

YOUTH-LED CLUBS & ACTIVITIES PLANNING GUIDE



Vermont
Afterschool

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The purpose of this guidebook is to advise and provide some structure for adults and administrative systems who are planning to support youth to develop clubs or programming in their afterschool, summer, or third space programs.

This kind of youth empowerment work can be a shift in role and perspective for some adults, so we have built out several pieces of content to support those shifts and to explain their benefits and how they foster the growth and development of our youth. Doing this work with youth takes time and planning ahead to allow for the Adult Mentor and Youth Leader to work through the process. Program leaders can support this by ensuring there is enough time planned for each phase.



1. SETTING THE STAGE + STARTING WITH STAFF

Start off by connecting with staff around supporting and encouraging youth ideas and youth-driven clubs and activities. Ensure staff have the skills and perspectives that foster collaboration and empowerment in their relationships with youth.



For the purposes of this guide, we'll refer to the staff directly supporting youth in designing and executing their club or activity as **Adult Mentors**. While it's important for all staff to explore the following skills, attitudes, and perspectives in their work with youth, it's critical for the Adult Mentors directly supporting youth-led clubs and activities to live these concepts in that work.

It is also important to note that everything we do in our work with youth we do through the use of our relationships with those youth. This concept is particularly important for the role of Adult Mentors, as they will be supporting youth to navigate long-term planning, adult administrative systems, relationships with their peers, and receiving feedback regarding their efforts. These are tricky subjects to navigate and require an understanding and supportive relationship with an Adult Mentor. It is up to the youth to determine which adult they have this kind of relationship with, **so it is imperative that the youth select who their Adult Mentor is, to ensure the necessary relationship is established.**



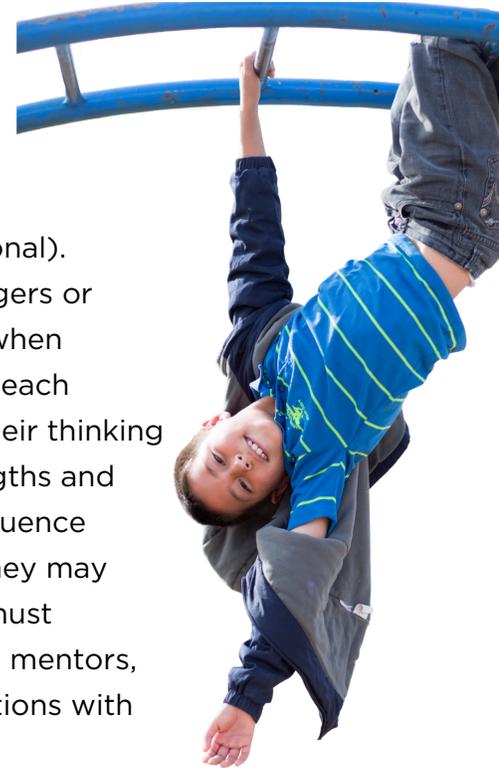
To ensure staff are prepared to foster collaboration and empowerment in their Adult Mentor relationships with youth, it is important to:

- Assess attitudes and interest about partnering with youth and consider youth input. This content can be used to frame conversation with a potential Adult Mentor to assess their fit for that role.
- Acknowledge that this may be a shift for some but will result in growth and participation from students.
- Consider what training or support staff need to feel they can do this well.

I. SETTING THE STAGE + STARTING WITH STAFF

- Step back and let youth lead. Know staffs' strengths and provide opportunities for them to use and hone these strengths. Relationships with the youth are your most important tool.

- ▶ **Scaffolding:** Break up learning or skill-building into chunks and provide structure and support for each chunk. This is important in helping youth taste success as they make small steps toward their goals.
- ▶ **Learning Styles:** Youth learn best when working with their preferred learning style: Visual (spatial), Verbal (linguistic), Aural (auditory-musical), Physical (kinesthetic), Logical (mathematical), Social (interpersonal), and Solitary (intrapersonal).
- ▶ **Empowerment:** Working with youth may involve different triggers or power dynamics than working with adults. Know your youth, when support will be most needed, and what is the best support for each individual youth. It may take time for some youth to change their thinking and assert their influence. Understanding their skills and strengths and utilizing them toward goals will show youth the power and influence they already have and encourage them to hone those skills. They may need scaffolding, practice, and modeling empowerment. We must remember their experiences with adults holding power and, as mentors, we must share power and model empowerment in our interactions with youth to support their growth.



Our 4-phase Youth Empowerment Framework:

1. **Awareness** of the interests and skills the youth bring to the table.
 2. **Visioning** how those interests can come together as a club & draw other students.
 3. **Transformation** of their schools, programs, and communities by bringing the club to life.
 4. **Growth** in their program and its leaders by making the process of supporting youth-led clubs and activities a regular part of the program's routine for designing activities.
- ▶ **Youth Voice:** Youth voice cannot happen without scaffolding and sharing power. It is a process that builds slowly and takes practice. Young people are not used to freely giving their voice and opinion, and having it heard and regarded. It is important to build trust and show the youth their voice matters. Over time, youth will start to share freely. If adults continue to hold the power in the room, the youth will continue to feel incapable, dependent, and/or disregarded.



Communication Tip #1

Text. Email. Phone. Messenger. Carrier Pigeon. Discover what types of communication work best for each youth.

2. AWARENESS – CLUB/ACTIVITIES BRAINSTORMING PROCESS WITH YOUTH + ADULT MENTORS

- **If you are using a brainstorming process with a group of students:** Make sure the youth understand the boundaries and parameters they have to work within in terms of the rules, expectations, and the types of activities that are and are not allowed in school-related programming. It will be important to be clear about this from the beginning so the youth know what parameters they have to work within.
 - **Outline key needs & restrictions:** Make sure to clearly share with your youth leaders the rules and requirements clubs and activities need to abide by. It is best to keep them to a **simple 3-5 items if possible**. You'll want to be able to refer to them quickly and easily in reviewing the results of your brainstorming sessions. Remember that the ideas that have questionable alignment with the needs and restrictions can be brought to the administration by the youth leader for discussion and possible approval.
- Remind everyone present about the rules of brainstorming and how **all ideas will be accepted at first**, and that each idea will be assessed afterward using the needs and restrictions outlined beforehand.
- Have a **group or circle process where all youth get several opportunities to give ideas** to the process and all ideas are recorded (on a flip chart or white board or Google Doc).
- After the brainstorming rounds are completed and no new ideas are coming up, review the list for **overall feasibility and compliance with the needs and restrictions of the program**. Any ideas not in line with the needs and restrictions will be removed or moved forward with administrative approval.
- Make a plan with the youth leader to talk to administrators or decision makers if there are tentative activities that may need special approval or have questionable alignment with the identified needs and restrictions. It will be important to **determine that each activity can actually happen and will be allowed** before they can be listed as a true possibility for the youth to follow through with. It is important to include the youth leader in this conversation, planning and process. It is an opportunity to support the youth in taking on a leadership role and leading this type of advocacy conversation promotes their development and confidence. As Adult Mentors it will be important to support & encourage the youth leaders while also normalizing the struggles and frustrations that can come advocating for change.

3. VISIONING - PLANNING TO LAUNCH THE CLUB

Work with the youth to make a plan for how they are going to start the club, what supplies and needs they have for making their club a reality, and how they are going to advertise it to other students.



- What supplies are needed for the club activity?
- Do supplies need to be purchased or does the school already have them?
- What's the purchasing process for getting supplies (check with site coordinator or administration)?
- What is the timeline?
- Who needs to sign off on the request?

Have an active discussion about how the youth and Adult Mentor are going to ensure the needs and supplies for the club are taken care of. Assign names to tasks and items with dates and a timeline.



- What are the activities in each session?
- What is needed for each session?
- How many sessions are there?
- Who is the intended audience?
- Are there going to be peer leaders?
- Is the program for younger students or same-age peers?
- What are the minimum/maximum number of participants for the club?

Communication Tip #2



Use multiple modes of communication for different learning styles: visual reminders, review acronyms, make sure all youth know where to go for info & questions. Set aside time for check-ins & to discuss common challenges & potential solutions.

This chart will help youth plan for each activity they want to have in their club to ensure they have everything they need, when they need it, for each activity. [Click here to download the chart.](#)

| Club Activity | Materials needed for the activity | Who will get the materials? | When do we need them by? | Mark as done! |
|---------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

3. VISIONING - PLANNING TO LAUNCH THE CLUB

Make a plan and timeline for launching the Club that works for the youth, the Adult Mentor, and the school's planning needs for clubs. Outline steps, dates, times, locations, who is responsible for what, and when each step needs to be completed to stay on the timeline for launching the club.



- Are snow days, early release days, or in-service days going to get in the way of the club? (Check the school calendar when planning the dates and locations for Club activities.)
- How will other students be told about the Club so they can participate?
- Do you need to plan for advertising?
- What other needs should be planned for?

This chart will help the youth plan each of the club sessions over the course of the time their club will be running, and organize the people, staff, and supplies needed for all of the activities being run each session. [Click here to download the chart.](#)

| Club session & date | Time & location | Session activities + who is leading them? | Supplies needed | School staff / support person / Adult Mentor to be present |
|---------------------|-----------------|---|-----------------|--|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

Launch the club activity plan for the period of time determined by the youth and adult mentor in the plan, and using the identified club time & space, and the preferred mediums for advertising the club to the student body.

Communication Tip #3

Active listening is a way of listening and responding that ensures the youth know you are truly interested in their perspectives, ideas, opinions, concerns, thoughts, etc.



Check out [p. 13 of the Youth Workforce Development Guide](#) for more active listening tips.



SAMPLE CLUB/ACTIVITY APPLICATION FORM

Youth-Led Club Proposal/Youth Action Proposal

| | |
|--------------|-------|
| Program Name | _____ |
| Youth Leader | _____ |
| Adult Mentor | _____ |
| Telephone | _____ |
| Email | _____ |

Please **circle** which days you are planning to provide programming:

Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday Sunday

Please **circle** all relevant program purpose areas:

| | | | | |
|----------------|----------------|---------------------|-------------------|------------|
| Leadership | Mentoring | Reading/Writing | Mathematics | Science |
| Social Studies | Arts & Music | Cultural Activities | Health/Nutrition | Languages |
| Communication | Team Building | Physical Activities | Raising Awareness | Technology |
| | Skill Building | Having Fun | | |

Other program purposes not listed: _____

Maximum number of youth in program: _____ For grade/age levels: _____

Minimum number of youth needed: _____ Program location: _____

SAMPLE CLUB/ACTIVITY APPLICATION FORM

Youth leader: _____ Program name: _____

Provide a program description (description may be used in marketing materials):

Knowledge: What do you want youth to learn about from being in your program? (Words, facts, content, etc.)

Understanding: What do you want youth to understand from being in your program? (Ideas, concepts, perspectives, etc.)

Actions: What do you want youth to be able to do from being in your program? (Skills, talents, behaviors, etc.)

[Click here to download Club/Activity Application form.](#)

4. TRANSFORMATION – IMPLEMENTING THE CLUB ACTIVITY

Work with the youth on implementing their plan for the club sessions and getting feedback from participating students on how happy they were with the club and if they should try to run it again.

Note: This is a process where the youth will need regular and consistent, as well as supportive, feedback from their Adult Mentor and other adults involved. It is important to prepare the youth for receiving feedback and for adults to present feedback in a supportive, strength-based, and forward-moving way. Actively engaging in solution-focused conversation and brainstorming will be critical in this process.

- Implement the plan for running the club as the youth and Adult Mentor outlined together in their planning.
- The Adult Mentor should support the youth from the sidelines and check in frequently (without being overbearing or taking over) to see if they can help with anything. The Adult Mentor can start out being more of a presence and support during sessions, and then back off over time, letting the youth have more independence and ownership as the club moves forward and is running smoothly.
- Issues ALWAYS come up, so normalizing this and supporting the youth to keep moving things forward, while learning from the experience, is critical to the youth feeling their club is a success. Don't fix the problems for them but be there to ask questions and help them plan for the best possible solution given their needs and interests.
 - ✔ It will be very important for both the youth and Adult Mentor to plan to meet for 15–30 minutes after each programming session to process how things went during the session. We want to ensure that any discussion of struggles or disappointments, or needs for changing the content are not public conversations with participating students present. These post-session meetings are the opportunity for the Adult Mentor to support the youth, normalize struggles, help plan for the unexpected, and ensure the youth is learning and growing through the experience of running a club. It will be important to have these meetings in the moment and not put them off until the next day or another time. Planning for them ahead of time will be helpful.
 - ✔ It may also be important to note for the youth that attendance is not a popularity contest, but due more in part to advertising and/or student interest in the subject matter of the club. We want to make sure to support them to run their activities even with low attendance, and normalize that sometimes a smaller group can mean more productive time together.



Communication Tip #4

**Utilize the 6 key active listening skills:
Pay attention; Withhold judgement, Reflect;
Clarify; Summarize; Share.**

4. TRANSFORMATION – IMPLEMENTING THE CLUB ACTIVITY

- For the end of the sessions, develop a quick survey form asking participating youth what they liked about the club, if they would like the club to be offered again, and what could be added to make it even better. These could be number rankings too to make it quick and easy to get the youth's feedback.
- Present the Activity Survey results to the Youth Leader and talk about how everyone felt the sessions went.



- Which activities went really well?
- Which activities need some work?
- What new activities would make the club even better?
- What could help things run more smoothly?

Note: This is another time when it will be critical to prepare the Youth Leader for receiving feedback from their peers and supporting them to hold a growth mindset in using that feedback to evolve and grow their club activities. The relationship and trust the Adult Mentor has developed with the Youth Leader over the planning time will be instrumental in supporting them to process feedback and receive it well.

- Check-in and see if the youth is interested in running the club for a second session. See what support they may need to make the desired changes to the club activities. And make a plan to repeat the planning and execution process with the Adult Mentor.

Communication Tip #5



Determine communication styles of youth & staff (Dominant, Influencer, Conscientious & Steady) & develop “try to” & “avoid” tips together.

Check out p. 14 of the [Youth Workforce Development Guide](#) for more communication style tips.



S. GROWTH - INFLUENTIAL ADULTS ENSURING THAT REPEATING THIS PROCESS BECOMES A REGULAR PART OF PLANNING FOR CLUBS EACH SESSION GOING FORWARD

Adults and administrations can show their commitment to youth empowerment and youth-led activities by systematizing the process of soliciting youth-led clubs and activities as a critical part of their school or program culture. When leaders express a value and appreciation for the importance of supporting youth-led programming and reinforce that appreciation by creating a structure, support, and a process for continuing the activities outlined in this guidebook, they are promoting the empowerment and leadership development of all of the youth involved in their programming.

- Discuss the success of the club activity design process and the evaluation results from the clubs with staff, students, and administrators, showing that it should be an ongoing process for creating school clubs with the support, encouragement, and regular implementation from the administration.
- Check-in about any adjustments or changes that may need to be made to the youth-led planning process to ensure the administration continues to support the club design process going forward.
- Make an explicit plan for repeating the youth-led club activities solicitation process, clarifying what the timelines and deadlines are for developing and submitting proposals for each session of the year. Establish a routine for announcing when a youth-led programming design process starts and ends before each program session and ensure all students are encouraged to participate.
- Provide support and encouragement for staff to be Adult Mentors and make themselves available to support youth in this process and possibly develop regular check-in meetings where adults can make themselves available to partner with youth.
- Consider dedicating a portion of the school budget to youth-led club activities for the purchase of supplies and needs for club activities.

Additional steps adults can take to show systemic support for youth-driven clubs:

- ✔ Invite the community to an event celebrating these clubs and activities and the efforts of the youth who designed them and brought them to life. An event or a time set aside to acknowledge the youth for their efforts, initiative, and dedication to seeing things through can be powerful for youth and support them in learning to accept acknowledgement and praise for their efforts.
- ✔ Invite decision-makers and administrators (principals, superintendents, etc.) to visit the clubs and programs as the youth are running them. This can really help the youth to feel valued and appreciated for their efforts and in turn will support them to value their school/program.