

**An Asset
Builder's
Guide to**

**Youth
Leadership**

A SEARCH INSTITUTE PUBLICATION



**AN ASSET BUILDER'S GUIDE TO
YOUTH LEADERSHIP**



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"To lead the people, walk behind them."

—Lao Tzu

"A leader is a dealer in hope."

—Napoleon Bonaparte

"I suppose leadership at one time meant muscles; but today it means getting along with people."

—Indira Gandhi

"Leaders come in many forms, with many styles and diverse qualities. There are quiet leaders and leaders one can hear in the next county. Some find their strength in eloquence, some in judgment, some in courage. . . . The fact that there are many kinds of leaders has implications for leadership education. . . . We should give young people a sense of the many kinds of leaders and styles of leadership, and encourage them to move toward those models that are right for them."

—John W. Gardner

"Preparation to lead need not be at the complete expense of vocational or scholarly preparation, but it must be the first priority."

—Robert K. Greenleaf

"Adults underestimate youth and their ability to do good in society, but I think kids are the ones who are going to change the world."

—Craig Kielburger, 15-year-old founder of Free the Children,
a worldwide anti-child labor group

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P R E F A C E

Leadership means different things to different people. This fact became clear as we embarked on developing a resource about youth leadership. Some people told us they wanted tips on how best to involve young people on committees and boards. Others wanted information and ideas that would challenge readers to rethink everything they do in their school, congregation, or organization to give youth decision-making power equal to or greater than that of adults. Still others thought we should focus on helping youth be leaders in Healthy Communities • Healthy Youth initiatives. Even among the contributors, there was a range of ideas about what this book should be.

It was our goal from the start that this resource should tie youth leadership to Search Institute's framework of development assets—40 building blocks of development that all young people need to thrive and be successful. These assets provide an important foundation for the nurturance of youth

leadership because they represent a holistic approach to positive development that includes young people from all walks of life from birth to age 18. The assets do not provide a youth leadership model, nor have we tried to construct such a model from them. Rather, we show where assets and youth leadership intersect and foster each other, how an asset-based approach can strengthen your youth leadership efforts, and how focusing on positive development for all young people can spark creativity, energy, and commitment among youth and adults in your organization.

It is not our intention here to present a quick and easy recipe for a successful youth leadership program. Rather, we have proposed options for you and your group or organization to choose from as you explore definitions and possibilities, meet new challenges and benefit from seeing how others have addressed similar situations, and seek to strengthen your asset-building efforts and the young people in your organization and community.

INTRODUCTION

FOSTERING AND UPHOLDING YOUNG LEADERS

In his book *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*, Robert K. Greenleaf writes of his hope that those in “leadership will bend their efforts to serve with skill, understanding, and spirit, and that followers will be responsive only to able servants who would lead them.”¹

Service may not be the first word that comes to most people’s minds when they think of leadership, yet in many ways the two words go hand in hand. Both involve giving something (your time, talents, energy) to benefit others; both require responsibility; and both offer opportunities to learn about yourself and the world. They also both work best when done with compassion and respect for the wants and needs of others.

Those who seek both to lead and to serve are most effective and have the most positive outcomes when they put the common good—what is best for the most people—ahead of their own priorities or those of influential groups or individuals. John W. Gardner, former secretary of health, education, and welfare, pays tribute to this cornerstone notion when he states that “the larger topic of which leadership is a subtopic is the accomplishment of *group* purposes.”²

We have defined an *effective leader* as one who does what is needed and appropriate in the situation or setting, listens and responds to the needs of others, behaves ethically and with integrity, and understands the need for shared leadership. People become effective leaders through the integration of what they *do* (the roles they take on, the actions they pursue), what they *know* (the skills and information they possess), and who they *are* (their attitudes, beliefs, opinions).

Readers of this resource likely share some commonsense assumptions—not necessarily about *how* young people should develop leadership skills, but about *why* it is imperative that they do so. If we accept that we all have an obligation to serve our various communities (school, neighborhood, youth organization, congregation), then it is equally undeniable that those of us in a position to do so (and we all can contribute skills and ideas at some level) have a parallel responsibility to ensure that young people, too, develop aptitudes as well as attitudes conducive to leadership and service. We all have an obligation to the future *and* the present of our various communities. Furthermore, not only must we see to it that young people can discover and cultivate their abilities to shape our communities, we must commit to working alongside them in these efforts as their mentors, allies, and friends.

The benefits from this approach are wide-

¹ Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1977).

² John W. Gardner, *On Leadership* (New York: Free Press, 1990).

ranging. Data from a Search Institute survey involving approximately 100,000 6th- to 12th-grade students during the 1996–97 school year indicate a strong correlation between leadership, community service, and youth participation and the number of developmental assets a young person has in her or his life—the building blocks Search Institute has identified as the positive relationships, opportunities, competencies, values, and self-perceptions necessary for success. (For a complete list of assets and their definitions, see pages 8–9.) Among the associated positive outcomes of leadership and community service are fewer behavior problems in school; increased school performance, grades, and attendance; increased prosocial and moral reasoning; more positive attitudes toward adults; increased empathy; and greater personal and social responsibility.³ It is thus to everyone's advantage to more broadly integrate youth into our efforts to manage and enhance our communities and organizations.

Presented in this workbook are 18 keys to help-

ing young people become effective leaders in their schools, congregations, and community organizations—now and in the future. Keys #1–5 focus on expanding the way you think about youth leadership. Keys #6–11 are about building the foundation for and overcoming obstacles to shared power in your organization. And keys #12–18 help you put your ideas into action and truly engage youth in leadership in your organization and perhaps in the wider community. The book is written for adult educators and youth workers, but all of the ideas and activities should be shared among youth and adults. The information is most appropriate for ages 10 to 18.

Some readers will find that all of the tools are helpful and will want to work on them one by one. Others will pick and choose those that are most relevant to their efforts. However you choose to use this book, you probably will find that some things work really well for you and that others are inappropriate or need to be adjusted to fit your situation. Don't worry about doing it "right." You and your young people will have better experiences if you take some risks, try new things, work and grow in partnership, and keep the common good foremost in your minds.

³ See Peter C. Scales and Nancy Leffert, *Developmental Assets: A Synthesis of the Scientific Research on Adolescent Development* (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1999).

BROADENING YOUR DEFINITION AND YOUR EFFORTS

Recently, members of a youth committee in a congregation in Indiana sat around a table debating how to spend their annual summer trip. Their options were an excursion to a nearby beach or a work-focused trip to a community in need of refurbished and rebuilt homes. There were good arguments on both sides. The group had worked hard on service projects throughout the year, and they wanted to relax and have fun together, to celebrate their accomplishments. On the other hand, service is an integral part of their congregation's mission, and the community in question was in desperate need. The negotiations stalled, and no one seemed sure of what was right for the group. Finally, a 9th-grader named Brian stood up and said, "We could go out purely in the interest of having fun this summer, but we have proven that we are able to have fun no matter what we do. This is a project that enables us to provide homes for people who have nothing. We have to choose this project."

Brian was one of the youngest members of the youth committee. Yet when he spoke with passion, energy, and sincerity about something in which he truly believed, his peers—and even older youth—listened and were persuaded. Moments later, they quickly and unanimously approved the work trip.

It can be easy to assume that the most visible young people in a group or community are also the most likely leaders. From an outsider's perspective it might seem that the oldest, most outspoken, or most popular young people must be the ones to whom others look. Even characteristics such as physical appearance, height, and the sound of a person's voice influence whom we look to for leadership. Yet often, as in the case of Brian, people emerge as leaders because they say what they think and feel, are committed to strong values and beliefs, and set a positive example for others.

People lead in many different ways: some by example, others by exploring and bringing to the group's attention new ideas and opportunities; some by inspiring others to action, others by making and promoting laws and policies. Thus, while asking one or two youth to be on a committee or assist with a project *can* be considered engaging youth in leadership, it is certainly a limited approach. Many organizations and communities are discovering that they tap into a tremendous amount of energy, creativity, and commitment when they widen the scope of youth leadership and engage young people in leading and serving in many different ways and areas of public life. They realize that they make better deci-

sions and have stronger programs and initiatives when they have diverse leadership that includes young people. The keys in this section focus on challenging yourself and your organization to expand

your thinking about what youth leadership means and who the young people are who can make valuable, lasting contributions to your efforts.



Key #1: The Asset Connection

Effectively engaging young people as leaders in organizations requires more than just training them in public speaking, interpersonal relations, decision making, and other skills. By providing a comprehensive and integrated base of developmental support and opportunities, organizations create environments in which young people can have the foundation for becoming responsible, respectful, and resourceful leaders *and followers*. Research with almost 100,000 young people across the country has helped us identify what it takes to ensure this foundation: a framework of building blocks called *40 developmental assets* that are powerful in shaping who young people are and who they will become. The more complete the set of building blocks—the more assets young people experience—the more likely they are to do well in school, make positive contributions in their communities, and take care of their health. The assets are also important factors in young people's choices about risky behaviors such as alcohol and other drug use; as their assets accrue, their involvement in these kinds of behaviors goes down.⁴

Too often, the focus of youth work—and even education—is on solving or preventing recurring problems such as truancy, drug use, teen pregnancy, and violence. The asset approach concentrates on bringing out and building on the best in young people. It is based on the idea that people of all ages are more likely to be happy, healthy, and successful when they are nurtured and empowered through positive, supportive interactions and experiences. Leadership opportunities allow young people to try out new skills and competencies, have real power and influence, and have some control over what hap-

pens to them within their organizations and community. Young people's leadership potential is also enhanced when they feel confident, respected, trusted, secure, and expected to contribute.

There are a couple of points to keep in mind here. First of all, the idea of developmental assets is not a new one. They are the kinds of things parents, teachers, youth workers, and others who care about young people have been doing for years. What is unique about the assets approach is that it organizes the good things people do for youth into a unified, cohesive framework. Instead of wondering if the individual things you are doing make a difference, you can have confidence that the cumulative impact of positive adult and peer actions and interactions is helping young people thrive. Second, it's more important and easier to focus on the eight categories of assets than on individual assets. There are four categories of *external assets*—support and opportunities that are provided by family, friends, organizations, and communities; and four categories of *internal assets*—capacities, skills, and values that develop within



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

NOTE: For each of the 18 keys described in this resource, we've included "questions to consider." We suggest you first reflect on these questions yourself and then discuss some or all of them with others in your organization.

- ▶ What connections do you see between opportunities for leadership and asset building?
- ▶ In what ways are you and your organization already building external assets for young people? In what ways are you building internal assets?
- ▶ Who are the asset builders in your life? How can you learn from them?
- ▶ Who are the young people in your organization who seem to be lacking assets the most? What can you do to help strengthen their foundation?

⁴ For more information about developmental assets, see Peter L. Benson, Peter C. Scales, and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, *A Fragile Foundation: The State of Developmental Assets among American Youth* (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1999).



YOUTH GET HYPED ABOUT LEADERSHIP AND ASSETS

Since 1995, a group of teens called Helping Youth Promote Empowerment (the HYPE Council) has been working to lead, serve, and encourage asset building among their peers in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The council, made up entirely of middle and high school students, oversees the allocation of state funding for nonprofit organizations with youth-focused and youth-led initiatives. Grants of up to \$8,000 are made to programs that encourage young people to get active in their communities, intentionally nurture developmental assets, and are based on young people's own ideas and interests.

Hedy Lemar Walls, the council's coordinator and adviser, says that decisions about how to distribute the money haven't always been made by young people. For years, all funding for youth initiatives was allocated by an adult committee. "All of a sudden we asked ourselves: 'Where are the kids?'" says Walls. "We needed to figure out what the kids wanted. We told the adults, 'Thank you very much, but we don't need you anymore.' It was time to involve the youth."

The first year, 38 young people ages 12 through 18 were interviewed and accepted onto the HYPE Council. They were taught how to evaluate grants as well as write

them. Then they went into the community to mobilize interest and recruit applicants. Ian Kaminski-Coughlin, a junior, views the council as a service he and his peers are providing to other young people and the community. "I don't see myself as a leader, but I think I'm opening the door for others to become leaders," he says. "I just want to get as many people involved in community service as possible. That's why I'm here."

Nineteen-year-old Rashan Moore, the oldest council member, says helping others is the reason he, too, got involved. "I don't agree with public school systems' policies," he says. "If I can in some way help fund programs that will help a kid get through a slightly different route—not just the alternative school route—that motivates me."

In addition to helping other young people, Kaminski-Coughlin says getting youth involved in leadership has important benefits for the community as well. "If you don't foster leadership or take responsibility at an early age, then apathy comes and that seems to be such a large problem with youth and adults in America. If you don't give youth the opportunity and kind of nudge them into the roles that are available, then apathy will run rampant."

young people. The accompanying list gives examples of how leadership opportunities can build assets in each of these eight categories:

External Asset Categories

1. Support—Young people need to experience care, love, and involvement from their family, friends, neighbors, and many others. They need organizations and institutions that provide positive, supportive environments. Working together in leadership teams or groups can strengthen relationships of support and caring between peers and across generations.

2. Empowerment—Young people need to be valued by their community and have opportunities to contribute. For this to occur, they must feel safe. As leaders, young people see themselves as valuable

resources for their organizations and communities. Leadership opportunities that connect young people to their neighborhoods, schools, and community can help them feel safe and know who they can turn to if they need help.

3. Boundaries and expectations—Young people need to know what is expected of them and whether behaviors are "in bounds" or "out of bounds." Boundaries and expectations are reinforced when peers and adults are clear and up front about what conduct is expected from leaders and when young people know the limits of their leadership power. Leadership opportunities help young people understand the value of boundaries and realize that boundaries exist throughout life and apply to every stage of one's development.

4. Constructive use of time—Young people need

constructive, enriching opportunities for growth through creative activities, youth programs, involvement with a center of worship or spirituality, and quality time at home. Leadership opportunities, especially for older youth, can keep young people involved and interested in programs and activities and challenge them to use their creativity to deal with new situations.

Internal Asset Categories

5. Commitment to learning—Young people need to develop a lifelong commitment to education and learning. Involvement in leadership can spark new interests and resolution in young people as they apply their knowledge to issues and situations, and as people look to them for answers to questions and solutions for problems.

6. Positive values—Young people need to develop strong values that guide their choices. Preparing young people for leadership nurtures positive values when it includes exploration of beliefs and commitments that are important to the organization or community and to the young people themselves.

7. Social competencies—Young people need skills and competencies that equip them to make positive choices, build relationships, and succeed in life. Many skills and competencies are nurtured as young

leaders work (by themselves and with others) to shape plans, find solutions to problems, and make decisions.

8. Positive identity—Young people need a strong sense of their own purpose, power, and promise. Leadership opportunities are important for shaping positive identity as young people discover their gifts, talents, and place in the world.

These connections are just some of the links between engaging youth in leadership and building developmental assets. They offer only a glimpse of the potential intersections between assets and youth leadership. And they do not examine the reciprocity of the relationship—the ways that building assets can help youth be better leaders. We have identified many more throughout this book, and you will discover others as you explore what youth leadership is and can be in your organization, whether your focus is academics, spirituality, recreation, or something else.



ASSET-BUILDING TIP: *Embrace the idea that assets are important for all young people. Find a leadership role for a young person you are not very fond of and who seems to have little support from others. Go out of your way to help her or him succeed in this role.*



SEARCH INSTITUTE'S 40 DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS

EXTERNAL ASSETS

Support

1. **Family support**—Family life provides high levels of love and support.
2. **Positive family communication**—Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.
3. **Other adult relationships**—Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.
4. **Caring neighborhood**—Young person experiences caring neighbors.
5. **Caring school climate**—School provides a caring, encouraging environment.
6. **Parent involvement in schooling**—Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.

Empowerment

7. **Community values youth**—Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.
8. **Youth as resources**—Young people are given useful roles in the community.
9. **Service to others**—Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.
10. **Safety**—Young person feels safe at home, at school, and in the neighborhood.

Boundaries and Expectations

11. **Family boundaries**—Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts.
12. **School boundaries**—School provides clear rules and consequences.

13. **Neighborhood boundaries**—Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.

14. **Adult role models**—Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.

15. **Positive peer influence**—Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.

16. **High expectations**—Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.

Constructive Use of Time

17. **Creative activities**—Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.

18. **Youth programs**—Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community.

19. **Religious community**—Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.

20. **Time at home**—Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week.

INTERNAL ASSETS

Commitment to Learning

21. **Achievement motivation**—Young person is motivated to do well in school.

22. **School engagement**—Young person is actively engaged in learning.

23. **Homework**—Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.

24. **Bonding to school**—Young person cares about her or his school.



SEARCH INSTITUTE'S 40 DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS (cont.)

25. Reading for pleasure—Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.

Positive Values

26. Caring—Young person places high value on helping other people.

27. Equality and social justice—Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.

28. Integrity—Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.

29. Honesty—Young person “tells the truth even when it is not easy.”

30. Responsibility—Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.

31. Restraint—Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use alcohol or other drugs.

Social Competencies

32. Planning and decision making—Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.

33. Interpersonal competence—Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.

34. Cultural competence—Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.

35. Resistance skills—Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.

36. Peaceful conflict resolution—Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.

Positive Identity

37. Personal power—Young person feels he or she has control over “things that happen to me.”

38. Self-esteem—Young person reports having a high self-esteem.

39. Sense of purpose—Young person reports that “my life has a purpose.”

40. Positive view of personal future—Young person is optimistic about her or his personal future.



Key #2: Exploring the Assets Leaders Need

Leadership styles vary, depending on the situation and on the person. Recognizing key competencies, values, and commitments of leaders is one step in beginning to expand your idea of who the leaders and potential leaders are in your organization. In addition, reflecting on how you can bring out these assets in yourself can be a good way to strengthen your role as a leader and mentor for young people. Through years of working with youth and adult leaders, we have identified key areas of external and internal asset development that help any person be an effective leader:

Support

- **Has a strong network of people to depend on**—Effective leaders do not attempt to do everything on their own. They know when to turn to others for information, ideas, or help, and they have people who will give them this kind of support.

Empowerment

- **Believes that her or his contributions and competencies are recognized by others**—Effective leaders realize that they are valued and valuable, and they are motivated to serve by sharing what they have to offer.

Boundaries and Expectations

- **Understands and accepts the scope of leadership power**—Effective leaders know the limits of their leadership, and they also understand and accept the responsibility that is expected of them.
- **Knows what behavior is appropriate and inappropriate**—Effective leaders recognize that they are role models and behave accordingly.

Constructive Use of Time

- **Balances activities and home life**—Even though many leaders devote much of their lives to their leadership roles, every person needs to find balance in her or his life. Effective leaders know that while it's important to be active and involved in organizations, it's also important to have “downtime” to simply be with family, friends, or relax alone.

Commitment to Learning

- **Is creative and values creativity in others**—Effective leaders aren't limited by convention or “traditional” ways of doing things, especially when those ways are not working. They are motivated to find new and challenging activities, ideas, and solutions to problems. They also know how to enlist the creativity of others.
- **Looks for and seizes opportunities for personal growth**—Effective leaders recognize the need to continually learn and grow. They seek and make time for situations that encourage personal and spiritual growth. They are open to learning new perspectives and ways to lead.

Positive Values

- **Takes positive risks**—Risk taking is often thought of as something to avoid. But being a leader means being willing to take positive risks such as trying new things, standing up for what is right or unpopular, and taking constructive advantage of opportunities. It also means resisting pressure to just “go along with the crowd.” Positive risk takers know that sometimes you have to take chances in order to discover the possibilities.
- **Models positive values**—Effective leaders recognize their responsibility to use their influence for the greater good. Young people who grow in leadership can play a tremendous role in influencing their peers

**QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

▶ Who are the young people in your organization who are in formal leadership positions? Which of these asset-based characteristics do they seem to have? Which do they most need to work on?

▶ Who are the young people who are informal leaders? Which of these characteristics do they most have? Which do they most need to work on?

▶ What differences do you see in the characteristics of formal and informal leaders? Why do you think that is?

▶ Are there young people who have specific skills or talents who are not currently leaders? What could you do to involve them more?

by modeling—and expecting others to model—positive values.

Social Competencies

■ **Listens well**—There are few characteristics as powerful for gaining trust and respect as being able to listen well. One of the greatest services a leader can provide is to listen to others in a way that communicates to them that they are valued and that what they have to say is important and welcomed. Try the brief exercise on page 13 called “Listen Up!” to evaluate your skills as a listener.

■ **Communicates effectively**—Leadership requires the ability to communicate effectively with individuals and groups about feelings, ideas, and facts. Good leaders know that withholding information (or the appearance of doing so) can damage trust and leave people feeling isolated and excluded.

■ **Plans well**—Managing schedules and time effectively is a critical task for leaders. Being able to choose what to get involved in without becoming overextended is also key.

■ **Has good decision-making skills**—Leadership frequently requires making decisions and working with others to make decisions. Good leaders have the skills to think through and make decisions carefully, rather than base them on pressure from others or self-interest. The worksheet on page 14 shows one strategy for making good decisions.

■ **Values and seeks diversity in associates**—While there have been and still are many “leaders” who see differences as a weakness or problem, our definition of an effective leader includes believing that differences are a blessing. Effective leaders know that they can better serve others and their mission when they have the support and input of people with a wide range of backgrounds, interests, skills, and attitudes. They recognize their own gifts and know that others have important gifts as well.

Positive Identity

■ **Has a vision and is mission driven**—People who have vision and a mission know who they want to be, what they believe in, and what their hopes are. They have reflected on these beliefs, values, and dreams and understand how they guide their life.

■ **Is goal oriented**—Effective leaders know how to make realistic plans based on what they want or need to achieve. They see the importance of having both short- and long-term objectives, and know what steps to take to accomplish them. Good leaders



ASSET-BUILDING TIP: *Nurture your own cultural competence (asset #34) by reflecting on your assumptions about which youth have which of these characteristics. Do you have preconceived ideas based on gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, appearance, family status, age, or other factors? Challenge yourself to become more aware of your own biases about who can and should be leaders.*

believe they are in charge of their lives and have some control over what happens to them and in the world.

You can use the worksheet on pages 15–16 in

two ways: (1) to assess your own experiences of these asset-based leadership characteristics and (2) to help youth explore their strengths and determine which ones they would like to develop further.


WORKSHEET
LISTEN UP!

Think back to the last one-on-one conversation you had with someone else. Use this checklist to help you think about how effective you were as a listener.

Yes**No**

1. I paid attention to what _____ said without thinking about my reply.

2. I shared with _____ a similar situation from my own life.

3. I watched _____'s face and body language, as well as heard the words.

4. Other things kept distracting me.

5. I tried to understand the feelings _____ was having.

6. I offered advice about what I thought should happen.

7. Occasionally I stopped to ask questions or summarize what I was hearing.

If you checked yes for the odd-numbered statements and no for the even-numbered statements, you are probably the kind of listener people will seek out when they need someone to talk to. As you listen, remember that people don't always want advice, opinions, or solutions as much as they want to tell a caring, trustworthy person about something they're going through, thinking about, or struggling with.

WORKSHEET



PERSONAL ASSESSMENT OF LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS

This worksheet identifies 16 key asset-based characteristics of effective leaders. For each item, rate yourself on a scale from 1 to 5, 1 meaning you don't see yourself as having the competency, value, or commitment at all, and 5 meaning you feel you have fully developed and are using the competency, value, or commitment.

Support	1 2 3 4 5	I have a strong network of people to depend on. Do I believe that I can't do everything on my own and that others can offer valuable support? Do I know who to turn to for information, ideas, or help?
Empowerment	1 2 3 4 5	Others are aware of my contributions and competencies. Do I feel valued and valuable? Do I have opportunities to share with others what I have to offer?
Boundaries and Expectations	1 2 3 4 5	I understand the scope of my leadership power. Are the limits of my leadership clear to me? Do I fully understand and accept the responsibility that is expected of me?
	1 2 3 4 5	I know what behavior is appropriate and inappropriate. Are the expectations about my behavior as a leader clear? Do I view myself as a role model and act accordingly?
Constructive Use of Time	1 2 3 4 5	I balance activities and home life. Do I have a mix of activities, commitments, and time at home? Do I allow myself "downtime" to simply be with family, friends, or relax alone?
Commitment to Learning	1 2 3 4 5	I am creative and appreciate the creativity of others. Do I think outside of conventions and traditional ways of doing things? Am I creative with solutions, activities, and planning? Do I shortchange my creative side for the technical and analytical? Do I continually work on developing my creativity?
	1 2 3 4 5	I look for and seize personal growth opportunities. Do I recognize the need to continually learn and grow? Do I seek and make time for opportunities or situations that encourage personal and spiritual growth? Am I open to learning new perspectives and ways to lead?
Positive Values	1 2 3 4 5	I take positive risks. Am I willing to take risks and stand up for what is right? How often do I just "go along with the crowd" and do what everyone else is doing? Am I willing to stand alone for my beliefs and values?
	1 2 3 4 5	I model positive values. Do I recognize that I have a responsibility to try to motivate others to work for the common good and to address social problems? Do I consistently model positive values and expect others to do the same.

WORKSHEET



PERSONAL ASSESSMENT OF LEADERSHIP CHARACTERISTICS (cont.)

Social Competencies	1 2 3 4 5	I listen well to others. How effective am I at listening? Do I listen in a way that affirms others and values their importance? Can I be quiet and just listen without feeling like I need to be adding to the conversation? Do I let others know I am listening and encourage them to continue sharing?
	1 2 3 4 5	I communicate effectively. Am I comfortable speaking one-on-one as well as in front of a group? Can I develop and present an effective talk or speech? Am I familiar with the various roadblocks to effective communication and do I successfully avoid them? Do I write clearly? Am I familiar with the various ways I communicate besides using words?
	1 2 3 4 5	I plan well. Do I plan and schedule well? Do I choose well when deciding what to get involved in? Am I able to follow through on my commitments or do I tend to be overextended? Do I know how to make the most of the time available? Can I say no to what is not of interest or what would overextend me?
	1 2 3 4 5	I am good at making decisions. Do I have a process for making decisions? Do I have a clear set of values on which to make decisions? Do I make healthy choices, even when it's difficult?
	1 2 3 4 5	I value and seek diversity in the people around me. Do I see differences as a blessing and make sure leadership teams are made up of people who are diverse—in philosophy, gender, or ethnicity? Am I aware of my gifts, and do I seek out diversity in order to bring balance and richness to a team? Have I confronted my own issues or fears regarding those who might be different from me?
Positive Identity	1 2 3 4 5	I have a vision for my life and I am mission driven. Do I know what I stand for and believe in? Do I spend time reflecting on my beliefs and values and how they guide my life? Do I have a vision for my life? Have I ever spent time writing a mission statement to guide my life? Do I have a dream I am moving toward?
	1 2 3 4 5	I am goal oriented. Do I have a plan for my life, and am I moving toward it? Have I set goals, and am I taking steps to make my goals a reality? Do I feel like I am in charge of my life and know where I am going? Have I taken the time to write my plan on paper and listed the specific ways I am going to make sure my goals are accomplished?

Once you have completed this assessment, look for your areas of greatest strength. What can you do to make the most of those strengths? Similarly, what are the areas in which you need the most growth—the characteristics you rated 1, 2, or 3? How can you build your competency in those areas?



Key #3: Rethinking the Role of Youth Worker or Educator

Truly engaging youth in leadership in your organization—taking a proactive approach to leadership development—is likely to change your role as an educator or youth worker. You can decide whether you want to welcome this change and make the most of it, or you may find you feel threatened by it.

In a congregation, school, or youth-serving organization with effective youth leadership, adults almost always play more of a background role than in organizations where youth have little or no power. With an asset-building approach, adults find themselves most often in the roles of facilitator, coordinator, or coach. Even teachers begin to pay more attention to discerning and encouraging their students' strong points, creativity, and independence than to planning, guiding, and trying to control everything that happens in the classroom.

For example, a colleague of ours recalls being a student in an alternative high school that facilitated learning through work groups and weekly meetings, rather than traditional classrooms. During one particularly contentious meeting she was feeling and acting angry and negative. Rather than confront or chastise her during the meeting, her adviser later called her aside and pointed out to her that she was a very influential member of the group and that her attitude that day was negatively affecting everyone. He encouraged her to use her role as a leader to have a positive impact on the group. She recalls being



ASSET-BUILDING TIP: *Take young people's input seriously and nurture asset #7 (community values youth). Invite youth leaders to be part of a regular review of your job performance. Ask them to tell you what you do that supports them, what you do that makes it hard for them to be leaders, and what else they would like from you.*



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ▶ What word would you use to describe your current work with young people? teacher? coach? elder? mentor? baby-sitter? friend?
- ▶ How will this role need to change for you to help youth be leaders?
- ▶ Are you comfortable with changing your role? If not, can youth leadership still work in your organization?

“utterly astonished” by and liking the idea that she could be a leader in her own way.

In making an asset-building moment out of a potentially hostile or embarrassing situation, this teacher sparked in a young person a feeling of empowerment and responsibility.

A shift to asset thinking also means that encouraging healthy relationships between youth and other adults in or connected with your organization becomes a priority. Rick Jackson of the YMCA of Greater Seattle has even suggested a job description for youth workers based on the assets: “Wanted—Someone who not only builds strong relationships with youth but also takes a ‘development approach’ to youth development and is ‘on fire’ with purpose and possibilities. Must be able to build bridges between youth and adults and form intergenerational teams to do community work.”⁵

For youth workers and educators who work primarily with young people, this expanded role may be a bit uncomfortable at first. However, a personal relationship with an adult can provide a young person with a role model, an opportunity to observe and learn new skills, and a trustworthy ally and advocate. You probably aren't able to develop this kind of relationship with each of the young people you work

⁵ Lynn Ingrid Nelson, *Helping Youth Thrive: How Youth Organizations Can—and Do—Build Developmental Assets* (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1998).



HELPING YOUTH TAKE THE LEAD: AN INVESTMENT THAT PAYS OFF

Jeff Carr, founder and director of the Bresse Youth Center, in downtown Los Angeles, has experienced firsthand the benefits of being willing to step back and let youth take the lead. In five years, the center has grown from 100 members to more than 1,000. Carr says that inspiration from youth who come to the center is what has made it a groundbreaking and fast-growing organization.

Young people play key roles in planning and leading the organization, which boasts an automated identification system (for safety), a graphic arts business, and a computer lab. According to Carr, the programs and activities available are continually being shaped in response

to young people's interests. "This is a place where kids [believe] they have some degree of control and the opportunity to make some decisions about what happens," he says. Carr also has developed a \$40,000 per year scholarship program that has so far supported five Bresse graduates in college. A former participant recently returned from college to work as the director of sports and recreation. One of his long-term goals, he told Carr, is to acquire the skills to one day be the director of the entire organization. Carr believes that with his combination of vision, skills, and a lot of support, he will probably achieve that goal.

with, so engaging other adults is an important contribution you can make to asset building. These intergenerational relationships also benefit adults. Through regular, close contact with a young person, an adult may learn to trust youth, better understand the daily lives of young people, and start to view

the world from a more youth-friendly perspective. Encouraging these kinds of relationships can also lead to increases in other types of intergenerational activities, events, and relationships as other youth and adults begin to see the positive outcomes of mentoring.

Key #4: Recognizing Many Different Types of Leadership

A formal leadership role—such as director, president, chair, or executive—is one way to define what it means to be a leader. Influence over others is another. But power and influence don't just happen because a person decides to be a leader or is assigned a certain title or position. Barbara A. Lewis is an educator and author of a number of books, including *What Do You Stand For? A Kid's Guide to Building Character*. We have added examples and asset connections to the five types of leadership Lewis describes:⁶

1. Leadership of the moment—taking charge in the midst of a crisis. For example, in the story at the beginning of this section, Brian stepped forward—even though he wasn't usually considered a leader in his church's youth committee—because he felt strongly about the issue at hand and he had a lot of integrity (asset #28), which enabled him to take the risk of speaking his mind.

2. Leadership by example—living in a way that inspires others. Lewis describes the experiences of a Muslim girl named Shagufta who as a small child was self-conscious about the traditional clothes she wore and her beliefs and rituals because they seemed so different from those of her non-Muslim classmates. However, in high school, with the support of a teacher, she joined a multicultural club that celebrated differences and helped her learn about other cultures (asset #34) as well as develop pride in her own (asset #38). Her confidence in herself and her willingness to teach and learn from others made Shagufta a leader for peers who felt “different” or left out (asset #15).

3. Community leadership—serving in a formal leadership role in an organization or other group of people with a shared interest (such as a class, Scout

⁶ Barbara A. Lewis, *What Do You Stand For? A Kid's Guide to Building Character* (Minneapolis: Free Spirit, 1998).

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ▶ Are there types of leadership other than those described here? What are they?
- ▶ What kind of leader are you? Does your role vary depending on the situation? Are you comfortable with the ways in which you lead?
- ▶ What are the different ways adults think young people lead in your organization? What are the ways youth think young people lead?
- ▶ Who are the less obvious or less recognized youth leaders? What kinds of roles are they playing?
- ▶ What types of leadership does your organization most need? Are you in the midst of or anticipating a strategic planning process that you need help facilitating? Do you need a staff person in the office to keep things in order? Do you need people to be in charge of specific activities or events? What role could young people play in meeting your leadership needs?

troop, or religious group). First Chinese Baptist Church in San Francisco sponsors a youth camp that has a strong community leadership component. From the very beginning of their participation young people are groomed for leadership. Their first year at camp youth are considered counselors in training, the second year they are junior counselors, and the third year they become senior counselors.⁷ Adult leaders have high expectations (asset #16) for the campers and the campers have an incentive to return the following year, thus building asset #19 (involvement in a religious community).

4. Job leadership—directing the work and activities of others. For example, a youth-serving organization could take seriously asset #8 (youth as resources), and hire a young person to coordinate the schedules of volunteers.

⁷ Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, *Youth Ministry in City Churches* (Loveland, CO: Group Books, 1989).

5. Trailblazing leadership—trying new things and leading the way for others to join. For example, young people in many countries, including the United States, have been leaders in social change efforts to end racial and ethnic discrimination.

Effective leaders may play each of these roles at different times or in different contexts. In addition, there may be other ways that people lead such as through influence or by being part of a team of lead-

ers. Some people will lead in many ways, others in only one or two. Use the questions on the preceding page to reflect on the types of leadership that are needed and possible in your organization.



ASSET-BUILDING TIP: *Build asset #8 (youth as resources) by finding at least one leadership opportunity (even if it's limited) for each young person you work with.*

WORKSHEET

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN LEADERSHIP

According to educator and author Barbara A. Lewis, there are at least five types of leadership. Use this worksheet to document the different ways in which specific young people lead in your organization. You may choose to look back at your history, or use the chart as a log of what happens over the next month, quarter, or year. What does this information allow you to say about your current youth leadership? Are some young people more active than others? Is there a specific type of leadership that youth most commonly take on? Try to balance the scales of leadership between individuals and types of roles.

Leadership of the moment

Taking charge in the midst of a crisis

Name _____

Example: Led a discussion group when a staff person was late because of a car accident

Leadership by example

Living in a way that inspires others

Name _____

Example: Has openly committed to not using alcohol or other drugs

Community leadership

Serving in a formal leadership role in an organization or other group of people with a shared interest

Name _____

Example: Leads service projects with younger youth as part of becoming an Eagle Scout

Job leadership

Directing the work and activities of others

Name _____

Example: Supervises junior high students who take care of young children during events and activities

Trailblazing leadership

Trying new things and leading the way for others to join

Name _____

Example: Encouraged adult leaders in the congregation to take part in a discussion of the importance of building developmental assets

Other types of leadership

Name _____



Key #5: Recognizing Leadership

as a Rite of Passage

Adolescence seems to pose something of a dilemma in our culture. On the one hand, we expect teenagers to take on more responsibility as they mature. On the other hand, we have very few ways of honoring and celebrating their increased contributions and the changes they are going through in the process of growing up. Other than getting a driver's license there are few established, visible healthy rites of passage that serve as markers in the process of growing from being a young child to a teenager to an adult. In religious organizations, events such as Bar/Bat Mitzvah and confirmation are intended to mark transitions. In reality, they often are the beginning of the end of young people's involvement. In schools, graduations are the most significant event, but they too mark an ending rather than a transition for most young people.



IDEA TO TRY

LIFE CHANGES CEREMONY

On a regular basis (such as once a month or once a quarter), hold a special "life changes ceremony" for young people. Rotate planning and leading the ceremony among the youth involved. Before the ceremony, ask all of the participants to tell you about any changes in their lives that they would like recognized and acknowledged (for example, getting a driver's license, graduation, a birthday, travel, or the death of relative, friend, or pet). Ask the planners to develop ways of marking these changes that are appropriate for your organization. In a congregation this may include asking each person to light a candle and say a silent prayer. In a school or youth organization young people could draw or design a symbol that represents her or his life change. The group could then create a "rites of passage" banner that includes all of the symbols from the year. Whatever the group chooses to do, make sure that each person's change is treated as important and significant.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ▶ What are the formal and informal rites of passage for young people in your organization? Do any of them involve leadership?
- ▶ Do young people feel they have opportunities for leadership in your organization that signify their development and maturation? Do they have suggestions for others?

Leadership involvement is critically important to building assets (and to keeping youth engaged and involved) because it is a rite of passage—a valuable, visible way of communicating the message to young people that their contributions are important and evolving—that is recognized, appreciated, and respected by peers and adults alike. Leadership can both tap young people's potential and honor their development and growth.

School psychologist Gayle Hamlett recognizes the importance of leadership as a rite of passage and includes a leadership component in a middle and elementary school curriculum she coordinates in Denver, Colorado. The curriculum helps students explore their own development and maturation, and also how they can expand their contribution to the school community. As a group, students tackle tough issues such as violence and what they can do about it. At the end of the year they participate in a "rite of passage" ceremony that acknowledges and honors their efforts and hard work.



ASSET-BUILDING TIP: *Make increasing asset #30 (responsibility) a rite of passage.*

Instead of waiting for young people to assume more responsibility and then being impressed, ask and encourage them to take on certain roles, tasks, and commitments. Let them know that you recognize that they are growing and maturing and you want to honor that by giving them more control and power.

Whether adults help out or not, young people will find rites of passage. Some of these are positive (such as wilderness experiences), others are debatable (such as body piercing or sexual experiences), and still others can be extremely dangerous or unhealthy

(such as violence or drug use). By engaging young people in leadership in your organization, you can ensure that they experience positive markers of change and growth, both and as individuals and as part of a community.

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR SHARED POWER

In any organization that has adult leaders, truly engaging youth in leadership is really about creating partnerships between youth and adults. That means that adults and youth need to learn to share planning, decision making, facilitating, and other aspects of ensuring that your organization functions well and is working toward achieving its mission.

In most organizations this mutuality won't be easy to achieve. Many adults will express "adultist" attitudes, arguing that young people lack sufficient experience, perspective, or knowledge to be full partners in leading and that adults therefore must assume and maintain control of situations involving and affecting young people.⁸ Some young people will

want full control over activities, projects, and issues that they believe are their domain. Even when youth and adults agree that youth leadership is important, often the systems and support are not in place to make such involvement work effectively.

It will take effort from everybody to learn to cooperate and balance power. Keys #6 and 7 show you some steps to take to examine how youth leadership fits with the philosophical underpinnings of your organization. Armed with this knowledge you'll feel more confident about the importance of what you are doing and better able to stand up to people who aren't supportive. Keys #8 through 11 focus on what you can do to create an environment that encourages, supports, and motivates youth and adults to cooperate and help one another as leaders.

⁸ See Dorothy Stoneman, *Leadership Development: A Handbook from the Youth Action Program of the East Harlem Block Schools* (New York: Youth Action Program, 1988), for a fuller discussion of adultism—the assumption that adults are better than young people and are entitled to act upon young people in many ways without their consent.

Key #6: Connecting Youth Leadership to Your Organization's Mission

If asset building is already part of your organization's mission, then nurturing youth leadership will fit well within that context. However, many organizations that build assets—intentionally or unintentionally—don't necessarily use asset-building language in their mission statement or organizational goals. If your organization does not, you may want to explore the possibility of adding it.

Whether or not asset building is part of your mission, it's important to think specifically about how youth leadership ties in with and promotes your mission. Organizations vary widely in the priority they place on giving youth a voice and developing leaders for the future. For example, many congregations are concerned about maintaining their membership because so many young people are dropping out. They view youth leadership as a top priority because it gives older youth a place in the congregation and an investment in what happens to it. Most schools, on the other hand, don't have to worry about keeping the organization vital, but they *are* concerned about having young people engaged in learning (asset #22) and are committed to making and keeping the school a good place for all students, which builds asset #5 (caring school climate) and asset #24 (bonding to school).

Leadership opportunities give young people the chance to create policies, programs, activities, and procedures that they support and believe in. When students have this investment in a school, they are more likely to care about and benefit from what they do there, thus building assets #21–25, the commitment-to-learning assets. We can even extend this thinking to envision today's involved youth as parents who will have a greater likelihood of being involved in their own children's schooling (asset #6).

Understanding whether, why, and how youth leadership is consistent with your mission—or even a specific part of it—will help you figure out which

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ▶ Why does your organization care about youth leadership? In what ways is this demonstrated?
- ▶ Are there any conflicts between youth leadership and your organization's mission? If so, what can be done to resolve them?
- ▶ Do you have a mission statement in your organization that specifically addresses youth issues? If so, does it include anything about youth leadership?

opportunities are appropriate and would likely have the most success. In addition, support for new ventures is much easier to build when people see the connections to existing commitments.

If you don't have a mission statement or it does not refer to asset building or youth leadership, you may want to gather information from others to help you figure out how these concepts fit with your group's goals. A good place to start is by interviewing people in your organization, including leaders, longtime staff, and other associates such as parents and young people. You can ask them whether or not they see youth leadership as an important part of your organization. If so, why? If not, why not? How does involving youth in leadership forward your mission and goals? What is the history of youth leadership in your organization? You may also want to ask them if they know of any documents or texts related to youth leadership such as a strategic plan, religious texts, or formal statements from your organization's adult leadership. This exploration will not only help you understand how youth leadership fits, it can also spark dialogue and uncover resources that you can build on or learn from.

 **ASSET-BUILDING TIP:** *Ask a team of adults and youth to work together to gather information about your organization's mission, both historically and today. In the process, they'll gain a better understanding of your organization and build important intergenerational relationships (asset #3).*



Key #7: Getting Support from Key Stakeholders

Just as shifting to the asset-building framework requires a sharp change in thinking for some people, so does the idea of involving youth in real leadership. One way to help ensure that young people feel supported and encouraged, rather than doubted and mistrusted, is to build a core team of supporters for your efforts. We use the term “stakeholders” to refer to the people in your organization who might have something to gain or lose by having young people involved in leadership.

In congregations, stakeholders might include clergy, lay leaders, boards and committees, parents, youth, and other members. In most school settings, the stakeholders include teachers, administrators, other staff, parents, board members, and students. In many youth-serving organizations, stakeholders include directors, staff, funders, participants, parents, and volunteers. Clearly most organizations won't be able to get buy-in from every individual stakeholder, but building a team of representatives from each of the groups can go a long way toward building support throughout the organization.

Start by identifying which stakeholder groups you'd like to reach out to. Then focus on individuals



ASSET-BUILDING TIP: *Ask adults to share their feelings and concerns about youth leadership. Then talk with them about the importance of asset #14 (adult role models), and encourage them to use their skills and energy to be allies and mentors to young people who want to be more involved, rather than adversaries or competitors.*

within those groups who are likely to be supportive. Consider these questions as you build a list:

- Who are the people in the organization who already support youth leadership?
- Who are the people who likely would support it if you took some time to talk with them about assets?

Try getting buy-in from these two groups first. Then think about the people in the organization who will be especially resistant to youth leadership. Are there ways you can reach out and get them involved early on? If they feel included and listened to, they are less likely to stand in your way. Before you solicit the support of those who you think are likely to object to increased youth participation and leadership, anticipate and prepare to address some of their concerns. Emphasize the opportunity that these expanded roles for young people present for *strengthening* your community or organization.

If you've had youth involved in leadership for a long time, you may need or want to start with only a few small changes or adjustments to what you've been doing. Once you've had some successes and others have seen the positive difference that asset building and youth leadership make, you'll have a better sense of how quickly you can make other changes without upsetting longtime supporters, trying to do too much at once, or losing things that are already working well.

Similarly, if you have had little youth involvement in leadership, it's probably a good idea to start slowly and get people used to the idea. Once they see the potential and some positive results, you might get more support than you expected.



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ▶ Are you confident that engaging youth in leadership is appropriate for your organization? Can you articulate your reasons if people express concerns?
- ▶ Do you need to enlist support from others, or is engaging youth in leadership something you can do on your own?
- ▶ Do you feel supported in your efforts to build youth leadership? If not, why not? What can you do to build support?



Key #8: Engaging Families

Families play a major role in the development of leaders and in furthering your efforts to create a healthy and productive balance of power between young people and adults. If a young person has a supportive family that provides appropriate structure and boundaries, combined with many opportunities to grow and try new things, there is a good chance that he or she already has many of the qualities of a good leader. If, on the other hand, a young person is in an unhealthy family situation where assets are severely lacking, she or he will need a lot of help realizing her or his potential. In addition, families who are supportive of their young people are more likely to be volunteers and co-leaders in your organization.

The biggest task in working with families to nurture youth leadership is skill building—that is, working with both adults and youth to help them gain the tools they need to communicate effectively and strengthen their family relationships. For instance, you could offer workshops for families on intergenerational communication. Or you could encourage families to participate in a school or youth program so that parents and siblings learn about and see the types of leadership that young people are involved in. One thing that some people who work with youth find helpful is to ask parents to rotate serving as sponsors or chaperons of events. One set of parents might accompany the group on a field trip, while others might supervise a dance, and others work with young people on a service project. When possible, assign each parent a youth partner who knows as much about the event as the parent. This not only gives you more volunteers and involves them more



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ▶ What do you currently do to reach out to families? Could you do more?
- ▶ Do you see families as allies to your work? partners? competitors? irrelevant? obstacles?
- ▶ Are there youth in your organization who need extra help in dealing with their families? What can you do to support them?

fully in the lives of younger participants, it also puts them in positions where they learn that they can rely on and work with people the same age as their own children.

If there is trust and respectful communication in a family, youth can more easily take on leadership roles such as planning and preparing meals, helping with decisions about family vacations, taking care of elders, and planning family events. A family that is trusting and supportive will also be more supportive of youth in leadership roles *outside* the home.

On the other hand, young people whose parents undermine their efforts and aspirations, and who convey low estimations of their children's abilities, will be difficult to nurture as leaders. Adult allies can coach parents on how to respond to and encourage the young leader in the family—how to believe the young person “can do it” rather than promote an expectation of failure.



ASSET-BUILDING TIP: *Give families a chance to do leadership through service while building asset #9 (service to others); organize a family service project in your community or organization.*



Key #9: Helping Adults Learn the Benefits of Shared Leadership

At any time in any organization, there are people for whom change represents a threat. These may be people who have the majority of the power and authority and fear giving it up, or people who are comfortable with the status quo and dread the unknown. In many organizations where things are working well—or at least okay—people have a sense of not wanting to rock the boat by making too many adjustments. Finally, every group includes people who seem to enjoy engaging in personal or professional power struggles or who derive a sense of self-worth by obstructing others. As a result of this dynamic, it is very important to approach change (such as asking adults to give up some control to young people) with a good deal of resolve, as much consensus as possible, and the knowledge that some people are going to be difficult to get on board no matter how carefully the issue is approached or how valid the arguments for change are.

There are a number of ways to deal with this potential roadblock to youth leadership. One is to find ways to involve youth as leaders that don't need to be "endorsed" by other adults. For instance, teachers (religious or secular) can involve young people in leadership within the classroom if there is resistance among administrators or other staff. Another strategy is to identify the people who are least likely to let go of any power and deal with them early on. You may approach them as allies and try to involve them as mentors to youth leaders. Explain to them that you



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ▶ What sorts of problems do you anticipate with adults in your organization not wanting to give up control? If so, what can you do early on to deal with those problems?
- ▶ Do you have concerns about giving up some of your control? Why or why not? How does this affect your ability to convince others of the value of youth leadership?

believe it is important to nurture youth leadership because it will benefit young people as well as your organization. Ask them for suggestions of ways they think young people could contribute.

If you would rather not approach people who may not be supportive, perhaps there is a person in your organization with more authority who can support your efforts and make it clear that it is an organizational priority. Finally, you can model leadership by helping young people explore and even practice different ways of dealing cooperatively with people who won't give up control. This is something they will face throughout their lives.



ASSET-BUILDING TIP: *Don't put young people in situations that might do more harm than good. If you think certain adults in your organization might challenge youths' authority or contributions in an asset-damaging way, find other ways of engaging youth in leadership.*



Key #10: Setting Goals

Once you have at least a few supporters and you understand where your organization has been and currently is in its commitment to youth leadership, you'll want to think about where you want to go—what your goals are. This process should include young people, adults who will be sharing power with young people, and other stakeholders who may have important concerns about, insights into, or investment in shaping your objectives and desired outcomes.

So where do you start? Here are some issues you may want to consider when setting goals:

- **Are there particular assets or asset categories you want to emphasize?** The goals you set and the types of leadership roles young people take on may depend on the assets or asset categories you want to emphasize. For example, if you want to focus on the positive-identity assets (#37–40), you may set goals related to helping young people understand the power they have to make a difference in their own lives and in the community. Or maybe you want a more comprehensive asset-building approach. If so, you'll need to set goals for each of the eight categories. Another option is to focus on helping youth be leaders in asset-building efforts in your organization or the wider community. At the same time that they are building assets for others, they'll be nurturing their own assets. Involving youth in leadership has the potential to build any or all of the assets, but you'll have more success if you clearly articulate the asset-building results you are working toward.

- **What impact do you hope to have on the organization?** Effective youth leadership benefits both the individuals involved and the organization as a whole. Think about what needs youth leaders in your organization can meet.

- **Who are the young people who will participate?** This is clearly one area in which congregations, schools, and youth-serving organizations will be very



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ▶ Who should be involved in setting goals?
 - ▶ What educational, learning, or grant-driven goals need to be addressed?
 - ▶ Has your organization involved youth leaders in the past? If so, what have the goals been of those efforts?

different. But whatever type of organization you are in, your goals will need to reflect the young people who are involved. You'll want to consider their ages and levels of maturity, their skills and competencies, their interests, and their life experiences. For example, younger teens (ages 10–14) will be more likely to succeed if they are given concrete guidelines, short-term projects, and specific goals and tasks. Older teens (ages 15–18) are better able to deal with some open-endedness and ambiguity as well as longer-term commitments.

- **Do you have evaluation requirements for a funder or other stakeholder?** If so, you'll want your goals to be consistent with the kinds of information you need to include in your evaluation.

- **What kinds of leadership opportunities are possible?** Knowing what your options are can help you avoid setting up unrealistic expectations.

- **What resources are available?** Consider the amount of money and goods you can invest, whether or not transportation is needed and available, how much time you can commit, and how many adult staff or volunteers are willing to be involved.



ASSET-BUILDING TIP: *When developing your goals, build the support category of assets by first brainstorming and listing suggestions without discussion. After everyone has had a chance to share her or his ideas, look for themes and commonalities. Save discussion of individual ideas until the end of the session.*



Key #11: Assessing Current Opportunities and Looking for New Ones

Involving youth as leaders in an organization doesn't necessarily mean developing a whole new youth leadership program. One way to assess the kinds of leadership that young people currently take on in your organization is to keep track of them. You can use the chart on page 34 to review what has happened in the past, or as a log for the next day, week, month, or longer. If you aren't sure of all of the ways young people lead, give copies of this form to others to fill out. Or, use this assessment as a leadership opportunity for youth and ask them to gather information about all of the ways that their peers lead.

In addition to the many leadership opportunities that are probably available within the normal activities of your organization, some organizations also offer formal leadership development opportunities. These can include occasional or regular short work-



ASSET-BUILDING TIP: *Find a youth leadership training program through your school system, denomination, or community. If you don't know where to start, contact your local YMCA or YWCA, Boys and Girls Club, Jewish Community Center, Scouts, or other youth-serving agency. Once you've located a program, find out details such as time commitment, cost, and follow-up activities. Then ask for youth volunteers from your organization to attend the program. If there is a cost involved, look for scholarship money so that no young people are excluded. Finally, build the empowerment assets by asking the young people who participate to commit to using what they learn to help start a leadership training program in your own organization.*

shops, daylong events, and leadership-focused camps that extend for a week or more. One strategy for beginning a leadership program is to seek out and learn from other organizations in your community that already focus on youth leadership. Here are some things to keep in mind as you gather information and make plans:

- **Make asset building the foundation of your efforts.** Inform all adults involved with the program about the importance and interrelatedness of the assets and their connection to youth leadership.
- **Youth should be involved** in planning and facilitating the program.
- **The program should be respectful and supportive of all youth.** Leadership development should never be a contest. There can be plenty of leadership roles—formal or informal—for each young person who has the competencies and interests needed to be a leader.
- **Leadership training should not concentrate exclusively on particular strengths or skills** (such as public speaking). Also focus on nurturing competent, compassionate, well-rounded leaders.
- **It is best if a youth leadership program is open to all young people.** If you decide to limit it, participation



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ▶ What opportunities for youth to lead are currently available in your organization?
 - ▶ Are there enough opportunities for all young people to be involved in some way?
 - ▶ Are there leadership roles that adults fill that could be shared with or turned over to young people?
 - ▶ Who are the young people who could help you assess your organization's current leadership opportunities through surveys, interviews, an inventory of what is available, or some other process? How can you ensure their participation in this process?
 - ▶ Are you taking full advantage of the leadership opportunities in your organization or community? If not, what barriers are getting in your way? How can you deal with those barriers?



A HANDS-ON LESSON IN CIVICS PROVIDES LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Youth in Mankato, Minnesota, take a hands-on approach to understanding local government and developing leadership skills through Youth in City Government, a program sponsored by the local YMCA that is part of the curriculum in two schools. Cooperation between the schools, the Y, and the local city government results in a 12-week program in which young people study issues of concern in their community. At the end of the course, they hold a mock city council meeting where they take leadership in addressing those issues.

Throughout the activity young people get to “try on” different roles, such as decision maker, city staff personnel, citizen-participant, and member of the council. To prepare, they meet with and interview their real-life counterparts and tour the city to see for themselves the places and people affected by the council’s governance.

The young people get a real taste of what being an elected official in Mankato is like, says Judy Arzdorf, program director for the Y. “The city allows us to use [the council] chambers to hold meetings and the city staff come in and explain how it all works. [The young people] get excited to see that the city staff actually care about what [the youth] are doing,” she says.

Arzdorf says that the program has at least two major benefits: it encourages youth to think about what it takes to be a city leader, and it builds a sense of pride in the community. “The YMCA has a real commitment to values. Citizenship is a very important one,” she says. “We decided that we could promote better citizenship by teaching youth the political process and how to go about changing their lives for the better.”

should be based on age or level of involvement in the organization, not on which young people seem best suited to the program.

■ **Families can and should be key supporters** of young people, both during the program (as volunteers) and

after the program as youth practice what they have learned. If possible, include an educational component for families that helps them understand their role in helping their children become leaders.

PUTTING IDEAS INTO ACTION

This final section focuses on the practical side of shared power—helping adults and youth work together to keep your organization strong, dynamic, and running smoothly. Scheduling and running meetings, recruiting volunteers, building teams, supporting leaders, and other activities will all be different when young people and adults function as

partners. We've included a number of topics that you may need to address. Key #12 explores how to recruit young people to be involved. Keys #13 through 15 focus on forming positive working relationships. And keys #16 through 18 give ideas for how to honor, celebrate, and build on and expand young people's contributions in your organization.



Key #12: Recruiting

Organizations that try to engage youth as leaders commonly lament, “Oh, we don’t have many young people who would be interested in that sort of thing”; or, “Young people today are already so busy, they don’t have the time to commit to something else.” These kinds of responses (or excuses) not only point out a narrow vision of leadership, they also highlight some of the challenges faced in recruiting youth to be leaders: many young people *are* very busy and not all youth *are* suited for all leadership positions.

So how do you test these assumptions, overcome obstacles to greater youth involvement, and make recruitment positive and effective? It will work differently in different organizations, but here are five factors to keep in mind:

1. Ask youth for their help. Often, people who volunteer were *asked* to participate. Instead of assuming that young people cannot or will not take on leadership roles, ask them. And don’t be afraid to ask more than once. Some young people may resist because they doubt their ability to lead. Others may simply be too busy, too distracted, or too unfamiliar with the job or role to respond the first time they are asked.

2. Avoid tokenism. Young people don’t want to be asked to participate just because adults need or want them to. Youth leaders must have real roles that are important and valuable to an organization.

3. Think outside the box. This approach applies to both leadership opportunities and opinions about who among your young people can lead and who cannot. Be expansive in your ideas about the leadership roles youth could take on in your organization. Similarly, look for ways to engage young people who aren’t usually leaders.

4. Match gifts and passions with needs and opportunities. Don’t just fill slots, find people who are really suited to the role that is needed. If there is a leader-

ship role that doesn’t fit anyone, perhaps it is not well defined or is not truly needed in your organization right now.

5. Take every opportunity to affirm that young people are needed and capable. Many of the young people you work with may be getting messages at home, in the community, and elsewhere that they are not competent or able to be leaders. When young people are regularly put down, criticized, and devalued, they stop believing in themselves. You can’t change what happens in the rest of their lives, but you can be a consistent source of encouragement and high expectations.

All young people have the potential to lead and make a contribution. Focusing on finding out what each young person has to offer and personalizing your recruitment efforts is a much more effective

IDEA TO TRY



RECRUITING YOUTH TO LEAD: STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

- 1.** Build relationships one by one. Take time to talk individually with young people about their gifts, interests, talents, skills, passions, and priorities. Often you’ll find (sometimes surprising) links between the leadership needs of the organization and the skills, abilities, and dreams of a young person.
- 2.** Recruit young people for leadership roles in which they can be successful. Match the tasks and responsibilities with their abilities and character. Give them opportunities to try out lower-risk, short-term leadership experiences that can help prepare them for more significant contributions in the future.
- 3.** Create a book or database with information about young people’s talents and interests (you could recruit a team of youth to put the information on a computer database). Then match talents and interests with opportunities and needs in your organization.
- 4.** Recognize key rites of passage as transition times when youth may be open to new leadership roles and challenges.


QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ▶ What are some unique ways in which youth have contributed leadership to your organization in the past?
- ▶ What needs do you have for leadership in your organization that could be filled by young people? What can you do to make young people aware of and interested in those opportunities?
- ▶ Which young people in your organization have skills or abilities that you could help them use and strengthen in a leadership situation?
- ▶ Who are the young people who seem least likely to be leaders? How can you find out more about skills or interests they have that might make them effective leaders or that you might ask them to use on behalf of the group? In what ways can you help young people prepare for types of participation that might be conducive to assuming leadership roles?

approach than launching a mass recruiting campaign or trying to find the “best” youth leader. The story that follows is an example of what can happen when organizational needs are matched with individual strengths.

Martin is a young person who was never a leader in the stereotypical sense of being outspoken or otherwise particularly visible. He was, however, very talented with technology. Someone in his congregation knew this and asked him to assist with moni-

toring the sound and light systems during worship services. Martin's skills in this area grew until he not only had full responsibility for monitoring the systems, he provided maintenance and troubleshooting as well. The entire congregation learned to depend on him for this aspect of congregational life. Martin became a leader through steady, quiet work in an essential area that few others in the congregation understood. That would not have happened if the people around him hadn't recognized and tapped into his unique interests and expertise.

So, when thinking about recruitment strategies, broaden your efforts to find out about the unique qualities and capabilities different people bring, including artistic ability, speaking skills, compassion for others, math skills, friendliness, consistent participation in organizational events, attention to detail, creativity, commitment to serving and caring for others, interest in current events, street smarts, writing skills, and listening skills. Then look for personalized ways to entice young people to try out lower-risk, short-term leadership experiences that can help prepare them for more significant opportunities in the future.



ASSET-BUILDING TIP: *Post leadership opportunities in your organization's newsletter, on a bulletin board, on a Web site, or in some other place where many young people will see them. Be clear that the opportunities are open and perhaps even especially suited to young people.*

Key #13: Helping Adults and Youth Work Together

The youth coordinator at a family service agency had good intentions. She wanted young people to be actively involved in the organization. She had a number of youth who volunteered or participated in pro-



DEALING WITH ADULTS WHO AREN'T POSITIVE ROLE MODELS

It isn't safe to assume that all relationships between youth and adults will be asset-building ones. In the worst-case scenarios there are adults who prey on and victimize young people. But that's only the extreme end of the spectrum; there are also many adults who are self-centered or who make poor decisions that negatively affect themselves or others. Sometimes it's possible to work with adults to help them become better role models. In other cases, adults will continue to be a negative influence, no matter how hard you try. If you are in a position of authority in your organization you may be able to control which adults interact with young people. However, even if you can control whom young people interact with within your organization, you won't have that kind of power out in the world. The best thing you can do is help young people make good choices about the friendships and alliances they make, no matter what their ages. Here are some suggestions:

- ◆ Talk with young people about the assets and the characteristics of asset builders. What are they like? How do they treat people? What are their priorities? Encourage youth to be asset builders for others and to form relationships with people who are asset builders for them.
- ◆ Focus on respect for self and others. Encourage young people to make mutual respect the foundation of their friendships. Any relationship that isn't based on respect isn't worth having.
- ◆ Let young people know they can always come to you if they have concerns about a relationship with another young person or an adult. Tell them that anything that makes them feel uncomfortable should be considered a warning signal that something is wrong.

grams, but she felt they should have more of a voice in planning and decision making. So she convinced the staff and board to allow several youth to participate in their meetings.

What seemed like a great idea turned out to be a disaster. Not only were the young people bored during the meetings, they were also either ignored or patronized. Their ideas were dismissed, and their questions went unanswered. They quickly figured out that the adults didn't really want them around.

But was that the real reason things went wrong? Or did the adults simply not know how to include and interact with the young people? Chances are good that the adults would have enjoyed and valued the young people's input and leadership if they'd known how to communicate with and respond to them. This example highlights the importance of educating and training adults to feel comfortable and natural when working alongside youth leaders. Before your first intergenerational meeting, pave the way by asking involved adults to consider the following questions and perspectives:

- **How do you behave toward young people in meetings?** (Youth should be treated the same way adults like to be treated: respectfully, openly, honestly, and attentively.)
- **How should adults respond when a young person has an idea they disagree with?** What are the ground rules for productive, respectful interactions that we all should follow? Point out that the goal is to establish an environment conducive to open discussion and reciprocity. (Again, youth and adults should be treated alike. When disagreeing with someone, you should be respectful and stay focused on the issue or idea and not the person.)
- **How can you include young people, since they won't really understand everything that is going on?** (Adults don't really understand everything either. The fresh perspectives and questions that youth bring can shed a whole new light on things.)
- **What should you do when youth leaders let you down?** (What do you do when adults let you down?)

**QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

- ▶ How do adults and youth in your organization already work together?
 - ▶ Are you comfortable working with groups of adults and youth together? Is that something you need to do in your organization? If it is something you need to do but are not comfortable with, what can you do to increase your confidence in this area?
 - ▶ Are there groups of adults or youth who could benefit from information on how to work better with other generations? Who could provide that information?

That happens, too. See the sidebar on page 39 for more on this topic.)

Young people also need to know what's appropriate and acceptable when dealing with adults. Even though they live in a world filled with adults, the socializing systems with which youth have the most contact are predominately youth based: schools, youth-serving organizations, sports teams, and the like. To help youth work effectively with adults, talk with them about these issues:

- **How do you treat adults?** Point out that even if adults aren't respectful of youth, youth can rise above that and be role models for how to treat people from different generations.
- **What about adults who won't listen to your opinions?** Role-play situations in which young people have to stand up for themselves to be heard. Help them identify and talk about the things adults do that shut them down (such as ignore their comments, talk about them as if they weren't there, or tell them that they won't understand something without giving them a chance). Let them know that they have the right to peacefully and respectfully confront adults who do these things.
- **How do you respond when you disagree with an adult?** Emphasize that it is okay to disagree and that there is a difference between telling people you dis-

agree with them and telling people they are wrong or stupid. Give young people opportunities to practice explaining why they disagree with an idea or issue without attacking the person who expressed it.

- **How do you deal with adults who are out of touch with today's young people?** The reality is that many adults just don't know what things are like for today's youth. That doesn't make them bad people. Help young people think about their own day-to-day lives and how they are different from what adults probably experience. Encourage them to think of ways to help adults understand how things are for young people today.

- **What do you do when adults let you down?** You tell them why you're disappointed, but you don't blame them, give up on them, or try to hurt or shame them. Young people need to know that adults don't always get things right and sometimes they even screw things up.



ASSET-BUILDING TIP: *One way to help youth and adults work together is to help them form personal alliances. To get youth and adults talking and getting to know one another, try this activity: Ask each person in your organization (or a subgroup who interact on a regular basis) to write a short description of her- or himself on a sheet of paper or note card, youth (however you define it) on one color, adults on another color. Put all of the descriptions in a hat or bowl and ask each youth to draw one description of an adult and each adult to draw one description of a youth. If you don't have an even match of youth and adults, ask some people to choose more than one description and others to work in teams. Give them several days, a week, or a month to match the description they drew with the person who wrote it. They'll have to do this by asking a lot of questions and talking with a lot of different people. At the end of the period of time hold a party or celebration where each person introduces her or his "partner" to the group.*

WORKSHEET

WHAT MAKES ME A LEADER?

People of all ages have important and unique leadership qualities to contribute to their families, neighborhoods, organizations, and communities. The words below are characteristics that can make people good leaders. Circle the words that you think describe you (circle as many words as you want). Then, if possible, find a partner who is at least 10 years older or younger than you. Talk with your partner about the words you each circled and discuss the questions below.

Imaginative Moral **Entrepreneurial**
Energizing Honest **SERIOUS**
PROUD Loyal *feisty* *Calming*
 Intelligent **Outgoing**
 Responsible Young at heart **Friendly**
 HUMBLE **Experienced** Shy **Critical**
Free spirited **DIRECT** *Considerate*
Decisive *Naive* **PERSISTENT** outrageous
Funky *Caring* **ACTIVE** Creative
Musical Independent *Curious* **Determined**
Responsive **Hardworking** *Dependable*
Entertaining **GOAL ORIENTED** Patient

After you've circled the words that describe you, talk about these questions with your partner:

- ▶ Were you surprised by any of the words on this list of leadership qualities? Which ones?
- ▶ Are there words that should be added to this list? What are they?
- ▶ Do adults and youth generally have different leadership qualities, or are differences personal rather than based on age?
- ▶ Do all of the characteristics you circled seem like leadership qualities? Why or why not?
- ▶ Do you think you have what it takes to be a good leader? Why or why not? If not, what can you do to strengthen your leadership abilities? Do you want to strengthen them? Why or why not?
- ▶ Are there qualities that you think your partner has that he or she didn't circle?
- ▶ Now that you know these things about each other, are there some things you can do to make the most of each person's leadership qualities?



Key #14: Leading Successful Intergenerational Meetings

What would you think if you were invited to a meeting where everyone else had more information than you about the topic, you were asked to represent all of the people in your community who are the same age as you, and the meeting was scheduled at a time when you had a regular commitment to something else?

Sound frustrating? Unfortunately, this kind of thing (and worse) frequently happens when young people are included as “representatives” on committees, boards, coalitions, or teams. But it doesn't have to be like this. Part of asset building is making sure that youth have opportunities to participate in leadership and decision making, and that expectations of them are reasonable and appropriate. Adults also need to know what is appropriate and helpful when working alongside young people. If you are serious about including youth in leadership, there are steps you can take to ensure that the results are productive and respectful of all people. If, for example, youth leadership includes meetings where adults and youth must work together, keep these considerations in mind:⁹

- **Be creative and sensitive about meeting times and places.** For example, if evenings interfere with studying, family time, or after-school activities, meet on a weekend morning and serve breakfast. Ask each member to bring something to share. Identify group members who can offer rides to others who need them. If weekends are bad for some, and all of the young people are in or can get to a certain school during the day, meet over lunch.
- **Learn about the needs of all participants.** If you don't know what accommodations participants need, ask them. Some examples of what might be

⁹ Adapted from Kay Hong, “Tips for Leading Successful Meetings with Adults and Youth,” *Assets: The Magazine of Ideas for Healthy Communities and Healthy Youth* (Autumn 1997).



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ▶ What meetings currently held in your organization include youth and adults? Are those meetings productive? fun? respectful of all? Why do you think that is? If you answered no to any of these, how could things be improved?
- ▶ How “youth friendly” are all meetings in your organization? Are youth always welcome? Would they feel comfortable attending? Would adults feel comfortable with youth present?

helpful include child care, the option for teleconferencing, and meeting notes that are sent to all.

- **Encourage all participants to keep track of meeting dates and times using a calendar or planner.** However, recognize that many young people don't carry calendars and consider asking adults to do reminder phone calls a day or two before each meeting.
- **Start off with an ice breaker, game, or other fun activity** that helps participants make the transition from other activities to the meeting.
- **If adults don't know what young people need or want, encourage adults to ask** and then ask again after a meeting or two.
- **If young people don't know what adults need or want, encourage young people to ask** and then ask again after a meeting or two.
- **Serve snacks!**
- **Address language issues early on.** Will you all go by first names? Is the term “kids” offensive to some participants? What about statements like, “You're too young/old to understand”?
- **Be aware of and confront your biases.** Avoid stereotyping by age, appearance, clothing style, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or other characteristics.
- **Give each participant—youth and adult—a chance to talk** and always give the speaker your full attention.

■ **Talk with each other seriously** and be ready to redirect the conversation if one generation starts to talk too much, interrupt or ignore others, or be critical or scolding.

■ **If youth are hesitant to speak up or tend to respond with “I don’t know” to questions they probably have an answer for, help them identify the reasons for their reticence** (e.g., fear of put-downs, difficulty telling when people are done talking). Without being patronizing, be encouraging and attentive when young people do speak up.

■ **Make sure to bring new people of all ages up to speed.** Review the group’s goals and provide pre-meeting training or orientation for newcomers. Include basic information such as meeting structure, discussion ground rules, past activities, and current agendas.

■ **Be aware of the developmental needs of young people and the different learning styles of all group members.** This may mean adding more experiential elements to your work, augmenting written and verbal communications with visual aids, and breaking into small groups.

■ **As a group, periodically evaluate opportunities for all participants.** For example, are youth being given only insignificant or peripheral tasks? Are different people getting to act as meeting “chair”?

■ **Be clear about each participant’s role and level of authority,** the time and number of meetings, and the expected duration of the commitment.

■ **Evaluate your meetings on a regular basis.** You can use the Meeting Reaction form on page 44. Sometimes people are more honest when responding to a written survey and will give you information that they might not otherwise share.



ASSET-BUILDING TIP: *Hold a meeting about meetings (!) and focus on asset #29 (honesty). Encourage youth and adults to talk openly and seriously about which meetings in your organization should be intergenerational, what would make those meetings work, what they think might be hard about them, and what they’re afraid of. Make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to voice opinions and ideas.*

WORKSHEET



MEETING REACTION

Thank you for participating in this meeting! To help us plan for the future, we'd like to know what you thought about the work we did together today. Please circle the number that most closely describes how you felt by the end of this meeting.

During this meeting today, I felt

a. Comfortable	1	2	3	4	5	Uncomfortable
b. Respected	1	2	3	4	5	Disrespected
c. Involved	1	2	3	4	5	Uninvolved
d. Informed	1	2	3	4	5	Uninformed
e. Satisfied	1	2	3	4	5	Dissatisfied
f. Interested	1	2	3	4	5	Bored

Comments or suggestions for how to improve future meetings:

Date:

Name (optional):

Key #15: Building Trust Between Youth and Adults

When you ask American adults what they think about teenagers, the first words out of their mouths are often negative, or at least not very positive. In fact, a recent report from Public Agenda based on research on adult perceptions of young people found that 67 percent said that negative words such as “rude,” “irresponsible,” and “wild” are the first to come to mind when they think of teens.¹⁰ So it’s not surprising, then, that many adults don’t trust youth enough to believe that they can be good leaders.

So what can you do to help convince skeptics of the trustworthiness of young people? A first step is

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ▶ Are there problems with trust between youth and adults in your organization? Why or why not?
- ▶ If there are problems, what steps are being taken to address them? What else can be done?
- ▶ Are there things that have happened in your organization’s past that have helped or hurt trust between youth and adults? What can be done to highlight those things that have helped and deal with and move past those that have hurt?

to point out to adults all of the ways in which young people already contribute to your organization. However, people who are resistant to the idea won’t necessarily want to sit down and chat with you about it. You may have to think up some creative ways to spread the word about youth leaders. One idea is to use the “Find the Youth Leaders” exercise on this page as a model for creating a puzzle for your organization. List all of the ways in which young people are involved as leaders in your organization. Next to

IDEA TO TRY

FIND THE YOUTH LEADERS: SAMPLE PUZZLE

Listed in the first column below are ways that young people are leaders in our organization. In the second column are the scrambled names of young people who are involved in these activities. How many of the names can you unscramble? How many of these young people do you know? Are there other ways young people are leaders in our organization?

Type of Youth Leadership	Young Person
1. Participates in service-learning through our organization	ogfef akperr
2. Serves on an organizational council or board	necfars ismckhe
3. Helps organize fundraisers to fight local hunger	harsa ebnowr
4. Volunteers to mentor younger children	jeo mdau

Answers: Geoff Parker, Frances Mischke, Sarah Browne, Joe Dumas

the leadership role described, scramble the name of a young person who is involved in that activity. Be sure to include all young people; leaving out just a few could lead to hurt feelings or to a sense among others that those young people aren’t doing their share.

Using this exercise with young people and adults:

1. Gets young people thinking about all of the ways they and their peers contribute to the organization;
2. May inspire young people to get more involved;
3. Affirms for everyone that young people are vital to, and not just served by, the organization;
4. Increases the likelihood that adults will get to know who young people are and what they do for your organization—an important first step in asset

¹⁰ Public Agenda, *Kids These Days* (New York: Public Agenda, 1997).


IDEA TO TRY
TRUST WAVE

1. Select one person to be a "runner." The rest of the group are "spotters."
2. Divide the spotters equally into two smaller groups and form two straight lines facing one another.
3. Ask people to arrange themselves to be parallel with the people next to them and far enough apart from the line they are facing so that when their arms are fully extended straight out at shoulder height, their hands reach approximately to the wrists of the people in the other line.
4. Ask the runner to start ten yards or so from the group and call out "Ready, Spotters?" The spotters grab the hands of the person directly across from them and respond, "Ready for run." The runner then proceeds to walk, jog, or run between the two lines of people.
5. As the runner moves through the line, the spotters make a wave by raising their arms just before the runner reaches them and then lowering them as soon as the runner has gone by.
6. Ask runners to maintain the same speed throughout their run. Slowing down is not a problem, but speeding up is (spotters might not have enough time to react).
7. As each runner completes the run, he or she replaces one of the spotters until everyone in both lines has had a chance to run.

It is extremely important that no one be forced to run if they don't want to or can't—for any reason. Trust cannot be forced, and trying to make someone do something he or she doesn't want to do can be very damaging to trust.

In addition, it is critical that the spotting lines understand that they need to be extremely careful and attentive or the runner will get smacked in the face or head. If anyone is goofing off or isn't careful, the activity should be ended or that person removed from the line. If you have concerns about the trustworthiness of the spotters, point out that they too will need to run through the line at some point and will need to rely on the others to keep them from getting hurt.

After you've completed the activity you can have a discussion about trust. Here are some suggested questions:

- ▶ What was this experience like for you? Did you enjoy it? Were there things about it that you disliked?
- ▶ Were you comfortable being a spotter? Why or why not?
- ▶ What were you feeling as you began your run? as you were in the middle of it? when you were done?
- ▶ Did you trust the spotters? Why or why not?
- ▶ Did you trust young people as spotters more? adults more? Why?
- ▶ Do adults and youth in this organization usually trust one another? Why or why not?
- ▶ What can we do to increase the levels of trust between youth and adults?
- ▶ Are there people in the organization who act as spotters for others in ways other than what we did in the Trust Wave? Please explain.

building and trust building. (Note: You could also modify this activity to include names of youth and adult leaders.)

Another way to work on building trust if you have a group of adults and youth together is to do a Trust Wave. A description of this exercise is above.

Building trust can take a long time, but it begins with small steps. As adults discover through personal interactions and experiences that youth can be trustworthy, they'll be more likely to accept them as

leaders. And as youth learn to trust adults, they'll want to be more involved in and supportive of what they do.



ASSET-BUILDING TIP: *Increase trust by building asset #30 (responsibility).*

Ask a group of youth and adults to create a code of conduct that holds people of all ages accountable for their own behavior. Once the code is created, ask everyone in the organization to pledge to abide by it.

Key #16: Supporting Young People in Leadership Roles

One of the most important things to remember when it comes to nurturing effective leaders is not to set them up to fail. Success will encourage further involvement on the part of current leaders and show other young people in the organization that leadership is a positive, rewarding venture. One pastor in Chicago understood this, so when he wanted youth to get involved in leadership (included preaching) he had a plan. The congregation's adult members resisted and were upset because they thought only the pastor should preach, but he stuck with his convictions. He also spent a lot of time helping young people prepare for their task. He and others helped the youth write their sermons, practice, get feedback, and refine their work. The result was that when young people preached they were very well prepared and the congregation got a sermon that lived up to their standards.¹¹

The kinds of support youth leaders need depend on the people and organization involved, but here are some general guidelines:

- **Schedule regular (weekly, biweekly, or monthly) check-in times** with all young people in formal leadership roles. Ask them how things are going, what projects or tasks they're working on, whether they need or want anything from you, and so on. If they ask for help, provide it yourself as soon as possible or find someone who can.
- **Make it a point to talk regularly with youth** whom you know are leaders in informal ways in your organization. Ask them the same things you ask young people in formal roles.
- **Schedule "office hours" during a time when young people are likely to be able to drop by and see you.** Let all youth know that your door is open if they want

¹¹ William R. Myers, *Black and White Styles of Youth Ministry: Two Congregations in America* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1991), cited in Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, *Building Assets in Congregations: A Practical Guide for Helping Youth Grow Up Healthy* (Minneapolis: Search Institute, 1998).



YOUTH LEADERS IN MICHIGAN HAVE THE LAW ON THEIR SIDE

Youth leaders in Michigan have an uncommon type of support for the work they do: a law. Public Act 444 makes it legal for young people ages 16 and up to serve on boards of nonprofit organizations in Michigan. What's the big deal about that? The big deal is that young people now have the right to be *voting* members on boards and committees that make decisions that have an impact on their families, schools, organizations, and neighborhoods. In the past, child labor laws and other restrictions meant youth participation had to be limited to informal advisory status.

Young people have been very involved in and supportive of the development of the bill that eventually became the law. "The youth said to us, 'You ask us to serve on boards, but we don't have the power to vote,'" says Rob Collier, vice president of the Council of Michigan Foundations and member of the Michigan Community Foundations' Youth Project (MCFYP).

Erin Trahan is manager of youth outreach for the Michigan Nonprofit Association, another organizational member of MCFYP. She says the law not only lets young people share power, it also raises awareness in the community of the important contributions young people can make. "The bill is a way to popularize the idea of making a space for young people on advisory boards and to make people think about youth as resources to the community," she says.

someone to talk to. If you don't work in an area where they can easily find you, leave a pager or telephone number where they can reach you.

- **Pair youth leaders with adult mentors** who share similar interests or duties.
- **Offer workshops or guided discussions on issues related to leadership** such as decision making, honesty, relationship skills, and communication. Hold them at times when young people are likely to be


QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ▶ What kinds of support do you need in your job or volunteer work? What does that tell you about what youth leaders need from you?
- ▶ Who are the other adults and youth in your organization who can offer support to youth leaders? What can you do to get them involved?
- ▶ Have there been times when you have let youth leaders down? Looking back on those situations, what do you wish you had done differently?

able to attend. Provide snacks, a comfortable environment, and interactive learning activities. Encourage participants to address topics related to real situations in their own lives.

Supporting a young person in a leadership role also means being honest and constructive when he or she lets you down, either in terms of behavior or in terms of the work that needs to be done. Your options in these situations include removing her or him from the role or position (this may be impossible if the role is informal); telling her or him how disappointed you and others are; finding someone else to take over; or ignoring the situation and acting like it never happened. All of these possibilities are very deficit focused. They emphasize what went wrong and punishing the young person rather than working to fix the situation. An asset-building approach, on the other hand, turns problems into learning opportunities for everyone involved.

First, talk about what happened and why, and how the situation can be salvaged. One of the key

skills of a good leader is knowing when you've made a mistake, being honest about it, and asking for help in fixing it. By encouraging young people to reflect on and be honest about their shortcomings, you help them begin to develop this important competency. You'll also probably find that young people don't usually let others down because they don't care or just don't want to work at success. Most youth want to do things well. But, like adults, they aren't always successful the first time they try something. Most will appreciate the opportunity to make the most of the situation and at the same time rescue their self-esteem.

After you've taken care of the situation, *examine where you may have let the young person down*. Did he or she not have enough training for the task or position? Were the expectations unreasonable? Were there things you should have done to help, but didn't? We are not suggesting that you dwell on your own failures and insecurities, but rather that you use these occurrences as opportunities to improve your own leadership and the support you offer to young people. By identifying areas where you could have done more, you improve the odds that you'll be better able to support youth leaders in the future. All leaders of all ages need the support of the people around them, especially people who have more experience.



ASSET-BUILDING TIP: *Every time you feel a youth leader has let you down, help preserve her or his self-esteem (asset #38) by first asking, "What could you have done differently?" and then asking, "What could I have done differently to help you?"*



Key #17: Encouraging Youth to Be Leaders beyond Your Organization

When people think about engaging youth in leadership, their first tendency is usually to focus exclusively on leadership within their own particular group or organization. However, young people can also be ambassadors to other organizations in the wider community (the sidebar on this page shows how some communities are more broadly engaging youth leaders). Leadership beyond the opportunities in your organization allows young people not only to practice skills but also to realize that much of what they learn and do in your organization applies to other facets of their lives as well. Other organizations with an emphasis on youth leadership can be allies and partners in your efforts. Some of the ways you can make this happen include:

- Finding out how your young people can get involved in their programming;
- Offering financial support to their program or seeking support for yours;
- Encouraging adults from your organization to volunteer in theirs;
- Jointly sponsoring workshops, events, and projects that nurture leadership;
- Sharing with one another your knowledge and experience regarding youth leadership; and
- Offering your organization's facilities for special events or meetings.

So instead of feeling frustrated that youth are too busy with their commitments to other types of organizations, ask yourself these questions: How do we support and encourage young people to express their gifts and talents wherever leadership opportunities are available? How do we prepare young peo-



MAKING YOUTH LEADERSHIP A CRITICAL PART OF HEALTHY COMMUNITIES • HEALTHY YOUTH INITIATIVES

One way to support young people's leadership outside of your organization is to encourage them to get involved in initiatives or projects specifically designed to strengthen and improve their communities. Nationally there are more than 400 Healthy Communities • Healthy Youth (HCHY) initiatives focused on creating communities that nurture assets in all young people.

In his book *All Kids Are Our Kids*, Search Institute president Peter Benson writes about these efforts: "One key, but often overlooked, constituency [in leadership] is young people themselves. However, even though they have much to offer as partners in the community-building process, strong social realities and norms interfere with involving them as equals. Perhaps the greatest challenge in engaging youth in the process is the uneven power between adults and youth in our culture." Most initiatives enthusiastically support the idea of youth involvement, but many are not sure of how to go about balancing the power.

A good example of a shared power initiative can be found in Hampton, Virginia. Since 1991, young people have had an influential role in that community in planning and decision making, both at the grassroots and executive levels. Their involvement has ranged from designing the city's teen center to serving as city planners and holding seats on several city boards and commissions. Other examples of youth/adult HCHY partnerships include the following:

- ◆ In a number of communities in Colorado, young people speak to various groups and organizations about the importance of the 40 developmental assets.
- ◆ In St. Louis Park, Minnesota, youth in grades 6–12 serve on the vision team.
- ◆ The Cape May Coalition in Cape Elizabeth, Maine, includes teen facilitators on its vision team.
- ◆ In River Falls, Wisconsin, a youth board advises the initiative's planning committee and coordinates asset-building activities for other young people in the community.

**QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER**

- ▶ In what ways are young people already serving as leaders in their neighborhoods, schools, and communities? What can you do to celebrate, affirm, and support that involvement?
- ▶ What barriers get in the way of youth leadership in the wider community? Adult attitudes or policies? Transportation? Time of meetings and events? Can you or your organization help address some of these issues?

ple to see their leadership in the world as an important part of their identity?

Here are some suggestions for helping you make the most of young people's opportunities outside of your organization:

- Ask young people to think of all the different places they already have leadership roles. Then together brainstorm ways in which your organization can support and affirm these other involvements.
- If you address community and social issues as part

of your work with young people, include discussions of ways young people can address these issues.

- If your community has a youth commission or youth initiative, encourage youth from your organization to get involved. Help them find out whom to contact for information.
- Talk with young people about what is happening in their neighborhoods. Do people talk with each other? Are children and youth safe? Help them think of simple strategies for improving neighborhood life. Encourage them also to check with neighborhood organizations or block club leaders for support and resources, and for suggestions about how to get involved.

**ASSET-BUILDING TIP:** *Build asset #3*

(other adult relationships) by finding ways for young people to "shadow" adult leaders in the community in their jobs or volunteer work. Develop a list of discussion questions for the adults and youth to use to talk about what it means to be a community leader.

Key #18: Affirming and Honoring Youth Who Lead

Part of the fun of engaging youth as leaders in any setting is having the opportunity to recognize and celebrate their contributions. This affirming and honoring should happen both informally, through one-on-one conversations and interactions with youth leaders, and formally, during organization- and community-wide events and gatherings. Here are some ways in which you can show young people how much you value and appreciate their participation:

- **Create certificates of appreciation for all youth leaders.** Think expansively when deciding whom to include.
- **Designate one day a special youth leadership appreciation day.** Hold an assembly or other gathering that includes a short presentation about the importance of youth leaders. At some point ask all youth leaders to stand and be applauded by the group.
- **Host a special youth leadership reception** at which all youth leaders are available to be thanked in person by their peers, younger children, and adults who are affected by their leadership. Be sure to stress with others the importance of attending this event.
- **Regularly thank and praise youth leaders** for their time and effort—let them know that their work makes a positive difference.

Another unique way to recognize the important work of youth leaders is by honoring them *before* they embark on their leadership work. One congregation, Mayflower Church in Minneapolis, does this by holding commission rituals prior to major service projects. Every summer for the past 11 years, a group of youth and adults from the church has gone to a different region of the country to build a home for a family. They work hard all week—9- to 10-hour



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- ▶ In what ways does your organization currently honor and celebrate youth leaders? What do you personally do?
- ▶ Have there been times in your own life when you've felt particularly honored or recognized as being special? What made you feel this way? What could you do to help the youth you work with feel this way?
- ▶ How can you educate others about the importance of celebrating and honoring youth leaders?

days—to provide affordable housing in areas where it is severely lacking. The work they do wouldn't be possible without the yearlong commitment and efforts of members of the congregation. Through donations and support for fund-raisers the entire congregation ensures that the group has enough money to buy the supplies needed to build the house. The trip represents Mayflower's single largest act of service each year. It's a lot to invest in an undertaking that is led primarily by young people. Before the group sets off on its journey, the congregation gathers to call them to action and send with them their hopes and prayers for a safe and productive trip. The young people then begin their work with the knowledge that they are supported and believed in.



ASSET-BUILDING TIP: *Encourage asset #25 (reading for pleasure) by presenting a youth leader with a book that you think he or she might really appreciate and enjoy. Inside the cover write a message of thanks for her or his leadership contributions.*

CONCLUSION

We hope that this resource has challenged you to think about youth leadership in new ways, to try different approaches to shared power, and to make positive changes in your organization.

Truly engaging young people as partners—whether you are focused on education, spirituality, youth development, or all of these—will add an exciting, dynamic, and enriching dimension to your work. You will find that young people who have real power and influence will become more invested in the success of your organization and in their own positive growth and maturation.

Changing norms is never easy, and in this culture youth leadership is not the norm. It will require patience, persistence, and a positive attitude on the part of you and the young people involved. There are bound to be roadblocks, disappointments, and perceived failures. These are not, however, reasons to give up. Rather, they are opportunities to learn, improve, and realize that assets can be built even in the most frustrating and distressing of times.

No leader of any age is without flaws, and everyone makes mistakes. Expectations of young people need to be reasonable and achievable. All members of your organization need to begin to understand that along with shared power comes shared responsibility, accountability, and reward. No one person or team should be expected to carry the burden of all that goes wrong or the appreciation and recognition for all that goes well.

Finally, remember that no matter how many things get in the way of wider organizational change, you alone control how you interact with young people. Start with yourself and your own attitudes, perceptions, and biases about youth leadership. Regardless of other circumstances, we are confident that you can find ways to work in partnership with young people, teach them, learn from them, and along the way build important developmental assets that form the foundation for a healthy, productive, and positive life.

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Amanda Seigel graduated from Hampshire College in 1998, where she majored in social science and writing. While at Hampshire, she coedited a theme issue of *Bridges: A Journal for Jewish Feminists and Our Friends* that focused on young Jewish women. She was active in a number of campus groups, including the Cambodian Tutoring Program at Amherst College, where she worked with elementary school children. As an editorial assistant at Search Institute, she helped develop and produce books, reports, *Assets: The Magazine of Ideas for Healthy Communities and Healthy Youth*, and other publications about developmental assets. In 1998–99, she participated in Next Innovations, a leadership program for young adults in the nonprofit sector.



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