



NAF Youth Engagement Readiness Tool

Since 1980, NAF has partnered with communities and leaders in education, business, and non-profits and community-based organizations to improve student outcomes through NAF academies, small learning communities in high schools. NAF wants to ensure that high school students across the United States are ready for college and careers. To support its work, NAF seeks to increase youth engagement and the voices of youth throughout its network. With participatory action research (PAR), a tool for youth engagement, NAF supports the creation of new spaces within academies for youth-centered approaches to knowledge and power sharing to advance more equitable learning experiences and environments. NAF will use the insights gathered from PAR to support youth-informed and -led, local decision-making and planning within NAF academies and to share the organization's work externally.

PAR as a Tool to Increase Youth Engagement and Youth Voice

"Youth engagement is about creating opportunities for young people to play meaningful roles in operational and governance issues, as well as in the decision-making structures of organizations. Youth engagement means that organizations partner with young people and engage them in the work of the organization.

The ideas and expertise of youth can contribute to improved services and programs and lead to better outcomes for children and youth. Organizations change and evolve when the individual employees adopt youth engagement into their daily practice.

[Organizational change] starts from shifting the practice of staff. For many people, this is a very new concept, so make sure that everyone really understands what youth engagement means at an organizational level!"¹

¹ The Youth Engagement Toolkit was produced in 2013 by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Province of British Columbia



Participatory Action Research “is collaborative research, education, and action used to gather information to use for [a range of] issues. It involves people who are concerned about or affected by an issue taking a leading role in producing and using knowledge about it.”²

So why PAR, and why a PAR process to engage youth? Youth-centered PAR is an “innovative approach to positive youth and community development based on social justice principles in which young people are trained to conduct systematic research to improve their lives, their communities, and the institutions intended to serve them.”³ Youth-centered PAR is a process whereby youth are empowered as experts and, along with adult allies, develop learning experiences and environments that address their needs. Adult allies can be researchers, educators, practitioners, business leaders, or interested community members.

The principles that drive PAR are:

- **Participation** - PAR advocates that those most affected by an issue, such as youth, be involved throughout the process.
- **Action-Oriented** - Action is achieved through a reflective cycle, whereby youth and their adult allies collect and analyze data about an issue, then decide what action should follow. The purpose of an action is to solve or ameliorate a problem.
- **Shared Ownership** - PAR is driven by those with a stake in an issue. Outside stakeholders, such as researchers, can support youth and their adult allies, but youth and allies drive the process.

For more information about PAR as a tool for youth engagement and youth voice, please refer to this [Literature Review Brief](#).

The **NAF Youth Engagement Readiness Tool** will help organizations rate their youth engagement practices and understand their areas of strength and areas for improvement. The Readiness Checklist is organized according to PAR’s three (3) principles:

1. **Participatory Readiness** - *How ready is the organization to engage with youth?*
2. **Shared Ownership Readiness** - *Can youth participate in decision-making and develop leadership skills?*
3. **Action-Oriented Readiness** - *Do youth and adults work together with joint rights and responsibilities?*

How to use the NAF Youth Engagement Readiness Tool

The NAF Youth Engagement Readiness Tool should be completed by educators and school/district leaders who are adult allies directly supporting the PAR process.

² Kindon, S., Pain, R., & Kesby, M. (2007). *Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods: Connecting People, Participation and Place*. Routledge.

³ YPAR Hub, <http://yparhub.berkeley.edu>; last retrieved on April 16, 2020.



About the Youth Engagement Readiness Tool

Under each of the three themes, participants are asked to rate youth engagement practices at their organization (e.g., school or district) according to indicators or statements that reflect a spectrum of youth engagement. Definitions or examples are provided for each statement. Participants are asked to reflect on the entire organization - *the school or district* (as opposed to educators engaging youth one-on-one).

There may be concepts related to youth engagement that are new and that's ok! The Youth Engagement Readiness Tool reflects "what youth engagement can look like in its ideal state." Each organization will start the PAR process at a different place with respect to youth engagement. In assessing your organization, ranks of 1 are normal for some indicators.

Completing the Youth Engagement Readiness Tool:

1. **The NAF Academy PAR leader will identify which educators and school/district leaders will participate in the readiness assessment.** The lead will provide NAF with participants' name and email address. NAF and its consultant will e-mail the Readiness Tool as a survey for each participant to complete.
2. **Participants should rate each indicator or statement by themselves.** You can review the indicators and statements below and register your answers in this survey e-mailed by X via X. Once submitted, you will receive an email confirming that you completed the Readiness Tool, which will include a copy of your answer.

After Completing the Youth Engagement Readiness Tool:

1. **School/District group review of the aggregated survey results.** Once all participants have completed the survey, NAF and its consultant will send the lead a summary of responses. No identifiable individual information will be included in the summary. The lead will convene a meeting with the participants to review the information and collectively identify strengths and areas for improvement. The lead or a designated participant will document key takeaways from the meeting and share with NAF.
2. **A NAF and school/district group meeting** will be convened to review youth engagement strengths and areas for improvement and decide on the next steps in planning for the implementation of PAR at the Academy and School/District.

The NAF Youth Engagement Readiness Tool is adapted from: *The Youth Engagement Toolkit, produced in 2013 by the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Province of British Columbia; Putting Positive Youth Development into Practice by National*



Clearinghouse on Families & Youth for the Family and Youth Services Bureau; *Assessing your Organization’s Readiness for Youth Development* by Dotterweich, Jutta (2008); *Youth and Adult Leaders for Program Excellence: A Practical Guide for Program Assessment and Action Planning* By Linda Camino, Shepherd Zeldin, Carrie Mook, and Cailin O’Connor; <http://yparhub.berkeley.edu>

Participatory Readiness							
Indicator	Ranking						Prompts for further consideration Consider responses to these prompts in terms of in-person or virtual youth engagement,
	1	2	3	4	N/A	D/K	
AT MY SCHOOL OR DISTRICT ...							
Youth engagement is supported by legislation, policy, or practice guidelines	We have no youth engagement policy or guidelines in place.	We are developing youth engagement policies or guidelines.	We have youth engagement policies or guidelines in place.	We frequently put into practice our youth engagement policies.	N/A	D/K	Is youth engagement in the school/district limited to a small number of students?
The following best describes how we practice youth engagement	Adults know what is best for young people and control situations in which youth are involved.	Adults allow young people to take part in decision making because they think the experience is good for youth.	Adults respect young people for having something significant to offer, and youth are encouraged to become involved.		N/A	D/K	
Youth have access to staff or leaders who can address their concerns	Youth do not have access to staff or leaders who can address their concerns.	Youth have access to a guidance counselor.	Youth have access to a guidance counselor, staff, and leaders, and youth advisory councils are in place.	Youth have access to a guidance counselor, staff, leaders, and youth advisory councils present information to school leadership. Youth have a regular seat at the leadership table.	N/A	D/K	<i>In which leadership meetings do youth participate as contributors. which meetings exclude youth participation, and why?</i>



Staff and leaders at my school understand the importance of youth engagement initiatives and support them	Staff and leaders at my school do not understand or support youth engagement initiatives.	Staff and leaders at my school are seeking to learn more about youth engagement initiatives and how to support them.	Staff and leaders at my school understand, recognize, acknowledge, and support youth engagement initiatives.	My school leaders and other staff make youth engagement initiatives a priority and directly support these opportunities with funding or other resources.	N/A	D/K	<i>Do staff and leaders at your school/district ask youth questions, and do they listen to their answers?</i>
District leaders understand the importance of youth engagement initiatives and support them	District leaders do not understand or support youth engagement initiatives.	District leaders are seeking to learn more about youth engagement initiatives and how to support them.	District leaders understand, recognize, acknowledge, and support youth engagement initiatives.	District leaders make youth engagement initiatives a priority and directly support these opportunities with funding or other resources.	N/A	D/K	
We have dedicated staff resources to support youth engagement practices	We do not have staff at our school/district to support youth engagement practices.	We have staff who volunteer to support youth engagement.	We have allocated resources to assign staff to support youth engagement.	We have allocated resources to assign staff to youth engagement and provide staff with resources and experts as needed.	N/A	D/K	<i>Do staff have the energy, interest, and motivation to support youth engagement?</i>
We have dedicated financial or material resources to support youth engagement practices	We have not dedicated financial or other material resources to support youth engagement practices.	Staff donate materials and resources to support youth engagement.	We have financial and other material resources to support youth engagement.	We support youth engagement through financial and other material resources and assign space and have policies to compensate youth (financially, with school credits, childcare, food, etc.) for their engagement	N/A	D/K	<i>List the financial and material resources available for youth engagement.</i>
We have dedicated time (before, during, and after school) to support youth engagement practices (up to a few hours a week)	No	Somewhat	Yes – we have time before, during and/or after school	Yes – we have dedicated time before, during and/or after school	N/A	D/K	<i>List the times during which youth engagement is supported by staff.</i>



<p>Youth engagement staff are respectful of and knowledgeable about the cultures (and sub-cultures) of youth participants</p>	<p>Youth engagement staff are not knowledgeable about the cultures (and subcultures) of youth participants.</p>	<p>We are working with youth engagement staff to increase their knowledge of the cultures (and subcultures) of youth participants.</p>	<p>Youth engagement staff are educated about the unique features (historical, political) of youth cultures and subcultures.</p>	<p>Youth engagement staff are educated about the unique features (historical, political) of youth cultures and subcultures, and they attend, alongside youth, workshops on different cultural, social, or religious perspectives.</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>D/K</p>	<p><i>What values or beliefs about youth and community do we hold? Which are important to our school, and which are we willing to rethink?</i></p>
<p>Efforts are made to ensure that youth can safely (emotionally, physically, mentally, culturally, and spiritually) participate from their own unique cultural perspectives</p>	<p>We do not have safe spaces; youth do not feel open to or safe sharing their thoughts and ideas.</p>	<p>We are developing safe spaces for youth from all cultures to feel open to or safe in sharing their thoughts and ideas.</p>	<p>We have safe spaces where youth from all cultures feel open to or safe in sharing their thoughts and ideas.</p>	<p>We have safe spaces where youth from all cultures feel open to or safe in sharing their thoughts and ideas; staff and youth promote a space free of discrimination.</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>D/K</p>	<p><i>How do you and other staff from school keep in touch with the changing needs of your students?</i></p>
<p>We have established mechanisms for communication with youth and families</p>	<p>We have no mechanisms in place to communicate with youth and families.</p>	<p>We are developing mechanisms to communicate with youth and families.</p>	<p>We have newsletters and send emails to communicate with youth and families.</p>	<p>We have newsletters, send emails, host open houses and special events, and use text messaging to communicate with youth and families.</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>D/K</p>	<p><i>Which mechanisms of communication work best for youth? For families?</i></p>
<p>We collaborate with a range of community organizations and groups to enhance our programs and services for youth</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>Somewhat</p>	<p>Yes – We collaborate with a range of community organizations and groups (including local businesses) to enhance our programs and services for youth.</p>	<p>Yes – We collaborate with a wide range of community organizations and groups (including local businesses) to enhance our programs and services for youth. We introduce youth to new contacts within these networks and attend these organizations’ meetings along with youth.</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>D/K</p>	<p><i>Which community-based organization and other groups do you regularly collaborate with? And how are youth engaged in this collaboration?</i></p>



Shared Ownership Readiness							
Indicator	Ranking						Prompts for further consideration Consider responses to these prompts in terms of in-person or virtual youth engagement
AT MY SCHOOL OR DISTRICT...	1	2	3	4	N/A	D/K	
There is a process in place to include youth voices in our school's decision-making and planning work	There is no process in place to include youth voices in our school's or district's decision-making and planning work.	We are developing a process to include youth voices in our school's or district's decision-making and planning work.	Youth at our school/district share their voices through feedback forms, surveys, or focus groups.	Youth at our school/district share their voices through feedback forms, surveys, focus groups, and via a Youth Advisory Council or a Student Council.	N/A	D/K	<i>In what decisions does our school or district choose to involve youth? What coronavirus-related education decisions have involved youth?</i>
Youth are involved in developing, reviewing, and updating policies and processes	Youth are not involved in developing, reviewing or updating policies and processes.	We have started to involve youth in developing, reviewing, and updating a limited number or types of policies or processes.	Youth are involved in developing, reviewing, and updating policies and processes.	Youth are trained in policy development, are consulted about, and provide input into existing or proposed amendments to policies and procedures. They regularly meet with staff and leaders to give feedback about practices.	N/A	D/K	<i>What real outcomes have resulted from school or district youth engagement efforts in the past?</i>
Youth voices shape the direction and goals of projects and initiatives	Youth voices do not shape the direction or goals of projects or initiatives.	We have started to integrate youth voices in informing the direction and goals of a limited number of projects or initiatives.	Youth voices inform or shape the direction and goals of projects or initiatives.	We seek youth input on identity issues they feel most relevant to themselves. Youth make decisions about these projects or initiatives.	N/A	D/K	<i>How receptive are staff to youth input and making changes based on youth input?</i>



<p>Youth plan and lead meetings or events</p>	<p>Youth are not invited to plan or lead meetings or events at our school/district.</p>	<p>Youth are encouraged to plan or lead meetings or events at our school/district.</p>	<p>Staff work with youth to plan meetings or events at our school/district.</p>	<p>Youth regularly plan and lead meetings and events at our school/district.</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>D/K</p>	<p><i>How would youth rank our school's or district's willingness to involve them in developing new services or advocating for new policies?</i></p>
<p>Youth plan and lead projects</p>	<p>Youth are not invited to plan or lead projects at our school/district.</p>	<p>Youth are encouraged to plan projects at our school/district.</p>	<p>Staff work with youth to plan projects, which staff lead, at our school/district.</p>	<p>Youth plan and lead projects at our school/district.</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>D/K</p>	<p><i>What are the opportunities at our school or district for youth leadership? Is leadership limited to student government/council?</i></p>
<p>We understand and are comfortable with youth as full partners with adult staff in engagement practices</p>	<p>We do not understand or are uncomfortable with youth and adults sharing power, decision-making, or responsibility in any aspects of an engagement process.</p>	<p>We are working to share power, decision-making, and responsibility with youth in some aspects of engagement.</p>	<p>Yes, we understand but are not yet comfortable with youth and adults sharing power, decision-making, and responsibility in all aspects of engagement.</p>	<p>Yes, we understand and are comfortable with youth and adults sharing power, decision-making, and responsibility in all aspects of engagement.</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>D/K</p>	



Action-Oriented Readiness							
Indicator	Ranking						Prompts for further consideration Consider your responses to these prompts in terms of in-person or virtual youth engagement
AT MY SCHOOL OR DISTRICT...	1	2	3	4	N/A	D/K	
Youth contributions and achievements are celebrated and shared.	We do not celebrate or share youth contributions and achievements at our school/district.	We are developing practices to recognize youth contributions and achievements at our school/district.	We recognize youth contributions and achievements at schools or in the community through school/district announcements or celebrations.	We recognize youth contributions and achievements and provide references, organize celebrations, or give credit for materials or projects they were involved with. Or we offer certificates for attending or conducting training.	N/A	D/K	
Staff receive support to learn and develop youth engagement skills	Staff are not supported in learning and developing youth engagement skills.	School/district leaders are identifying staff opportunities for learning and developing youth engagement skills.	School/district leaders encourage staff to learn and develop youth engagement skills.	Staff are supported financially with PD time or credits to learn and develop youth engagement skills. They have access to tool kits and other training resources.	N/A	D/K	<i>How is staff shifting thinking about youth from a deficit-based to an assets or attribute-based approach?</i>
Youth have access to trainings and skill building workshops	We do not provide youth with access to trainings and skill building workshops	We are identifying trainings and skill building workshops for youth	We provide youth with access to trainings and skill building workshops	We provide youth with access to training and skill building workshops for a variety of topics (e.g., project management, leadership, relationship building) and provide youth with job shadowing or internships	N/A	D/K	<i>What outcomes are your school working towards through youth opportunities?</i>

For more information on Youth Engagement, Action, and PAR, see the Toolkit here: [PAR Toolkit - NAF](#).