaging, while interactive demonstrations and conversations are more compelling to youth. When possible, a mentor should incorporate storytelling as an educational tool.

Describing past experiences that did or didn't work is an effective method to inform and make youth feel involved (also see Youth vs Adults, Leading by Example). Of course, if compromises need to be made, a mentor can opt for something in between, or present the idea for the project multiple times. An example of this is networking. Imagine that the goal is to meet people at an event and attain their organization's information. The mentor may begin with an activity, such as roleplaying as two people meeting at the event. This can be followed up by a more complete overview of the task, or information about how to approach someone and what to say.

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The project format is the final aspect that determines a youth's engagement. The format of the project includes the specific action items and tasks that will be necessary to complete it, the location and timeline of the project, the primary tools that will be used, and the deliverables. Through all sections of this guide, youth have expressed that they are least interested in work that reminds them of school. This may be completing worksheets and answering questionnaires, writing essays, doing research, and attending certain meetings. In a museum setting, avoiding all of these things may not be possible, but limiting them or finding alternatives is usually the most likely to promote engagement. Strict deadlines and formally turning in work are other things that youth associate with schoolwork. Aside from the types of work, youth value how the work will be utilized. It is inspiring for many teens to know that their mentors and coworkers will have something to gain from their work. Making the work that youth do feel relevant to completing the final goals is something that mentors should strive for. This doesn't necessarily mean directly implementing the ideas or part of the project that youth have been working on (although that will show them how they can have an influence). It could be as simple as working further with youth to perfect their brainstorming or making them feel heard. This is a large issue when it comes to having a small number of youth working with a larger group of adults. In these scenarios, youth may feel as though they are sitting in the background waiting for work to get done. Similarly, incorporating youth into a project midway through makes them feel less in the loop and less involved. This is a fast track to demotivation, unless an aspect of the project is enticing enough to make up for it. If youth are added to a project in its later stages, they are most likely best used as feedback and as resources to check the work that has already been done. This way, they know their input is helpful and they don't feel left behind.

As mentioned earlier, a youth's job is not limited to their projects and tasks. It includes their day-to-day interactions and involvement in the work environment. Even when a teen is not explicitly devoting time to a project or task, their engagement is crucial. Youth are constantly in contact with their mentors, advisors, or coworkers so effective communication and having good relationships are key to engagement in the workplace.

Communicating with Youth

Communication also includes the means of communication, tone, power structures, ability to communicate openly, timing of conversations, and who they are held with. Issues with communication are a common workplace struggle, but extra attention is needed in environments that host both youth and adult voices. Museums and other institutions are interested in working with youth because they believe that youth have something different to offer—because they do. The way youth think, work, and communicate is different from how adults conduct themselves. In order to create the best working relationships between youth and adults, clear communication is needed.

Writing down every communication mishap I've had while working as a young person would be a lost cause; there are simply too many to list. For instance, sending an email that never gets answered or when schedules overlap and meetings never happen. When I was working in a program that aimed to bring youth's voices into a museum, I encountered difficulties in communicating. I was sitting around a table with my peers, also young people, and we were given instructions for a task that involved splitting into groups and going out onto the museum floor. I don't remember what instructions I was given, but I do remember walking away from that table and whispering to my friend, "Do you know what we're supposed to be doing?" It turned out that no one in our group knew what exactly we were supposed to be doing, despite listening to the instructions. To avoid teenagers wandering aimlessly around their museum (or a different institution), designated adults should focus on communication strategies that make sure instructions are understood.

Communication Expectations

Deciding on an appropriate form of communication can be the first step towards effective communication. There are many options: email, texts, chat messages, phone calls, etc. If programs do not utilize an effective form of digital communication, youth will create their own or

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disregard communication entirely. This creates issues when there are suddenly multiple channels of communication open. While this might seem like a good thing, it's unnecessary and is clutter that clouds effective communication. For best practice, *one* form of communication that works for everyone should be established. It is imperative that the youth and adults work together to decide the form of communication that works best for all. For many people, digital communication is the norm. Many young people have a comprehensive understanding of this skill even if they lack in other areas of professional communication. Having too many streams of communication is not caused by a lack of understanding of technology, but a misuse of it.

I'm working on a project and I have a question. I'm not sure who to ask. I could email my instructor but I can't find their address, so I send a Snapchat to my friend. While I'm waiting for a response I make a comment on the Google Doc I'm working on. I keep working and then get an email from my instructor and my friend responds. Now that all of these lines of communication have been opened, I find myself checking large email chains, Google Doc comments, a Snapchat group chat, and work group text just to stay up to date on what was happening, all when one form of communication could have done the same job in a far less fatiguing manner.

General Conversations: Introductions, Icebreakers, and Communication Styles

Setting the groundwork for effective communication is an incredibly important aspect of working relationships that is often overlooked. Initial introductions should be valued and used to set a tone that will best serve the work that will be done.

An essential part of setting the tone is ensuring that everyone knows each other's names and pronouns. While this may seem like a rudimentary practice, it's incredibly important. Having youth use name tags or practice name recitation/memorization are good ways to ensure that this is covered. While some might find these to be embarrassing in the moment, knowing the name of those around you is very rewarding.

After creating a more comfortable environment, time for the youth to talk casually amongst themselves should be

provided. While some may see this as a waste of valuable time, time spent gaining comfort through casual conversation is ultimately beneficial. By having experiences that 'break the ice,' the youth are able to move more swiftly onto productive thinking. Fostering casual relationships between youth is an important step in overcoming the awkward, stagnant energy that halts thinking.

There are hundreds of activities that can be used as icebreakers, some good and some bad, but the best ones are those that incorporate casual conversation. 'Turn and Talk' is an

effective way to build relationships with low stake chats. To make this low stress, it's helpful to have any adults leave earshot of these conversations. This is not because adults have an offensive presence, but more because youth open up when surrounded by people like themselves, and may lead to a stronger working relationship. It is also beneficial to have the topic of these mini conversations be unrelated to topics of future discussions. This also helps lower the stakes and avoid the feeling that youth need to have a generic formulated answer. Having a group of youth turn to their neighbor and discuss whether they think plants have feelings or what their least favorite number is creates a foundation for deeper thinking. While this method concerns communication between youth, it benefits communication within the program as a whole, including that with adults, because a comfortable environment leads to more open communication.

Communication styles used to collaborate with youth should not be identical to models used in schools. While youth are accustomed to them, they can leave a sour taste in their mouths and be fatiguing. Additionally, it does not allow for the same level of trust, personal connection, and individual freedom.
School-like communication models contain several characteristics. There is a clear and stressed power dynamic between student and teacher. Power imbalances don't need to be broken down, it's just that their presence shouldn't be relied on for effective communication with youth. In a classroom, a teacher might expect obedience, set the agenda, or give particular instructions without soliciting input from youth. While this strategy is effective in the classroom, youth become discontent in other settings that use it.

When youth play a role in planning responsibilities, there is often more respect and commitment to how the work is being done. Youth may feel more willing to complete their work and be more confident in what they are doing when they are given agency in how they will operate and go about their work. This can look like asking youth to create their own schedules for when they will accomplish tasks, or choose the ways a task will be executed. Coming in with a 'lesson plan' does have the benefit of preparedness, but also comes with the cost of limiting flexibility, confining creativity, and making youth feel like they have less influence in the work being done.

Yet, there are some effective classroom tactics that can be used when communicating with youth in other settings. 'Cold calling' on people to get an answer to a question has proven itself very useful in keeping ideas flowing when dialogue is stagnant. This is one of several examples where communication models that resemble school have benefits. Below is a list of communication strategies commonly seen in the classroom and whether or not they adapt well to building working relationships with youth.

Helpful School-Like Communication Strategies
- Calling on participants when a response is needed.
- Delegating different roles to youth according to their preferences.

School-Like Communication Models to Avoid
- Daily tasks that are predetermined with no input from youth.
- Use of a rigidly structured calendar.
- Youth have little input of when "homework" (any work done outside of standard hours) should be completed and what the expectation is.

Logistics of Communication: Scheduling, Meeting Details, and Content Briefing

Creating a schedule that works for everyone is an essential aspect of working with others, and like any other people, youth have their own schedules and agendas. When working with youth, there are some scheduling differences that can be assumed to form a schedule that best fits everyone.

One consideration that should be taken into account is that many youth don't have access to reliable modes of transportation. Whether relying on rides from guardians or public transit, these constraints should be taken into consideration when scheduling meeting times.

Young people have their own social lives and tasks that they need to see through. When scheduling, be mindful of peak social hours. This may look like scheduling around Fridays and weekends where youth might otherwise want to hang out with friends. Standard times for school and extracurricular events should also be accounted for. These standard times include after school gets out and several hours after this.

It is important to provide concise information about the meeting. Meetings with adults can be stressful occasions and the best way to lessen this stress is to provide ample information about the meeting that will be held.

Information builds confidence, and this confidence is especially needed for meetings in foreign environments with new people. There are two categories of information that should be given in advance to youth invited to a meeting: logistical details and content briefings.

Logistical Details
Logistical details include the mechanics of the meeting: where it is being held and when it is being held. When communicating where a meeting is being held, do so with a narrowing scope, meaning you should provide general information that is gradually broken down. With this method, broadly stating 'meet at the museum' narrows down to 'meet in the design room,' to 'meet in the design room past the swinging doors by the cafe.' These specific details must be accounted for as it's easy to forget that youth, even if they are past patrons/volunteers, do not have the same understanding of the space as the adults they may be working with.

Content Briefing
Content briefing includes information that is more refined than the logistical aspect. Content includes who is invited to the meeting, what will be covered, and work that needs to be completed beforehand.

When armed with effective communication models, strong relationships that make a real impact can be formed. The nuances to its execution have the power to completely shift the nature of every encounter. The building blocks of conversing are needed to instill a sense of involvement that goes beyond superficial chatter. The ability to hold dialogue that captures the engagement of all participants will make a lasting impact on any program.
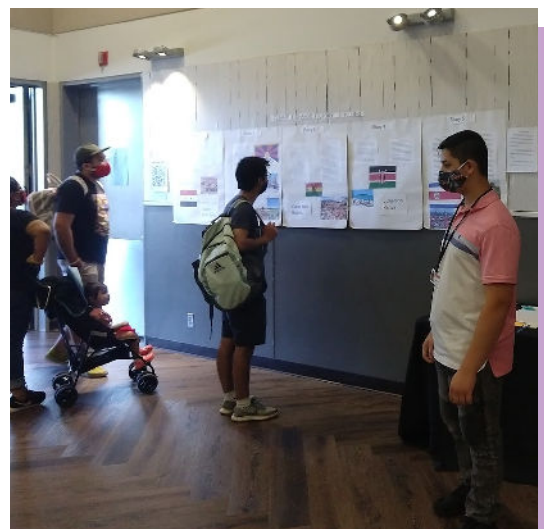
Advising

Museum projects can benefit from incorporating youth's voices as advisors during each part of the creation process. For typical advising projects, youth advisors work with experienced adults on a project team. These roles can take many different forms depending on the project and the dynamic of the group.

When advising projects are done well, not only do youth feel their ideas are valuable to the project, but their work is incorporated into the project. In adult-dominated settings, youth's ideas may be ignored or unused. By actively listening to and including youth in key points of the project, adults can avoid turning youth into figureheads that do not impact the project.

Importance of Advising

Youth provide different perspectives and ideas than adults. As museums work to engage youth in exhibits and activities, it is helpful to have youth's input during the creation phases. Like adults, youth have specific interests and areas of knowledge that differ from other people, meaning they could approach problems from different angles than adults or other youth. In areas where youth are more impacted than adults, such as the climate crisis, youth's voices are of the utmost importance, as with any frontline community. By working with youth, adults have the opportunity to expand the way they communicate and learn new skills to use in future projects.

Advising museum projects also benefits youth advisors. When a project functions well, youth have the opportunity to gain experience and make meaningful contributions to a professional setting with appropriate support. Successful projects result in increased confidence for youth in otherwise confusing or uncomfortable situations. When youth see themselves do well in a professional field, they feel empowered to pursue professional goals.

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Models of Advising

Just as museum projects take many forms, the setup of advising roles varies greatly depending on the type of project, timeframe, goals, and the personalities of the people involved. Some possible models for different project scopes include:

Whole Project. Youth advisors are active participants in the entirety of a project's timeline. A project like this may be an exhibit design or program, or content creation. Youth advisors should have a defined role in the process that is of equal importance (but not necessarily the same work commitment) as adults.

Project Segment. Youth advisors work with a specific part or phase of a project team to accomplish a component of the project. This may be used for large scale projects where youth are not involved in the start-to-finish process.

Focus Group. As a smaller commitment, youth advisory groups could meet once or a few times to discuss a project or project segment and provide recommendations. For example, an exhibit-building team may utilize a focus group to understand whether their project would be interesting to teens.

Across these advising models, youth take on a variety of roles, such as a content advisor, content creator, or project leader, among many other possibilities. The youth's role dictates their level of responsibility within the project.

Setting Up for Success: Defining Goals and Roles

The most important part of an advising project is mutually agreeing upon a specific and practical end goal that youth and adults find appealing. When advising projects are too free-form, youth cannot participate in a way that honors their time and effort. Additionally, the goal of the project should be legitimately useful. When youth waste their time on tasks that do not impact the project, they are not actually advising. This situation is frustrating to youth and does not uplift them. As a project develops, advisors and adults should make time to create goals and a timeline to reach them.

> **When advising projects are too free-form, youth cannot participate in a way that honors their time and effort.**

> *During an advising project, the goal was to rewrite some descriptions for experiments so they included a climate change focus. While I didn't have much input on what the advising looked like, my role and task were well-defined. Because I knew that my work would be useful to the advisor/mentor and I had a timeline, I felt engaged with the project and it was, overall, successful.*

Where it is possible, youth should be included in broad project meetings and take on active roles so they become an important part of the group. When youth are a disconnected subset of a larger project, they cannot substantially influence the project. In some cases, such as focus groups, youth may not be substantially

connected with the larger team. Because each advising role is different, youth and adults should discuss the scope of influence and how youth will specifically impact the project while they define roles.

> *During the initial meeting with an adult I worked with (in-person), she said email was the best method of communication. The work I did was researching and writing blurbs about experiments to include information about climate change. Since it was all straightforward online, email seemed like a good choice. I emailed, and it took three weeks to get a response. Even though I emailed back within a reasonable time with the work, the lack of communication from the adult's side made the experience difficult. I know that she was very busy with other tasks, but communication, even if it's just to say that you're busy and can't focus on the project at the moment, is the bare minimum to form good advising projects.*

As explained in the Communicating with Youth section, setting up a mode or a few modes of communication and expectations is vital to the success of a project. For advising in particular, clear communication around work plans, goals, and expectations is extremely important. Aligning the initial understanding of communication is key. Adults and youth should discuss how to receive feedback, potential training in new forms of communication, skills they hope to develop, and how long it should take to reply via a specific communication tool. Adults need to be direct with constructive criticism of youth's work. At the same time, they need to be open to youth's ideas without immediately critiquing them. Working together in mutual collaboration is the best method for successful advising. Some practices of supportive communication include regular check-ins, sticking to predetermined goals, ongoing mutual feedback, and reflections on how work aligns with bigger goals.

Conclusion

Young people are already working together to create meaningful positive change in their communities. For institutions to be relevant and involved in community issues, they must work alongside youth. Whenever an organization engages with youth, there's a danger of patronizing or tokenizing them. To avoid this, we must ask youth sincerely to work WITH us, not FOR us.

This guide was written as part of a larger NSF-funded project investigating the best ways for Informal Science Institutions to meaningfully contribute to their local Climate Action Ecosystems. In 2021 the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry in Portland, Oregon hired 15 youth who were already passionate about and involved in the climate action movement to be the face of Climate Education at the museum. Over 15 months, our "YouthCARE" (Youth Climate Action Research Educator) team developed educational tools, did social research, advised various museum project teams, and held multiple public events. Throughout all of these responsibilities, youth actively engaged in evaluating their own program. One finding from this evaluation was that some museum staff struggled to successfully collaborate with youth. This guide was created to support adults in engaging more successfully with young people in the workplace. It is our hope that this guide can help facilitate meaningful integration of youth voices into institutional policy and programming.

Grateful to have had the opportunity to work together and learn from a group of talented youth, OMSI hopes that this guide will become a useful tool for practitioners/organizations willing to live a similar experience.