

# HEY Guide: Youth Empowerment

*A Step-by-Step Guide for Developing a Youth Board*

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The mission of Honoring Emancipated Youth (HEY) is to strengthen and connect San Francisco's systems of support so that Bay Area youth emancipating, or "aging out" of the foster care system can enjoy a healthy transition to adulthood.

HEY identifies and raises awareness around challenges affecting local transitional aged foster youth by bringing together a diversity of expert voices and experiences, including those of former foster youth, service providers, and other supporters, in finding solutions.

This HEY Guide is designed to support agencies and staff who would like to engage and empower young people as they transition into adulthood and leadership roles. The model, practices and tools presented in this step-by-step Guide will provide a framework to support the growth and empowerment of youth and staff while preparing the agency culture for youth leadership.

HEY's Empowerment Advocacy Model was developed to promote and support non-traditional youth leaders. HEY defines non-traditional leaders as youth who did not have exposure to a leadership position during early adolescence. While they may have participated in some leadership activities, they never acted in a defined leadership role. HEY was inspired to develop this model to support our youth team comprised of current and former foster youth who were interested in lending their voice to create change. HEY found that while these youth had experienced plenty of life experiences, many did not have opportunities to participate in traditional youth leadership activities growing up. The effects of their lack of exposure to leadership positions made them less willing to step into traditional leadership roles. This model supports young people's growth over time by training, empowering and supporting them to become advocates and leaders. While this model is focused on developing youth through youth boards, the theories, models and activities described can be used to support all youth.

As a result of HEY's work, supporters of foster youth gain access to a community dedicated to improving the lives of foster youth. Through our work with emancipated foster youth we have collected a series of best practices proven to be successful while working with non-traditional leaders. We introduce our collection of best practice theories, methods and a tool in this Guide to demonstrate how HEY empowers young people.

To learn more about HEY and the other tools and products we provide for supporters of former foster youth and other transitional age youth in the Bay Area, please visit our website at [www.heysf.org](http://www.heysf.org).

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## LEADING ASSUMPTIONS AND GUIDING PRINCIPALS

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**Primary Assumption: If you are reading this, you believe or are learning to believe in the power of youth voice.**

**HEY sees the reader of this Guide as interested in learning more about models to best engage youth and young adults.**

### GUIDING PRINCIPALS

We believe in the POWER of youth.

We believe EVERYONE has the capacity to lead.

We believe that youth CAN create change.

We believe that one way to make a difference in society is by empowering youth.

We believe that youth voice should be encouraged and respected.

We believe that youth are strong advocates for other youth.

We believe that youth deserve opportunities to act as leaders.

We believe that youth deserve the chance to grow and have a future.

We believe that the best way to empower youth is to work with them.

We believe youth input is powerful and needed.

We believe that advocacy for youth should be done with the support and input of youth.

We believe that youth and adults may have different, but equally valuable expertise.

We believe that youth are experts regarding their own experiences.

We believe that given the right space, tools, and training; all youth can excel.

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**STEP 1: TRANSITIONING AGENCIES FROM YOUTH-SERVING TO YOUTH-LED**

In order to empower and support non-traditional leaders, interested agencies should work to transition from youth-serving to youth-led. Youth-serving agencies provide services, programs and adult centered guidance for young people as they navigate individual programs and agencies. The focus of youth-serving agencies is to ensure that individual youth are successful in one particular service or program. The present structures of youth serving agencies create environments focused on individual achievement and program success. This means that youth in these programs may leave without being equipped with training and skills that will assist them transition into healthy adulthood.

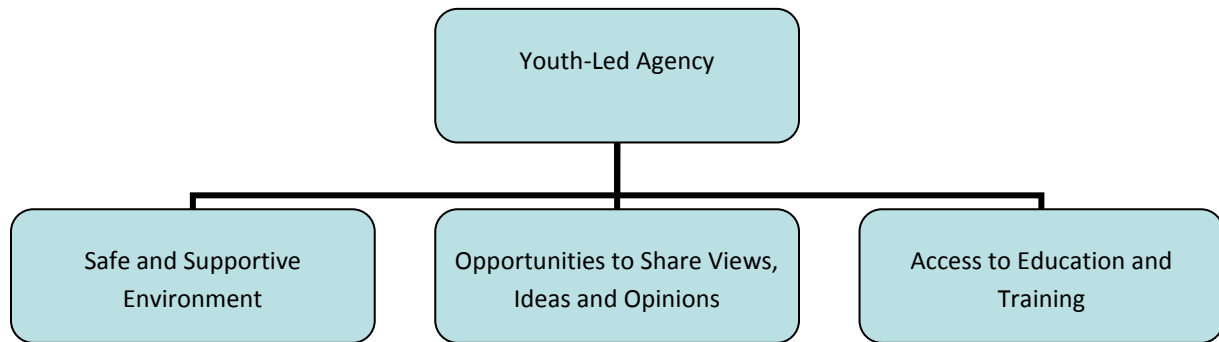
To ensure that youth gain transferable skills that prepare them for adulthood, agencies should transition from youth-serving to youth-led. Youth-led agencies provide opportunities for youth to explore leadership and adult centered activities through training, coaching and professional development. The focus of youth-led agencies is to empower young people through the use of strategic efforts that work to build the capacities of both the individual and agency.

<b>YOUTH-SERVING AGENCIES</b>	<b>YOUTH-LED AGENCIES</b>
<p>Youth act as receivers of programs, services, tools and resources</p> <p>Youth showcased as “Success Story” to describe program benefits</p> <p>Youth receive pre-packaged issues and topics</p> <p>Youth do not receive formal education or training about advocacy movements and systemic change</p>	<p>Youth act as developers, facilitators and evaluators of programs and services</p> <p>Youth act as agency representatives and can speak to the benefits of the agency’s programs and describe its impact on the community</p> <p>Youth have opportunities to research multiple issues and select final projects</p> <p>Youth receive strategic education and training about advocacy and its impact on larger systemic issues and social systems</p>

To assist agencies to transition from youth-serving to youth-led they must begin to empower youth. Youth empowerment recognizes that youth may be oppressed and marginalize and that they often lose power and control over their own lives on the basis their age, culture, disabilities, economic status, gender, or sexual orientation. According to McWhirter “to empower a youth connotes a re-attainment or restoration of power and control.” ‘Empowerment is the process by which people, organizations, or groups who are powerless (a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context, (b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives, (c) exercise this control without infringing upon the rights of others, and (d) support the empowerment of others in their community.’<sup>1</sup>

## BENEFITS

The benefits of youth-led agencies are that they continuously work to develop strategies that provide opportunities for youth to share power and influence practice. Youth-led agencies employ/appoint youth into leadership positions where they develop, evaluate and guide the policies and programs that support youth in programming. This means that youth-led agencies gain expert knowledge of systems, services and practices that are created *for youth by youth*.



BENEFITS FOR YOUTH	BENEFITS FOR ADULTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop Active Voice</li> <li>Participate in Leadership Opportunities</li> <li>Gain Increased Self Esteem and Self Image</li> <li>Have Opportunity to Build Stronger Networks with Peers and Adults</li> <li>Greater Understanding of Organization/Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gain from Genuine Youth Voice</li> <li>Experience Increased Level of Youth Ownership and Participation</li> <li>Access to Consistent Youth Review of Organization/Program</li> <li>Stronger Youth/Adult Partnerships</li> <li>Greater Understanding of Youth Needs</li> </ul>

## BARRIERS

Transitioning power to youth is one of the largest barriers that agencies face when transitioning from youth-serving to youth-led. This barrier is deeply rooted in a traditional organizational culture that does not share equal power between youth and adults. “Power can be described as the ability to influence and make decisions that impact the lives of self and others. Power is not a bad thing in and of itself, but it can be used in ways that benefit some people and hinder others. It is so built into the fabric of our lives that it can be hard to see. Who has influence can be based on structural factors that are often “invisible,” hidden, or unseen.”<sup>ii</sup> Power can also be expressed in subtle or informal ways that create barriers within the transition process. Therefore in order for agencies to be successful while transitioning from youth-serving to youth-led, they must be mindful of the agency’s power structures. The following sections will highlight best practices on how to address these barriers and will provide concrete strategies on how build the capacity of your agency while working to become youth led.

BARRIERS FOR YOUTH	BARRIERS FOR ADULTS
Feelings of powerlessness (Adult Activity)  Never trained on leadership concepts roles (I don’t get the lingo/concept)  Accustomed to adult lead programming (Always Planned for Me)	Lack of trust (They don’t Understand)  No experience working with youth leaders (We don’t have time)  Fear of youth in power (Lack of Control, I worked hard to get here I don’t want any confusion)

## STEP 2: IDENTIFYING VISION, MISSION AND BENEFITS FOR YOUTH BOARD

To begin the transition process in shifting from youth serving to youth-led, agencies should develop and articulate a clear vision and mission for their youth board. The youth board will be used to introduce genuine youth voice into the culture of the agency. Therefore, this step requires that a team begin by reviewing the vision of the agency. The youth board's vision should mirror the vision of the larger agency. If the agency has not developed a vision statement, the youth board should adopt a vision statement that describes what society would look like after the work of your team/agency has been completed. In addition, the agency should develop a mission statement for the youth board which describes how the work will impact the vision and support the mission of the agency. The mission will be used to guide the work and activities of the youth board as well as develop a strong connection to the overall work of the agency.

Youth-led agencies are successful because youth and adults work together to achieve the vision and mission. These agencies require a partnership to provide benefits for the youth as well as the agency. The benefits for youth should include leadership opportunities, professional development, coaching and mentoring, peer support, and civic engagement. The benefits for agencies include genuine youth voice, access to trained and developed youth leaders and opportunities to assist youth to transition into healthy adulthood, among other opportunities. Further conversations about how to ensure each of these benefits will assist agencies to determine the staff, financial and overall internal capacity needed to support the youth board.

### GUIDING QUESTIONS

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1. Developing a Vision – What would the world look like if the issue/barrier was resolved?
2. Developing a Mission – What role is this team going to play in achieving the vision? Describe the root cause/s the agency/youth board was developed to address.
3. Weighing the Benefits – Develop a list of the benefits for the agency and a list of the benefits for the youth. Determining Benefits of Youth Board:
  - What is the benefit of the youth board for the youth?
  - What is the benefit of the youth board for the agency/program?
  - What type of work will they do?
  - Is the function of the youth board determined by a funder or any other governing body?
  - How will youth board work/recommendations be disseminated throughout the agency and community?

## STEP 3: DETERMINING THE FOUNDATION: PARTICIPATION & STRUCTURE

### PARTICIPATION

Youth boards vary greatly amongst agencies for a myriad of reasons, many of which are based on readiness and capacity. Awareness of readiness and capacity allow agencies to determine the participation for youth boards. Hart developed a model called 'Hart's Ladder' as a way for agencies to access and determine the level of youth participation/leadership. The model has eight levels of participation. The bottom three rungs describe youth involvement that is not true participation/leadership whereas the top five rungs describe true participation/leadership.<sup>xi</sup> The closer agencies move toward true-participation/leadership the more they will inspire and encourage a youth-led agency. In contrast, if agencies remain closer to non-true participation then they will remain a youth-serving agency. Please take a moment to review Hart's Ladder below.

#### True Participation

- 8) Young people-initiated, shared decisions with adults. This happens when projects or programs are initiated by young people and decision-making is shared between young people and adults. These projects empower young people while at the same time enabling them to access and learn from the life experience and expertise of adults. This rung of the ladder can be embodied by **youth/adult partnerships**.
- 7) Young people-initiated and directed. This step is when young people initiate and direct a project or program. Adults are involved only in a supportive role. This rung of the ladder can be embodied by **youth-led activism**.
- 6) Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people. Occurs when projects or programs are initiated by adults but the decision-making is shared with the young people. This rung of the ladder can be embodied by **participatory action research**.
- 5) Consulted and informed. This happens when young people give advice on projects or programs designed and run by adults. The young people are informed about how their input will be used and the outcomes of the decisions made by adults. This rung of the ladder can be embodied by **youth advisory councils**.
- 4) Assigned but informed. This is where young people are assigned a specific role and informed about how and why they are being involved. This rung of the ladder can be embodied by **community youth boards**.<sup>iii</sup>

#### Not True Participation

- 3) Tokenism. When young people appear to be given a voice, but in fact have little or no choice about what they do or how they participate. This rung of the ladder reflects **adulthood**.
- 2) Decoration. Happens when young people are used to help or "bolster" a cause in a relatively indirect way, although adults do not pretend that the cause is inspired by young people. This rung of the ladder reflects **adulthood**.
- 1) Manipulation. Happens where adults use young people to support causes and pretend that the causes are inspired by young people. This rung of the ladder reflects **adulthood**.

As an agency determines the level of participation for youth on their boards they should consider their internal capacity. As the youth board moves closer towards true participation/leadership it requires that agency staff, resources and supports are fully vested and involved in the empowerment process. Therefore, agencies should be aware that they may move along the Hart's ladder based upon their organizations capacity and readiness.

## STRUCTURE

The structure of the youth board determines how the team functions within the agency. HEY has developed these three youth empowerment board structures. Agencies should review these structures to determine which will work best within their agency. Staff should begin the process by imagining how the youth board could be used to enhance/support the agencies current program/services.

### ACTION BOARD

The action board structure functions by providing opportunities for youth to identify issues, topics, barriers, and resources that they want to explore to create a change in the agency and/or community. Board members participate in group brainstorming, training, and strategic planning meetings that prepare them for action. Youth board members within this structure can rotate between permanent to drop-in members. This board includes both short and long term positions that vary in responsibility dependent upon the actions determined by project or activity.

### ADVOCACY BOARD

The advocacy board structure functions by providing opportunities for youth to influence policy, programming and services through an identified position of power. Board members are typically supported through trainings, team building, coaching and mentoring. Youth board members within this structure can include permanent or drop-in members. This board includes both short and long term positions that vary in responsibility dependent upon the actions determined by project or activity.

### INTERNSHIP

The internship structure functions by providing opportunities for youth to work within the agency on various projects or activities under the guidance of a supportive adult. Board members are typically supported on an individual basis using coaching and mentoring strategies to support their continued growth. Youth board members within this structure receive customized training to prepare them to take on pre-determined leadership roles. This is a long-term position that will require concrete goals and objectives, staff support and self motivation.

The aforementioned board structured can be used independently or in combination. We recommend that agency staff use this section to discuss the youth board with a larger group of stakeholders. Once staff have determined which structure the agency can support they should begin to incorporate the youth board into the agency.

## STEP 4: INCORPORATING YOUTH BOARD INTO AGENCY

### CHALLENGING THE CULTURE

Assisting an agency to transition from youth-serving to youth-led requires that staff challenge the existing culture to become inclusive and supportive of youth leadership. Agencies must address and acknowledge the various practices and power dynamics that may impact the youth leadership process. This includes reviewing programs and policies to ensure that the language supports the youth board's structure and work. In addition, agencies should develop methods of project incorporation to determine how youth board projects, programs and recommendations will be communicated and implemented within the agency.

A large part of challenging the organizational culture is around educating the agency about the importance of incorporating youth voice and describing the benefits of a youth-led agency. In addition, this step is about continuously evaluating the culture to ensure that youth are included in leadership and feel that their involvement influences the overall agency.

### AWARENESS OF ADULTISM

One negative practice of which agencies should be mindful when incorporating a youth board into an agency is *adultism*. *Adultism* is an embedded societal practice and accused as the number one deterrent to youth empowerment. Educated youth workers must be aware of this behavior in order to acknowledge and work to eliminate *adultism*. Addressing and challenging *adultism* is important because it encourages youth workers to level the playing field between themselves and the youth in their programs. "There is another important reason for understanding and challenging *adultism*. The various ways we were disrespected and mistreated have, over time, robbed us of huge amounts of our human power, access to our feelings, confidence in our thinking and ability to act, and enjoyment of living. The pain we experience as young people helps condition us, to play one of two roles as we get older: to accept further mistreatment as women, as people of color, as workers, etc., or to flip to the other side of the relationship and act in oppressive ways toward others who are in relatively less powerful positions than ours." John Bell<sup>iv</sup> The practice of acknowledging and addressing adultism will assist agencies to ensure that the strategies they develop provide support for youth. Once staff is able to understand the disempowering nature of the practice of adultism then they can begin to correct their negative behaviors and begin to share power and empower youth in their programs.

## STEP 5: PREPARING STAFF TO SUPPORT YOUTH BOARD - HEY'S EMPOWERMENT MODEL

HEY's Empowerment Model supports agencies as they transition from youth-serving to youth-led by incorporating three core components of positive youth development: youth worker development, youth empowerment, and youth advocacy. These components work simultaneously to empower youth to take on leadership and prepare agencies to develop and support youth leaders.

**Youth Worker Development**

**+**

**Youth Empowerment**

**+**

**Youth Advocacy**

**=**

**Positive Youth Development**

## THREE COMPONENTS OF THE EMPOWERMENT MODEL

### YOUTH WORKER DEVELOPMENT

The Youth Worker component functions by educating agencies about the importance of having trained and knowledgeable staff that supervise and support youth. We define a youth worker as anyone who works for or on behalf of youth. This component was developed to enhance the skills of Youth Workers/staff by introducing them to theories, best practices and strategies that will assist them to support and empower youth.

### YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

The empowerment component functions by assisting agencies to create a culture that provides opportunities for youth to strategically develop skills that will assist them to transition into agency leadership. This component was developed to provide strategic opportunities for youth to gradually take on leadership in a safe and supportive environment.

### YOUTH ADVOCACY

The advocacy component functions by assisting agencies to develop systems that ensure “genuine youth voice” is integrated and supported within the agency. This component was developed to strategically incorporate youth into decision-making bodies by providing opportunities for them to shape policies, programs and services.

YOUTH WORKER DEVELOPMENT	YOUTH EMPOWERMENT	YOUTH ADVOCACY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Views youth as active program contributors</li> <li>• Assists youth to develop new skills and talents</li> <li>• Targets all youth with knowledge of youth needs</li> <li>• Continuously works for shared and equal power between youth and adults</li> <li>• Involves community members – youth and adults inside and outside organization can be used as experts<sup>v</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focuses on positive outcomes – use strength based approach</li> <li>• Provides opportunities to practice leadership skills</li> <li>• Encourages and promotes voice and choice</li> <li>• Encourages team building/ cooperative learning</li> <li>• Incorporates community response (systemic change) – community resources pooled to promote the best outcomes for youth</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduces participants to the concept of self and community perspectives</li> <li>• Encourages participants to research and discuss larger community issues</li> <li>• Provides opportunities to work on projects that impact the community</li> <li>• Identifies opportunities for participants to share thoughts and ideas</li> <li>• Encourages participants to network throughout the community</li> </ul>

## YOUTH WORKER DEVELOPMENT

The HEY Empowerment Model assists agencies in transitioning from youth-serving to youth-led by training staff to act as the key facilitators and guides throughout the process . This component functions by educating agencies about the importance of having trained and knowledgeable staff that supervise and support youth. This component was developed to remind agencies that it is imperative to continuously enhance the skills of youth workers (staff) by introducing them to theories, best practices and strategies that will assist them to support and empower youth.



Youth Workers should begin this process by reviewing and comparing the tasks and responsibilities within a youth-serving agency versus a youth-led agency. A large part of transitioning from youth serving to youth led is being mindful of what behaviors and activities must change in order to support the empowerment process.

### Task – Youth-serving Agency

Focus of Problems – Focused on prevention

Reactive – Crisis based

Target specific youth – Program not flexible enough to meet individual needs

Youth as Recipients – No youth voice

Programs – Organizations attempt to resolve “problem/issue” without community support

Professional Providers – Adult staff as experts

### Task – Youth-led Agency

Focus on Positive Outcomes – Focus on Youth Development

Proactive – Pre-planning

Targets All Youth – Knowledge of youth needs

Values Youth as Active Participants – Youth engaged in development, implementation and evaluation

Understands Community Response (Systemic Change) – Encourages community resources pooled to promote the best outcomes for youth

COACHING AND MENTORING

In HEY’s research, we identified coaching and mentoring as the two key strategies that work to support youth throughout the empowerment process so that they can develop as leaders. These 2 strategies provide youth workers methods to cultivate and encourage leadership while empowering youth.

COACHING		MENTORING
Youth Worker functions as “invisible” supporter Youth initiates learning process Youth gain skills through trial and error, critical thinking, research and Q&A Youth Workers support via inquiry, reflective question	VS	Youth Worker functions as role model Youth Worker initiates learning process Youth gain skills through experiential learning, dialogue, observation Youth Workers support via advise, concrete examples/resources

To empower young people, Youth Workers should utilize *both coaching and mentoring*.

Mentoring equips youth with an adult supporter that encourages growth by acting as a positive role model. Through these relationships, youth gain skills through experiential learning, observation and dialogue. Mentoring assists youth to develop and strengthen transferable skills that will empower them to become leaders.

Coaching is slightly different than mentoring in coaching works to empower young people by providing an “invisible” hand of support. The coaching model provides young people with the opportunity to reach their own conclusions. As a coach, Youth Workers take the back seat, and allow youth to lead the process.

## YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

In addition to understanding new tasks and responsibilities within a youth-led agency, Youth Workers must also be charged with educating themselves about youth empowerment. Youth empowerment refers to the process of



transferring power and authority to another.<sup>vi</sup> The empowerment component of the model functions by assisting agencies to create a culture that provides opportunities for youth to strategically develop skills that will assist them to transition into agency leadership. This component was developed to provide opportunities for youth to gradually take on leadership in a safe and supportive environment.

Empowering youth should be a strategic process in which adults and youth collaborate together toward similar and mutually beneficial goals. Throughout this process, adults should support

youth in building skills to assist them to slowly take on power roles.<sup>vii</sup> To ensure youth empowerment, agencies must be prepared for youth and adults to begin to act as equal partners.

### TRADITIONAL ROLE FOR YOUTH WORKERS

Adults are sole decision makers and developers of youth programming. Youth are systematically mistreated and disrespected, while adults act as agents of oppression. Manifestations of the oppression include:

- *Denying of youth voice/tokenism*
- *Denying of power/decision-making*
- *Lack of youth rights/top down approach*
- *Youth are denied access to pertinent information or are given misinformation*
- *Organizational policies and practices supporting and encouraging systematic invalidation – youth seen as part of large group, as opposed to an individual*

### EMPOWERMENT ROLES FOR YOUTH WORKERS

Adults advocate for and support young people when they struggle. Allies provide the necessary training and coaching to prepare young people for leadership roles. Manifestations of empowerment include:

- *Enjoying working with youth*
- *Encouraging and supporting genuine youth voice (youth centered/youth led)*
- *Willing to share power*
- *Practicing active listening*
- *Knowledge of adolescent development*
- *Encouraging team building/cooperative learning*
- *Culturally aware and astute*

### SUPPORTING PRAISE VS. ENCOURAGEMENT

One of the most impactful ways to empower youth is by providing them with useful feedback that they can incorporate to improve their leadership skills. While giving this feedback youth workers must be mindful of using words of encouragement rather than praising statements. While this is a controversial topic amongst youth workers, HEY believes that one of the most straightforward ways to empower youth is to encourage rather than praise their accomplishments. *Praise* refers to the practice of a youth worker evaluating a youth's progress or work based upon their perception of the youth's accomplishment. This promotes the youth's "need to please" and therein gives the power and authority over the youth's success to the adult instead of the youth. One of the ways that praise is often manifested is during youth check-ins where youth workers review the work of a young person and give the standard feedback of; very good, good job, nice, great work etc.

On the other hand encouragement empowers the youth to improve and grow personally, rather than to please their management or co-workers. A way to encourage youth is by asking reflective questions that provide youth with the opportunity to reflect on their work in a meaningful way. Some examples encouragement questions are; how did you put together this project, how do you feel you did on this project, what do you feel you did really well etc.

### ASSET BASED YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Asset-based youth development is a theoretical approach that is a combination of ideas, assumptions and techniques that emerged from social work. Its underlying principal is that all people have strengths which are often untapped or unrecognized. When inherent ability and knowledge are recognized motivation is fostered, which encourages growth. HEY extrapolates the practice of asset-based youth development as a technique that encourages youth workers not to focus on what is "wrong or bad" but highlight what is "good or right".<sup>viii</sup> HEY does not support Youth Workers to ignore concerns or fabricate strengths but rather work to identify youth strengths that could be cultivated and developed over time.<sup>ix</sup> The role of Youth Workers within this practice is to assist youth to recognize and further develop their assets. Youth Workers should continuously strive to connect youth to internal and external resources and opportunities that support their development.

## YOUTH ADVOCACY

HEY defines youth advocacy as the ability to express original ideas, thoughts and opinions while acting on behalf of self or others to influence the outcome of a decision. We use youth advocacy as a method for youth to develop and practice their individual voice while learning to advocate for larger systems and practices. Furthermore we use this component to strategically incorporate youth into decision-making bodies throughout the agency by providing opportunities for them to shape policies, programs and services. The advocacy component functions to assist Youth Workers to develop systems that ensure *genuine youth voice* s integrated and supported within the agency. Youth Workers should begin their education by reviewing the best practices below that will support youth to develop voice and advocate within their agency.



HEY EYAB Member Aryeetey Welbeck

## YOUTH ADVOCACY SUPPORTIVE PRACTICES

### YOUTH VOICE AND CHOICE

Youth voice and choice provides youth with opportunities to engage in planning, development, implementation and evaluation. The idea behind youth voice and choice is that youth have to have access to meaningful decision-making opportunities. According to research conducted by High/Scope, youth voice and choice requires that youth have access to information, training and materials that support them to develop projects, products and presentations. The High Scope Choice Continuum describes how when youth do not have enough choice then they become disinterested in your program or project. When youth have too much choice they end up frustrated because the project is too large. The role of Youth Workers in this practice is to be heavily involved in all projects in order to ensure youth have meaningful choice. Meaningful choice occurs when youth have options that are challenging and significant. Workers should assist youth to develop significant projects using coaching and mentoring strategies of support.



Not Enough Choice  
(Leads to lack of  
Interest)



Meaningful  
choices within  
supportive  
environment



Too much  
choice  
(leads to  
frustration)<sup>x</sup>

## STEP 6: DEVELOPING A SUPPORTIVE & SAFE ENVIRONMENT

### DEFINING CULTURE

Successful youth teams are built on pre-determined core values that assist them to develop a culture of empowerment. Agencies should begin by reviewing /identifying the core values for the agency that will assist them to develop a culture that facilitates the youth empowerment process. Once an agency has described the ideal culture to support the youth team they can begin to develop strategies to incorporate the values into the board structure.

### DEFINING POPULATION/NEED

To ensure that agencies are developing a supportive environment they must design their programs based upon the specific needs of their target population. Agencies should decide the target population for the youth program before hiring the youth board members. The population description should be developed based upon the values, structure, and role of board members within the agency. Agencies should begin by describing the ideal candidate for the youth board. If the board includes both permanent and temporary positions agency staff should develop population descriptions for the various positions within the board.

Once the board population has been identified, the agency should brainstorm a list of strengths and barriers that may arise during their participation with youth board.

### DEVELOPING COMMON SYSTEMS

Agencies can only develop supports for youth quickly and across multiple programs after they have adopted common systems and language. This process of developing common systems requires that agencies identify areas that will be impacted by the youth team and review protocols to ensure consistency and clarity. Development of a common system includes these steps:

- Developing universal definitions for both youth and adult staff and programs – Include commonly used terms and agency acronyms.
- Creating program/service/job descriptions for the youth and the adult staff – Develop written program/service/job descriptions.
- Recording significant history of both the youth programs and the full agency– Develop written history/story of agency/program.
- Developing orientation and intake systems that are equal for both youth and adult staff – Include above items + hiring/intake paperwork process.
- Developing training curricula that is balanced for both youth and adult staff – Develop outline of training topics/include budget, training roster.

## IDENTIFYING SUPPORT TEAM

When forming a youth board, the agency should also build a youth board support team. The support team should be composed of a mix of board members, staff, community supporters and youth in your program. Each team member should be updated on the mission, functions and goals for the youth board. The team should begin by determining their roles within the youth board development. All team members' voices should be considered throughout the development and support process, regardless of their status as a youth or adult. The team should work together to identify resources and develop materials to support the youth board members.

The tool below will assist agencies to identify individuals to participate as members of the youth board support team. In our work with youth teams and support teams, HEY has identified three roles for support team members. The following tool identifies characteristics within each of these categories.

A *Planner* supports the organization before the youth team begins focused work.

A *Primary Member* supports the agency long-term and is fully vested in the youth empowerment process.

A *Secondary Member* supports the agency short-term and is used to enhance the youth empower process....

Support Team Planners	Support Team Primary Members	Support Team Secondary Members
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Short time Commitment</li> <li>✓ Minimal Responsibilities Working Directly With Youth</li> <li>✓ Assist to Develop Infrastructure/Raise Funds</li> <li>✓ Assist to Spread Awareness</li> <li>✓ Awareness of Youth Development Principles and Practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Long-Time Commitment</li> <li>✓ Direct Work with Youth</li> <li>✓ Provide Specialized Support in Day to Day Activities</li> <li>✓ Expertise in Youth Development Principles and Practices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Flexible-Time Commitment</li> <li>✓ Some Work With Youth</li> <li>✓ Provide General Support in Emergencies, Special Projects and Events</li> <li>✓ Need some knowledge of Youth Development Principles and Practices</li> </ul>

## CREATING A SAFE SPACE

Youth thrive in safe environments. As a youth-serving agency, your primary goal should be to create a safe space for youth. Youth identify a safe space when they feel they are not in physical harm or danger, feel that there is structure and clear limits, and have opportunities to serve in leadership roles where they are able to voice their views and opinions. We view a safe environment as a space that provides physical and structural support for youth. This tool will assist your agencies to prepare a safe and supportive environment for the youth board. The following checklist will provide an outline of best practices for developing a supportive environment. Please work with your support team to discuss and complete the following tool.

DEVELOPING A SAFE PHYSICAL SPACE	YES	NO
Have you identified a neutral meeting space for youth (free of gang activity/turf wars/youth friendly)?	.....	.....
Does your agency post signs for zero tolerance against prejudice and discrimination?	.....	.....
Does your agency disallow drugs, alcohol, knives and firearms in youth space?	.....	.....
Do staff and volunteers have an understanding of appropriate youth boundaries?	.....	.....
Will you allow youth to give input on how to design space?	.....	.....
Will you allow youth to assist in the development of community contracts and agreements? (rules)	.....	.....
Will you develop tools to receive feedback about feelings of physical safety?	.....	.....
<b>DEVELOPING A SAFE SPACE FOR YOUTH VOICE</b>	<b>YES</b>	<b>NO</b>
Have you reviewed agency policies and procedures to ensure they support the youth board?	.....	.....
Have you identified liaisons to communicate youth voice with larger agency?	.....	.....
Have you identified strategies/tools to incorporate youth voice into agency?	.....	.....
Will you develop tools to receive feedback about feelings about inclusion of youth voice?	.....	.....

## STEP 7: SELECTING YOUTH BOARD MEMBERS: TRAINING & SUPPORTING

### CONDUCTING BOARD ORIENTATION

All youth members must receive an orientation once they are chosen to serve on the youth board. This is the first step of the youth empowerment process. Orientation is important because it creates equal footing amongst all youth board members. Members should be educated on the organization's mission, vision, values, history, organizational transformations, programs and services, staff, board of directors and community partners. We also recommend that board members receive an official board manual that outlines the hours, time commitment, compensation, core duties and any additional responsibilities.

### CONDUCTING BOARD ORIENTATION

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The following tool is a sample orientation agenda for your youth board. Agencies can use this tool to identify all the aspects HEY recommends be included in an Orientation to ensure the youth are as educated as possible about all the aspects of the organization.

#### Agenda

- ❖ Welcome and Introductions (All – Youth, Staff, Board)
- ❖ Icebreaker
- ❖ Organizational Mission, Vision and Values
- ❖ Organizational History and Transformations
- ❖ Key Agency Programs and Services
- ❖ Agency Staff (Organizational Chart)
- ❖ Break
- ❖ Youth Board Mission and Purpose
- ❖ History of Youth Board
- ❖ Youth Board Member Description
- ❖ Adjournment

## GETTING TO KNOW YOUTH

One of the most important aspects of empowering young people is getting to know them as individuals. While most interaction within youth programs happens within groups or teams, the key to youth empowerment is the awareness and attention to their individual needs. This requires that the Youth Workers build time into their programs to develop relationships with young people. These relationships will provide youth with additional support needed during the empowerment process as well as opportunities to see healthy adult behavior.

### GETTING TO KNOW YOUTH

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#### **M&M Icebreaker Game**

This icebreaker is a simple way to help people introduce facts about themselves. It's very flexible and adaptable – and (if you have a sweet tooth) delicious too! The M&Ms Game goes by other names: the Skittles Game, the Candy Game, and the Color Game, among other names.

#### *Setup*

Pour M&Ms or any other multicolor candy into a bowl. Have everyone in the group grab as much or as little as they like from the bowl. This could include youth, Youth Workers, Support Team Members or any other relevant people. Make sure that no one eats their candy right away.

#### *How to Play*

For each piece of M&M candy that each person chose, they will have to answer a question, depending on its color. For example, colors can indicate:

- Red candy: favorite hobbies
- Green candy: favorite foods
- Yellow candy: favorite movies
- Orange candy: favorite places to travel
- Brown candy: most memorable or embarrassing moments
- Blue candy: wild cards (they can share any favorite or moment they choose)

Feel free to change the meanings of the colors to highlight characteristics you think are important!

## ENCOURAGING GOAL SETTING

The practice of goal setting provides opportunities for youth and staff to work together to build specific pre-determined skills and set goals. The process provides the youth with an opportunity to enhance skills and develop projects that support them as they transition into adulthood. Goal setting equips youth supporters with an action plan that will assist them to work with youth to develop a strategic road map. The road map will be used to monitor the youth's progress as well as assist the agency to measure the impact of their empowerment efforts.

## ENCOURAGING GOAL SETTING

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### **Goal Setting Game**

This activity is a simple way to help youth think about goal setting. It is very hands-on and provides opportunities for youth to practice goal setting in a fun and interactive environment.

#### *Setup*

Youth participants are instructed to line up at the back of the room. Place two separate stacks of colored paper on the table in front of participants. Make each stack a different color.

#### *How to Play*

To begin, instruct all participants that they will have three minutes to make paper airplanes out of one stack of paper and launch them across the room. Time participants and observe process.

Once participants have launched initial round of paper airplanes. Review the following questions:

1. Was there a goal for how many airplanes?
2. What was the goal for how far?
3. Ask the group to set these goals as a team and attempt process again.

After the second round, lead a conversation about how goal setting can affect performance and attitude.

## DEVELOPING A TEAM ENVIRONMENT

Team meetings and projects play an important part in the youth empowerment process. When charged with a set of tasks or a mission, teams can help foster a sense of community, camaraderie and peer support. Over time, the group becomes a safe environment for giving and receiving feedback as well as practicing new behaviors. Groups can be used as a controlled environment that works to balance an individual's strengths and weaknesses while equipping them with a new skill-set. Team meetings can be used as training, critical thinking, strategizing, brainstorming and review space where individuals learn to develop their skills. Through these meetings, youth have the opportunity to learn and practice skills in a safe yet realistic environment.<sup>xi</sup> HEY recommends that organizations interested in empowering youth develop a training curriculum to support youth during this process.

## DEVELOPING A TEAM ENVIRONMENT

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The following tool is a sample team agenda for your youth board. Agencies can use this tool to support youth board members.

### Sample Team Agenda

- ❖ Welcome and Introductions  
(All – Youth, Staff, Board)
- ❖ Icebreaker
- ❖ Review of Old Projects
- ❖ Training
- ❖ Introduction of New Projects
- ❖ Selection of New Projects
- ❖ Development of Next Steps
- ❖ Reflection
- ❖ Adjournment

## SCAFFOLDING TO PROMOTE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Youth development embodies the idea that young people need to gain essential skills in order to be successful as they enter into adulthood. One of the methods that Youth Workers can use to engineer their success is scaffolding. The practice of scaffolding requires Youth Workers to format their skill sets and expertise through a strategic and pre-planned process. Scaffolding has three key elements:

### 1 – BREAK TASKS DOWN INTO MANAGEABLE PIECES

Breaking tasks in smaller pieces requires that Youth Workers have a strong understanding of the materials and trainings that will be provided for the youth. The task of the Youth Worker is to break down hard topics into small manageable pieces that the youth can understand and put into practice. This is different than ‘watering down’ or eliminating items. Scaffolding requires that the youth receive all of the information in a way that will assist them to process and gain skills.

### 2- KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

This is an important step in scaffolding because in order for scaffolding to be effective, Youth Workers need to know their audience. Every youth brings a unique perspectives and needs. Successful scaffolding takes into account the strengths and weakness of each youth involved and builds upon their skills through strategic planning.

### 3 – ALLOW OPPORTUNITIES FOR SUCCESS, TRIAL AND ERROR

Great scaffolding leaves room for errors as well as trials and successes. Youth Workers should build scaffolding that allows learning to occur throughout the process. This means that scaffolding has to be flexible enough to create changes within the process that will assist youth to gain skill over time.<sup>xii</sup> The following tool is an example of how to scaffold a complex issue so that youth are able to lead the project. (Reminder: This process is not intended to “water-down” the topic but rather break it down into smaller more manageable pieces.)

Example Project:	
The youth board has recently noticed that there has been an increase in the number of youth being arrested for loitering at the park. After some initial research they found that there are several new laws that are causing the increase in arrest. The team is interested in informing the community about the issue. They have decided to conduct a community forum to discuss the impact on youth.	
1	Identify the Audience
2	Determine the Message
3	Develop the Message
4	Identify the Resources and Location for Forum
5	Outreach to Audience
6	Host Community Meeting
7	Develop Next Steps

## USING POPULAR EDUCATION STRATEGIES

Popular education is another strategy that is successful in reaching young people where they are at during a given point in time. “The idea of popular education (often described as “education for critical consciousness”) as a teaching methodology came from a Brazilian educator and writer named Paulo Freire, who was writing in the context of literacy education for poor and politically disempowered people in his country. It’s different from formal education (in schools, for example) and informal education (learning by living) in that it is a process which aims to empower people who feel marginalized socially and politically to take control of their own learning and to effect social change.

Popular education is a collective effort in which a high degree of participation is expected from everybody. Teachers and learners aren’t two distinct groups; rather, everyone teaches and everyone learns! Learners should be able to make decisions about what they are learning, and how the learning process takes place. A facilitator is needed to make sure that new ideas arise, progress, and do not get repetitive, but this isn’t at all the same thing as a teacher. In popular education, then, we can’t teach another person, but we can facilitate another’s learning and help each other as we learn.

In popular education, the learning process starts with identifying and describing everyone’s own personal experience and that knowledge is built upon through various activities done in groups. After the activity, a debriefing process allows us to analyse our situation together; seeing links between our own experience and historical and global processes in order to get the “big picture”. Through the generation of this new knowledge, we’re able to reflect more profoundly about ourselves and how we fit into the world. This new understanding of society is a preparation to actively work towards social change. In fact, in popular education, the education process isn’t considered to be complete without action on what is learned; whether it be on a personal or political level.”<sup>xiii</sup>

## STEP 8: TRANSITIONING POWER

### DETERMINING PHASES OF YOUTH LEADERSHIP

A successful strategy to assist agencies to transition from youth-serving to youth-led is to develop strategies that shift power in phases. When agencies begin to strategically train, cultivate and promote leadership in phases then the empowerment process begins to transition the agency. The following is a sample of how agencies can stager growth into leadership roles.

#### MONTHS 1-3

Staff is 100% involved in a supportive role (not leading but available if group needs support) for all youth board trainings and projects. Staff presents at all youth board trainings and meetings often as a trainer or facilitator. Some core trainings with key community partners are already scheduled to provide a basic understanding of agency, community, youth development, empowerment and advocacy.

#### MONTHS 4-7

Staff's commitment is reduced to 75%. Staff is present at all youth board trainings but not present at all youth board meetings (available upon request from team), meetings are developed and facilitated by youth board members. Team members identify training needs and staff assist team to locate applicable trainings and resources.

#### MONTH 8 -11

Staff is 50% involved in supportive role for youth board (we recommend that supporters not drop less than 50%). Staff is present at some youth board trainings and continues to have limited participation, only upon request, in team meetings. Meetings continued to be developed and facilitated by youth board members. Team members are conducting outreach and presentation of team developed workshops.

## ARE WE EMPOWERING YOUTH IN OUR PROGRAM?

The following HEY tool was developed to assist agencies to assess the internal and external resources available for youth based upon Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.<sup>xiv</sup> Use the tool below to identify the agency and community supports available to assist the youth in meeting their needs in each area. Engage other colleagues so that you can include as much information as possible; this tool can be a great referral resource for your entire team.

<b>Physiological Needs</b>		
<b>Key Questions</b>	<b>Agency Supports</b>	<b>Community Supports</b>
Did we develop a safe space? (for more information on creating a safe space see section below)		
Do youth on our board have access to food? (During program/after program)		
Do youth on our board have access to housing? (before program/after program)		
Do youth on our board have access to transportation? (before program/after program)		
<b>Safety and Security</b>		
<b>Key Questions</b>	<b>Agency Supports</b>	<b>Community Supports</b>
Do youth on our board have access to medical care? (before program/after program)		
Do youth on our board have employment/employment support/employment training? (before program/after program)		
Do youth on our board have access to case managers/staff to talk about family dynamics/issues? (before program/after program)		
<b>Love and Belonging</b>		
<b>Key Questions</b>	<b>Agency Supports</b>	<b>Community Supports</b>
Do youth on our board have an opportunity to work as a team?		
Do youth on our board have opportunities to work in different groups?		
Do youth on our board have opportunities to participate in team building activities?		

<b>Self Esteem</b>		
Key Questions	Agency Supports	Community Supports
Do youth on our board have the opportunity to participate in various activities that support different learning styles?		
Do youth on our board have the opportunity to succeed as well as fail with support?		
Do youth on our board get various leadership opportunities both large and small?		
Do youth on our board get to participate in on-going trainings to build their skills?		
<b>Self Actualization</b>		
Key Questions	Agency Supports	Community Supports
Do youth on our board have opportunities to think critically?		
Do youth on our board have opportunities to discuss larger systemic issues?		
Do youth on our board have opportunities to advocate on behalf of self and others?		
Do youth on our board have opportunities to develop activities and programs that support other youth?		
Do youth on our board have opportunities to develop activities and programs that support other agencies?		
Do youth on our board have opportunities to continue this work once they leave our board?		

## STEP 9: EVALUATION AND BENCHMARKS

### EVALUATION

To track the empowerment process Youth Workers must work to carefully document the progress of the youth team. Empowerment takes many forms and is expressed in various ways by teams and individuals. Goal setting, note taking and work planning will assist Youth Workers to monitor the movement of the group. The most important factor about youth empowerment is that it is a process not an end goal. Therefore, the documentation and supporting materials of the empowerment process can occur in a non-linear fashion. In addition, we use evaluation as a second strategy for measuring and monitoring youth empowerment. The first strategy for measuring empowerment is the youth's progress during the process. Successful evaluation works to reveal youth's perceptions of programming, services and trainings. We recommend that agencies develop evaluation strategies that promote continuous dialogue and feedback with youth.

#### STRATEGY QUESTIONS:

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1. How would you describe this project to someone we did not know?
2. What components of the project did you work on? What did you do?
3. Describe one of your favorite moments during this project? Why?
4. What were two things that you felt the team did the best?
5. Describe one of your least favorite moments during this project. Why?
6. If you could improve one thing about this project what would it be? Why?
7. What were two things that you learned about this topic?
8. What skill would you say you improved during this project? How?
9. What was a lesson that you walked away with from this project?
10. Out of all of the things you learned about during this project, what was one thing that stood out?

### BENCHMARKS

Establishing benchmarks provides an opportunity for agencies to pre-determine the short and long term goals for their youth team. Youth board benchmarks should include measurements for individuals as well as team development. Agencies should include all essential stakeholders during the development process in order to ensure that all benchmarks have supporting strategies. In addition, stakeholders should develop indicators that demonstrate that youth are making progress within the youth board.

# APPENDIX

## YOUTH EMPOWERMENT ADVOCACY MODEL ASSESSMENT

An assessment can help you and your agency determine whether the process described in the guide is a good match for your organization—and where to begin. <sup>xv</sup>

**Who should participate in the assessment?** The assessment is designed for the leadership and staff members of an agency where there is interest in engaging and empowering youth to become leaders. We suggest that a group of people in the agency complete the assessment form. This group can be made up of persons who volunteer to be a part of the group or individuals who are leading the empowerment process. Once the assessment forms are collected, you can then discuss the results together, as detailed below.

**How do we take the assessment?** Hand out copies of the assessment to each respondent and ask each person to keep track of his or her answers on their worksheet. For each question, the respondent is to choose the multiple-choice answer that most accurately reflects the organization. Once the respondent has completed the assessment, s/he should count up the answers to determine their score. Respondents should be informed that since every agency is different, it's likely that no single answer will perfectly describe your agency—respondents should simply select the answer that fits best.

- 3 = Yes            Agency implements practice or product.
- 2 = Sort Of        Agency has developed practice or product however has not implemented.
- 1 = No             Agency has not developed practice or product.

Score	Question
	1. Our youth board has a clear mission statement, identified functions and written goals.
	2. Youth on our board have opportunities to work as a team.
	3. Youth on our board have opportunities to advocate on behalf of others.
	4. Our agency has identified dedicated staff to support all functions of youth board.
	5. Youth on our board have opportunities to collaborate with other programs and agencies.
	6. Youth on our board have opportunities to lead projects and activities.
	7. Youth on our board have opportunities to succeed as well as make mistakes with support.
	8. Youth on our board have opportunities to develop activities and programs that support other agencies.
	9. Our agency has identified resources and funding to financially maintain our youth board.
	10. Staff reviews youth development best practices and participate in youth development workshops and trainings.
	11. Youth on our board have access to leadership opportunities both large and small.
	12. Youth on our board have opportunities to develop activities and programs that support other youth.
	13. Staff has opportunities to research, plan and develop activities to support youth.

	14. Youth on our board have opportunities to advocate on behalf of self.
	15. Youth in our program attend our meetings in a safe space.
	16. Youth on our board have opportunities to work side-by-side and have equal input as adults.
	17. Youth in our program indicate that staff are helpful and provide on-going support.
	18. Youth in our program have opportunities to give input.
	19. Youth on our board have opportunities to work in various groups.
	20. Youth on our board have opportunities to think critically.
	21. Youth on our board have access to talk to staff on a one-on-one basis.
	22. Youth on our board have opportunities to work as a team.
	23. Youth on our board have opportunities to design trainings and projects.
	24. Youth on our board have opportunities to participate in on-going trainings to build their skills.
	25. Youth on our board have opportunities to discuss larger systemic issues.
	26. Our agency has identified internal and external resources to assist youth to meet basic needs (food, housing, transportation and medical care) before/after program.
	27. Youth on our board have opportunities to share their original ideas, thoughts and opinions.
	28. Youth on our board have opportunities to continue this work once they leave our board.
	29. Youth on our board have opportunities to participate in “team building activities”.
	30. Youth on our board have opportunities to advocate on behalf of others.

### Scoring the assessment

Please place your responses to the above questions in the corresponding boxes below.

Youth Worker Development	Youth Empowerment	Youth Advocacy
1.	2.	3.
4.	6.	5.
9.	7.	8.
10.	11.	12.
13.	24.	14.
15.	16.	20.
17.	19.	25.
18.	22.	27.
21.	23.	28.
26.	29.	30.
Total:	Total:	Total:

## WHAT YOUR SCORE MEANS

**Low Score: 0–15** You have a ways to go to incorporate empowerment strategies. But do not worry; many youth-serving agencies will score at this level, so you're in good company. Youth-serving agencies get little (if any) support to do empowerment work, and for the past two decades have come under increasing pressure to produce numbers, despite growing evidence that this approach is not working for youth or communities. We suggest you start with Part One of the HEY Guide and work your way through the entire process.

**Midrange Score: 16–24** You are well on your way, and are probably already doing some of the things suggested in this guide. What you are already doing well will help you implement other ideas. If you or others in the organization have attempted to empower youth without much success, you may feel discouraged. This guide will offer fresh approaches to problems that you have already started to learn from. We suggest you focus your efforts on the area where your scores were lowest. If your score in Youth Advocacy was low, you may want to browse Youth Advocacy before moving on to Youth Empowerment and Youth Worker Development.

**High Score: 25–30** Your agency is probably in great shape! You are already making use of many youth empowerment strategies. We believe that working to empower youth is a constant process, and all agencies can benefit from continual growth and development. We hope the materials in this guide will serve as useful tools to help you further articulate and strengthen your youth empowerment work.

## HOW HEY INCORPORATES THE YOUTH EMPOWERMENT MODEL

### HOW HEY SUPPORTS YOUTH WORKER DEVELOPMENT

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HEY prides itself as an agency dedicated to continuously working to improve the outcomes for youth as they emancipate from care. To ensure that we provide the highest quality services we continuously provide opportunities for staff to attend workshops, conferences and trainings. In addition, the agency has developed a separate training line item within the budget to support professional development.

### HOW HEY INCORPORATES YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

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The following is an example of how HEY prepared itself to welcome a youth team. In addition, we provide many of the benefits for the youth including those from former Emancipated Youth Advocacy Board (EYAB) perspective.

#### **How will the youth board benefit the organization?**

HEY's youth board benefits our organization by providing genuine youth voice to influence community and policy decisions affecting foster youth. HEY staff and board wanted a true partnership with youth so that our policy agenda came directly from the people who have experienced and continue to experience the foster care system.

#### **How will the youth board benefit the youth?**

HEY's youth board provides youth with opportunities to influence policy and create changes within the foster care system. Their work educates the community about the real life experiences of current and former foster youth and highlights the need for continued services. In addition, EYAB members receive real life work experience that assists them to develop both personal and professional skills.

#### **Does the youth board serve a genuine purpose?**

Yes, our youth board brings awareness of the needs of emancipating youth in the Bay Area foster care community. In addition, our board members serve as experts in the community who are able to share their experiences as well as talk about larger systemic issues.

#### **Do we have financial support for the activities of the board?**

HEY's EYAB is one of the agency's largest programs and is funded through on-going fundraising and local community grants. Each EYAB member works fifteen hours per week over 11 months at a cost of approximately \$11,500 to the agency.

#### **Will we have consistent staff/volunteer support for the board?**

HEY's EYAB is currently supported by a Program Coordinator with over ten years of experience in youth development. Approximately 40% of her job responsibilities are to provide continuous support for the EYAB members throughout their term. **Do we have access to the necessary support materials to support the youth board?**

HEY's EYAB is identified as a separate line item within the HEY budget to ensure their overall support. The team has access to computers, materials, trainings and supplies.

## GETTING TO KNOW YOUTH AND ENCOURAGING GOAL SETTING

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HEY values growth and development for all of our EYAB members. In order to best support them we encourage goal setting. Each year HEY's Program Coordinator conducts a Goal Setting Workshop that reviews how to develop SMART (Specific, Measureable, Action-Oriented, Realistic and Timed) goals. After EYAB members complete the workshop they are requested to develop both personal and professional goals. Throughout their term the Program Coordinator meets with them to check-in on their progress as well as provide ongoing support. Our goal is for youth to leave our program having grown both personally and professionally.

## DEVELOPING A TEAM ENVIRONMENT

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HEY encourages and supports on-going team meetings and team trainings. Our EYAB meets as a team once per week for three hours; during this meeting the team discusses current projects, future projects and community topics. In addition, these meetings act as training opportunities where the group participates in both internal and external trainings. The training topics vary depending on the needs of the group but common topics include: social justice/social change, goal setting, meeting facilitation, training development and training evaluation. This time is especially important because each individual EYAB member sets their own hours based on their availability.

## SUPPORTING YOUTH VOICE AND CHOICE

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While the basic foundation and training structure are fully developed prior to the start of the EYAB term, the majority of the training and support are developed based upon the needs/desires of the group. The team is able to determine the types of trainings they will receive in addition to determine what type of training they will provide to the larger community. HEY supports true youth participation, and throughout the EYAB term the team slowly takes on more power and responsibility.

### Months 1-3

Program Coordinator is 100% involved in a supportive role (not leading but available if group needs support) for all EYAB trainings and projects. Coordinator presents at all EYAB trainings and meetings often as a trainer or facilitator. Some core trainings with key community partners are already scheduled to provide a basic understanding of agency, community, youth development, empowerment and advocacy.

### Months 4-7

Program Coordinator's commitment is reduced to 75%. Coordinator is present at all EYAB trainings but not present at all EYAB meetings (available upon request from team), meetings are developed and facilitated by EYAB members. Team members identify training needs and the Program Coordinator assists the team to locate applicable trainings and resources.

### Month 8 -11

Program Coordinator is 50% involved in a supportive role for EYAB team (we recommend that supporters not drop less than 50%). Program Coordinator is present at some EYAB trainings and continues to have limited participation, only upon request, in team meetings. Meetings continue to be developed and facilitated by EYAB members. Team members are conducting outreach and presentation of team developed workshops.

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## DEVELOP ORIENTATION TRAINING MATERIALS

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The development of orientation and training materials is helpful for the youth as well as the agency. Each year HEY develops an orientation manual for the incoming board members. The manual is filled with information that will assist them to be successful throughout their time on the board. The following is the outline of our current board manual.

### HONORING EMANCIPATED YOUTH

- HISTORY OF HEY
- HISTORY OF HEY'S EMANCIPATED YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

### HOURS

- WEEKLY SCHEDULING
- SCHEDULE CHANGES
- ABSENCES
- MAKE-UP HOURS
- PERSONAL, VACATION AND HOLIDAY TIME

### COMPENSATION

- TIME SHEETS
- PERFORMANCE BASED RAISES
- BONUSES

### CORE DUTIES

- SUPPORTING HEY
- TEAM PROJECTS /INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS
- CONFERENCES, TRAININGS AND COMMUNITY MEETINGS

### EXIT PLANNING

- RESIGNATION /DISMISSAL
- END OF TERM

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## HOW HEY SUPPORTS YOUTH ADVOCACY

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HEY understands the importance and role of advocacy in shaping policies and systems. Through our EYAB team HEY works to strengthen and connect San Francisco's systems of support for Bay Area foster care youth so that all youth emancipating, or "aging out" of the foster care system can enjoy a healthy transition to adulthood. To ensure that youth voice is reflected in the larger community HEY has continuously provided opportunities for youth to advocate creating changes in education, employment, health and housing.

## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNITY NETWORKING

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During the EYAB term HEY encourages the team to explore in the community by conducting organizational interviews with our community partners. Many of the initial meetings are arranged by the Program Coordinator, while later meetings are arranged by the EYAB members. To support on-going community partnerships and networking the entire HEY team acts as mentors who assist the team in identifying trainings and meeting which are of interest to the EYAB team based on their individual projects and goals. EYAB members are encouraged to actively participate in additional community boards, meetings and panels of their interest to expand their community networks.

## SNAPSHOT - HOW HEY INCORPORATES THE EMPOWERMENT ADVOCACY MODEL

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>YOUTH DEVELOPMENT</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provides on-going trainings and workshops that build skills</li> <li>- Develops training calendar of skill building workshops</li> <li>- Pays weekly stipend</li> <li>- Provides bi-weekly one-on-one coaching sessions with youth to promote critical thinking and analysis</li> <li>- Ensures youth have access to needed material and updated equipment</li> <li>- Provides on-going opportunities for youth voice and choice</li> <li>- Develops a physically safe environment</li> <li>- Provides youth with written policies and procedures so that they were aware of role and expectations</li> <li>- Hires trained staff and encourage staff to continuously receive updated youth development training</li> <li>- Supports a culture of peer support and inclusion of wide range of youth to promote genuine youth voice</li> <li>- Creates working space specifically for youth so they have a designated area</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>YOUTH EMPOWERMENT</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Supports rotating leadership roles so that all participants have opportunity to grow</li> <li>- Encourages personal and professional goal setting</li> <li>- Assists youth to identify on-going leadership development opportunities</li> <li>- Hosts fun youth development weekly team meetings - youth centered, youth focused, youth-led</li> <li>- Provides internal and external bi-weekly team skill building trainings</li> <li>- Supports on-going team projects including: curriculum development, workshop facilitation, community interviews etc.</li> <li>- Conducts bi-annual team retreats to support the team growth and develop next steps</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ADVOCACY</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Encourages youth to participate in collaborative activities</li> <li>- Provides bridges for youth to participate with other organizations once they leave EYAB</li> <li>- Supports youth to sit on other boards and community panels</li> <li>- Connects youth to community liaisons/mentors</li> <li>- Identifies opportunities for youth to act as agency representatives</li> <li>- Creates opportunities for youth to research community organizations</li> <li>- Assists youth to identify community strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges</li> <li>- Assists youth to look at the big picture using a social justice lens</li> </ul>

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## HISTORY OF HEY'S EYAB:

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Since its creation in 1999, HEY has always acknowledged the importance and power of genuine youth voice. In 2003 with the help of HEY's Board of Directors, the organization formalized youth participation by developing a youth advisory committee, known as the Emancipated Youth Advisory Board (EYAB). The name, however, soon changed to HEY's Emancipated Youth *Advocacy* Board (EYAB) because of their growing role as empowered advocates. HEY's EYAB is comprised of 3-4 former foster youth committed to advocating on behalf of current and former foster youth. During their 11-month term with HEY, the young adults play an instrumental role in conducting public education and outreach activities, and advocating for programs and services that improve outcomes for current and former foster youth. Thirty former foster youth have participated in HEY's EYAB since its inception in 2003.

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## A RETROSPECTIVE OF HEY'S EYAB OVER THE YEARS

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2003 -2005

The initial HEY Emancipated Youth Advocacy Board (EYAB) was comprised of a five emancipated foster youth ages 16-25. The first youth team included active community-based current and former foster youth advocates that were interested in supporting and carrying out the work of HEY. The board focused on collectively working to address issues and barriers in the foster care community



HEY EYAB Members

during a 12 month term. The team received on-going issue specific trainings throughout their term. The structure was very loose and the team was supported by adults who acted as mentors to the team. At this time the EYAB gradually began to represent HEY at various events and by doing so increased HEY's visibility and raised public awareness of the needs of foster youth in the Bay Area community.

2005 - 2006

During this time HEY began to focus more on specific issues affecting of foster youth, the new structure expanded HEY's advocacy to include education, employment, and health in addition to the housing focus. While the focus of HEY's advocacy shifted so did HEY's EYAB. HEY's EYAB used a Reflective Model that highlighted the importance of advocacy and its impact on the youth team. During this phase some of the original HEY EYAB board members still remained on the board mixed with new members who had various advocacy experience levels. From here on the role of HEY's EYAB changed to developing projects that required a more cohesive group structure. This new model was able to assist HEY in deepening the understanding of the role of HEY in the community.

2006-2007

During this term HEY responded to a need for more employment opportunities for former foster youth by restructuring HEY's EYAB to support a three-member Internship Employment Model. This model provided opportunities for reflection, advocacy, employment, as well as community involvement. HEY increased the hours from 10 hours per month to 10 hours per week. This team included some members from the second year team in addition to new members that all had leadership and advocacy experience. The goal of the restructured HEY's EYAB was to address transitioning youths' needs for meaningful youth leadership opportunities as well as actual employment experience which would enable their full participation as decision makers and advocates. Under this model HEY's EYAB's work expanded to include more products produced and disseminated by youth. This was the first term that the team was supported by a full-time adult staff member whose job description included a percentage of time for assist HEY's EYAB.

2007 – 2008

HEY continued to build upon its Internship Employment Model with a new component, a board comprised solely of nontraditional youth leaders. Non-traditional leaders are defined by HEY as youth leaders who did not have exposure to leadership position during early adolescences, while they may have participated in some leadership activities they never acted in a defined leadership role. To support this change HEY's Project Manager developed an Expert Advocate Model, this model provided a 10 hour per week, 11 month employment internship opportunity to educate the larger community about the issues of emancipated foster youth. Through this model HEY's EYAB members focused on becoming advocates through intense training and staff support. The team was able to develop and implement a training program to inform organizations and groups who did not necessarily work in the foster care field on the unique situation of current and former foster youth, and how to best serve them. Like HEY itself, HEY's EYAB served to strengthen systems through promoting awareness and improving cross-sector communication.

2009-2010

Through HEY's work with the Expert Advocate Model the team realized that nontraditional youth needed additional support to become empowered leaders. During 2008-2009 HEY hired a youth development expert who was charged with developing a model that supported and empowered non-traditional leaders. The new Program Coordinator met this challenge by developing our latest model the Empowerment Advocacy Model. This model provides three emancipated foster youth with a 15 hour per week, 11 month intense internship opportunity. This team will develop two community wide trainings that address the current barriers, challenges and opportunities to support current and former foster youth. In addition, this team will also work to create individual projects that will be researched, developed and implemented by the youth team members.



HEY EYAB Members Shavonte Keaton  
, Aryeetey Welbeck, and Claudia Mendez

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