



Youth Voice Definitions

The following words are commonly used within the youth voice and youth development fields. For each, a definition is given.

Adulthood: refers to all of the behaviors and attitudes that flow from the assumption that adults are better than young people, and are entitled to act upon young people in many ways without their agreement.

Adults Allies: refers to adult organizers who work with youth and are able to draw out the ideas of every member of the group, take them seriously, compliment them, and let young people make decisions for themselves.

Community Principle: states that communities need to see youth development as a process that happens throughout a young person's awareness of and interaction with the world around them.¹

Community Youth Development: is a perspective dedicated to advancing the field of youth work; addressing the needs of all youth, including displaced and vulnerable youth; and promoting healthy participatory communities through youth/adult partnerships.

Political Adulthood: refers to elected officials neglecting or not listening to the concerns, voices, and opinions of young people when considering, writing, or passing legislation. This is done because young people are unable to vote.

Youth Action: young people making a difference for themselves, their communities, and society as a whole.

Youth Activism: refers to young people engaging in a practice that emphasizes direct vigorous action, especially in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue.

Youth Civic Engagement: is the process of engaging youth in affecting policy and taking action on issues in their community.

Youth/Adult Partnerships: efforts that involve young people and adults working together, sharing power, and learning from each other to build stronger communities.

Youth Advisory/Action Councils (YACs): a group of young people, most often ranging in age from 12-25, working in conjunction with an existing organization to assure that youth are involved in achieving the overall mission of the organization. YACs can help make decisions, provide insight or advice to groups, and/or address a specific issue. They take on different shapes and structures depending on the needs of the community. To be successful, a YAC must be carefully thought out – from its purpose, to its role, to its membership.

Youth Decision-Makers: refers to a variety of efforts to engage young people in any level determining outcomes or decision-making. Decision-making can be related to an issue, a project, a program, or an organization.

Youth Evaluators: young people can help assess program effectiveness by being involved in the evaluation process. They can develop and implement surveys, conduct interviews and document their finding. These activities help young people develop and refine skills they have learned, such as written and oral communication skills. It also helps programs and organizations understand if they are meeting their goals and objectives.



Youth Funders: refers to the involvement of young people in philanthropy or the raising and giving of money. Young people raise money, develop requests for proposals, review proposals, and determine who gets the money. Sometimes young people are funding youth driven projects. Other times they are involved in broader initiatives to provide resources to community problem solving efforts.

Youth Governance/Youth on Boards: means that young people are equal stakeholders in decision related to budget, staff and strategic planning of an organization. This is also referred to as “youth on board”.

Youth Grantmakers: includes all young people on grant-making boards that typically fund youth-led projects and organizations.

Youth Participation: is a process of involving young people in the decision that affect their lives.

Youth Philanthropists: young people who give of their time, talent, and treasure for the sake of another or for the common good of the community.

Youth Planners: refers to having young people developing projects, being involved in creating a vision, setting goals, and determining the objectives for the project. They can help identify community needs, develop action plans and time lines, recruit volunteers, conduct community outreach, and evaluate the outcomes of the project. Working with program staff to design and implement a project gives young people a sense of ownership and accomplishment.

Youth Policy-Makers: engaging youth as policy-makers can help young people take their service efforts one more step towards sustainable community change. Engaging youth in this realm can affect the policies that govern an organization or your community.

Youth Resources: a philosophy and a program that recognizes youth as valuable community resources and engages them as partners with adults in bringing about positive community change.

Youth Rights: are synonymous with the civil rights (freedom from oppression or discrimination by government, business or other powers) that are guaranteed by law to all individuals. However, given their age, young people time and again are systemically overlooked and unheard within adult driven society.

Youth Service: there are a vast number of program models, titles, and organizations, which share one core attribute: the involvement of young people in providing services to their schools and/or communities. The term “youth service” serves as an umbrella to identify this entire field. The term should not be confused with “youth services”, which typically refer to programs where youth are the recipients of service.

Youth Spokespeople: refers to young people representing the organizations they work with to the public.

Youth Trainers: young people who develop and refine communication and leadership skills by acting as trainers for others, includes adults, peers, and even the agencies they work with.

Youth Trustees: similar to the definition for youth philanthropists, but refers specifically to young people who serve as administrators of property to beneficiaries.

Youth Voice: the ideas, opinions, involvement, and initiative of people considered to be “young”. These voices often go unheard and/or involvement of this group has often been marginalized. Places where youth voice can take place include: organizations, schools, government, faith based institutions, businesses, etc.

¹ Pittman, Karen. *Balancing the Equation: Communities Supporting Youth, Youth Supporting Communities*. Jamaica Plain, MA: CYD Publishing Group, Special Anthology Edition, Spring/Summer, 2002 (pp. 19-24).