YOUTH LEADERSHIP
| STARTUP GUIDE |

nebraska**children**
CONNECTED YOUTH INITIATIVE

SOCIAL INNOVATION
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INTRODUCTION

Youth leadership is one of the core components of the Connected Youth Initiative. This document is intended to provide communities with an overview of the key evidence-based framework for youth leadership and to serve as an implementation framework.

While each community establishes a plan for youth leadership within CYI, there are core components and philosophies that tie these efforts together across the state. The following pages are an overview of the youth leadership philosophy and framework. Specific tools and resources for implementation are found in the youth leadership Resource Library located at:
www.nebraskachildren.org/what-we-do/connected-youth-initiative.

This detailed information is intended to assist communities in implementation.

NEBRASKA CHILDREN YOUTH LEADERSHIP TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation has developed a youth leadership technical assistance team called the JAM team, named after its members, **J**essica, **A**lana, and **M**ona. The JAM team has extensive experience in youth leadership councils and at the statewide level. Each member is assigned to individual communities to support and assist in the implementation of youth leadership for the CYI population:

JESSICA HILDERBRAND

Southeast Nebraska

ALANA PEARSON

H3C
Norfolk
Fremont

MONA TARIN

Broken Bow Rural
H3C (Lexington Development)
North Platte (including McCook)

YOUTH LEADERSHIP RESOURCE LIBRARY

The resource library is a comprehensive list of resources that helps lay out the four components of youth leadership. The library is organized by three sections:

1. Authentic youth engagement practices such as youth/adult partnership, levels of youth engagement, and Youth Thrive

2. Resources for youth leadership groups such as guides for planning and facilitating meetings, curriculum topics, and public speaking

3. Other individual youth tools such as services, camps, and other youth opportunities

STATEWIDE YOUTH LEADERSHIP TEAM

Each CYI community will also participate in the statewide Youth Leadership Team, composed of one youth and one adult leader from each community. The items that this team will address in the early stages include Youth Leadership Code of Conduct and common training for adults providing youth leadership.

Team meetings will begin in January 2017. The team charter can be found here: **www.nebraskachildren.org/what-we-do/connected-youth-initiative**.

WHY YOUTH LEADERSHIP?

From a national perspective, positive youth development has long been recognized as an intentional, pro-social approach that engages youth within their communities, schools, organizations, peer groups, and families in a manner that is productive and constructive; recognizes, utilizes, and enhances youths' strengths; and promotes positive outcomes for young people.

YOUTH LEADERSHIP GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The guiding principles for youth leadership are derived from the philosophical frameworks of positive youth development, Youth Thrive promotive factors, and collective impact, particularly the emphasis on community context. Communities are encouraged to review and add any additional guiding principles.

- Youth leadership is youth-driven and youth-led
- Youth leadership develops self-worth
- Youth leadership supports youth to develop their own strengths
- Youth leadership supports the development of Youth Thrive protective and promotive factors through the development of skills and in gaining life experiences within a supportive environment
- Youth leadership is open and inclusive to all youth in regard to race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation

YOUTH LEADERSHIP: FOUR COMPONENTS AND BENCHMARKS

Four components for youth leadership have been identified and are essential within the CYI project, which are similar to other youth leadership initiatives within the state and the nation, such as the My Life project. Each community is encouraged to implement these components using local resources in order to be able to sustain youth leadership. At the same time, it is essential that youth leadership for the CYI population be established in a manner that provides a unique space for youth that creates belonging and safety while developing skills.

The four components of youth leadership (Youth Leadership Curriculum, Youth As Leaders, Activity Programming, and Service Learning) are defined in the following pages. A list of recommended minimal requirements is also included to assist communities in developing youth leadership in a manner that is consistent statewide.

1. YOUTH LEADERSHIP CURRICULUM
(SEE YOUTH LEADERSHIP RESOURCE LIBRARY - SECTION 2 - RESOURCES FOR YOUTH LEADERSHIP GROUPS)

The Youth Leadership Curriculum provides youth with the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills that strengthen the Youth Thrive promotive and protective factors. This can be drawn from numerous community groups and endeavors that serve youth. The inclusion of community and diverse groups provides youth with the opportunity to develop new friends and interests.

BENCHMARK: NINE COMPONENTS PER YEAR
Topics and structure should be decided by the young people and may be incorporated into activity programming or youth leadership groups, or may be offered as a standalone option. May be provided through multiple sources by community members and youth leaders

For example: Some youth might meet monthly and only focus on curriculum that day and another group might incorporate curriculum into their youth leadership group.

EXAMPLES OF YOUTH LEADERSHIP CURRICULUM
Listening, facilitating and communication skills (including social media)
Self-awareness
Team building/relationships
Self-care
Community connections (service learning planning)
Life skills (finances, work readiness, etc.)
Youth/adult partnership skills
Adolescent development
Entrepreneurship
Sex trafficking and exploitation
Avoiding risky behaviors
Leadership development
Strategic sharing
Conflict resolution, decision making and goal setting
Goal-focused coaching
Real Colors training
Healthy relationships
40 developmental assets

2. YOUTH AS LEADERS
(SEE YOUTH LEADERSHIP RESOURCE LIBRARY - SECTION 1 - AUTHENTIC YOUTH ENGAGEMENT)

BENCHMARK: EACH YOUTH IN YOUTH LEADERSHIP PARTICIPATES IN AT LEAST THREE DIFFERENT LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES YEARLY

As we work with youth, it is important to remember that we are preparing youth for leadership and life experiences. This preparation needs to happen in the most positive and meaningful way possible. Young people will be entering Youth Leadership at many different levels, and our job is to align youth strengths with leadership opportunities.

Below and on the next page are many different ways youth can participate. These are practices that can help a community build toward full youth engagement.

NON-ENGAGEMENT

Some of these might be normal activities. These are not examples of youth leadership because youth were not involved in planning, leading, or decision making. (See Youth Leadership Resource Library-Section 1-Authentic Youth Engagement-Hart's Ladder)

EXAMPLES

Youth forum in which a youth voice is expressed but not taken any further.
Youth might be called "Junior Staff" but have no say in decisions.

Youth are brought to an organization's event as decoration, but have no clear role.

Agency honors youth once a year in a ceremony, awards banquet, article in paper, etc. This is not a bad thing to do, but is not necessarily meaningful in terms of participation.

Youth voice might be brought in to fulfill a grant requirement. In this matter, youth are used to get the grant funds.

Group membership without voting privileges or opportunities to participate in consensus decisions.

Participation in youth group that is completely driven by adults.

Asking youth to serve as "rubber stamp" for decisions already made or plans already created.

Asking youth to present their story, rather than their recommendations/insights.

Asking youth to simply attend fundraising or awareness events without involving them in planning, unless it's a part of honoring them.

YOUTH LEADERSHIP GROUPS	YOUTH/ADULT PARTNERSHIPS
Partial Engagement:	*Partial Engagement:*
Young people participate in a curriculum or youth gathering opportunity, such as a council meeting or leadership group. Youth volunteer in community or attend a community event.	Youth attend local collaboration meetings or participate in committees. Youth provide input on program development (focus groups and surveys).
Engagement:	*Engagement:*
Youth facilitate or co-facilitate a council meeting or curriculum topic. Youth help plan a meeting such as writing agenda, ordering food, or leading a topic such as an icebreaker. Youth participate in the statewide policy youth work. Youth participate in a Strategic Sharing training and become representatives and speakers for unconnected youth in communities. Young people speak out on issues affecting them in school and the community at town boards, school boards, and to state legislators. Young people engage in mentoring of younger youth. Youth participate in a service learning project. Youth plan and organize a community project or event. Young people develop and produce public relations materials promoting youth development messages (TV public service announcement, news articles, talking on the radio). Youth lead recruitment, orientation, or retention work for youth. Youth plan an awards ceremony to celebrate youth achievements.	Youth serve as voting members of a community collaboration decision making team or board of directors. Participate in statewide leadership groups. Youth act as trainers and facilitators. Growing youth to become staff in a partner organization. Train to be volunteers in other organizations. Young people are involved in hiring decisions. Youth are involved in developing community grant proposals and deciding about allocations. Young people work alongside adults to develop and produce public relations materials promoting youth development (TV public service announcement, news articles, talking on the radio). Youth and adults work together to organize a community project or event. Young people help bring youth issues to community leaders by presenting to/attending meetings for city council, school board, etc.

3. ACTIVITY PROGRAMMING

(SEE YOUTH LEADERSHIP RESOURCE LIBRARY - SECTION 2 - RESOURCES FOR YOUTH LEADERSHIP GROUPS)

DEFINITION: A primary focus of the Connected Youth Initiative is engagement of youth in the life space. This connection is often made by building meaningful and intentional relationships with children, youth, and families. This sounds simple enough, but when complex issues are present, such as trauma, abuse, loss, or addiction, the result can be a lack of trust and decreased self-worth. Consequently, relationships can be hard to establish and even harder to enhance and maintain. Activity can often be the catalyst to find commonalties and begin the complex process of relationship building (with yourself, with other people, especially other youth, and within the community). Youth activity programs range in depth and interest areas throughout the year and enhance the development of promotive and protective factors.

BENCHMARK: HAVE AT LEAST THREE OPPORTUNITIES FOR CELEBRATION YEARLY

EXAMPLES OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR CELEBRATION

Birthday Cake Project - Volunteers prepare cakes to give to local young people on their birthday.

Mail a birthday card - Everyone loves getting mail, especially young people.

Host holiday celebrations such as Thanksgiving and other holidays and other achievements like graduations.

Care package drive - Many youth don't get holiday gifts, so these can be very special to the youth who receive them. Many youth groups include spouses or children of the youth in this giving.

BENCHMARK: HAVE AT LEAST TWO GATHERINGS OF YOUTH MONTHLY

These two gatherings may include Youth Leadership Curriculum.
This is a regular place of belonging for youth. The more opportunities we provide youth to connect, the more engaged they will be.

EXAMPLES OF YOUTH GATHERING

Youth Leadership Groups - Youth plan and lead meetings. This is a time of connection and to work on projects.

Development of Basic Living Skills (e.g., nutrition, cooking a meal together, learning about community resources).

Participation in community events (e.g., making a parade float) that provide an opportunity for community engagement or volunteerism at places of the youth's choice. Other examples include attending local cultural awareness events or participating in community improvement projects.

4. SERVICE LEARNING

(SEE YOUTH LEADERSHIP RESOURCE LIBRARY - SECTION 2 - RESOURCES FOR YOUTH LEADERSHIP GROUPS)

Service Learning is a strategy that integrates community needs, intentional learning objectives, and structured opportunities for reflection. Service learning projects take community service or volunteer projects to the next level by emphasizing both service and learning to create a more meaningful experience for youth.

Service learning is an ideal opportunity to engage community partners both in teaching the skill and in supporting youth in completing the project. For example, the University of Nebraska extension has a curriculum on service learning and may be willing to be part of teaching youth this curriculum prior to starting a project. Likewise, community partners may be willing to provide resources youth need in order to complete service learning projects that are of benefit to communities.

BENCHMARK: YOUTH LEADERSHIP GROUP PLANS AND PARTICIPATES IN AT LEAST ONE SERVICE LEARNING PROJECT YEARLY

In addition to Youth Leadership group Service Learning project, individual youth may also choose to plan and participate in their own service learning project as an opportunity for self-growth. This will most likely occur with older youth. The planning and completion of service learning projects can be seen as part of a college or employment resume.

Service Learning projects:

- Are developed by youth and focus on what they see as important community needs
- Help the community while providing a powerful learning opportunity for youth
- Allow youth to connect learning outcomes and skills to real-world experiences
- Are typically not "one-time" efforts

Example: *Youth research homelessness in their community and contact local homeless shelters to learn about the types of services they provide. Youth then decide together on a service project that will support this community need. After planning and completing the service project, youth reflect upon both the service learning process and the service project.*

COMMUNITY READINESS

In preparation for the establishment or enhancement of youth leadership, the CYI communities will undertake an assessment of existing youth leadership opportunities that exist specifically for the CYI population or could be adapted for this population. The assessment will include the four areas of youth leadership as these components may be provided through multiple partners in order to assure capacity and depth of experience. For communities working with multiple counties, the youth leadership assessment will include resources available in all counties or counties with the highest population.

Once the assessment is completed, the CYI community will establish a work plan for youth leadership in a manner that can best be enhanced and sustained. The plan will also include the agencies or key partner groups who will provide the core youth leadership service. Selection of these groups is made based on the following minimal criteria:

- Experience in working with the CYI population
- Experience in providing youth leadership
- Understanding of the key components and philosophies of youth leadership and youth engagement
- Organizational structure and capacity to assure that youth leadership will be provided within a system of sound human resource, supervision, and agency liability infrastructure

In CYI communities serving multi-county areas, more than one organization may be selected to provide youth leadership.

The CYI Youth Leadership Assessment and Planning tool may assist communities in making a plan.

AGENCY OR ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS

Prior to beginning youth leadership, the agency or organization(s) selected to provide youth leadership within the CYI will complete the following readiness checklist. This checklist may also be used as part of the selection process.

Readiness Checklist

1. Contract completed between the CYI fiscal agent or backbone organization and the entity providing youth leadership coordination.
2. Background checks on all staff and volunteers working for the agency who will be providing youth leadership coordination for the CYI in accordance with the contract.
3. Liability Insurance: The contracted entity will review their liability insurance to ensure that it will cover the youth leadership activities and staff responsible for youth leadership activities.

4. Transportation of Youth: The contracted entity will review the liability insurance to determine if it includes the transportation of youth. The agency will also review transportation policies to assure compliance with insurance. Transportation policies will include the circumstances under which youth who are over the age of 21 may transport other youth within the youth leadership program.

5. Volunteer Policies: The contracted entity will review and revise if necessary volunteer policies and practices to be in compliance with the CYI contract.

6. Reimbursement for Youth: The contracted entity will review or establish policies for the employment or contractual reimbursement for youth performing services as youth advisors or representatives at state and national meetings in those instances where youth will forgo earnings to perform those duties. The youth reimbursement policy is coordinated at the collaborative level to assure that all organizations have an aligned policy.

7. Mental Health Crisis Response Plan: The contracted entity will have a mental health crisis response plan for the times in which the youth is in youth leadership. This plan may be part of the larger common policies for CYI.

8. Mandatory Reporting: The contracted entity will have a mandatory reporting policy that is in compliance with state law and the overall framework for the Connected Youth Initiative.

9. Youth-Friendly Meeting Space: The contracted entity will identify a common youth-friendly meeting space. This action may be undertaken once the initial youth have been identified in order to assure that the space meets with youth approval.

10. Recruitment Plan: The contracted entity in conjunction with the CYI will develop a recruitment plan to assure that youth who have been in the care of DHHS, are homeless or near homeless, and/or are leaving probation are included.

11. Staffing Policies: While it is understood that in the initial stages of establishing youth leadership that entity will have already identified a staff person to work with youth, it is anticipated that the agency will establish policies and practices for including youth in the hiring of future staff who will work with them as well as providing youth with a safe mechanism for expressing kudos and concerns about staff performance.

12. Documentation: The contracted entity will have policies and practices for the documentation of youth leadership that minimally include the following:

- Use of the common referral form for all youth entering youth leadership, which will include the signature of a guardian for all youth under the age of 19

- Medical release forms

- Transportation release forms

- Use of the required youth leadership database and report forms

PRE- PLANNING PROCESS

Recruit at least three youth to start the conversation. The following items should be discussed at this time with these youth:

- Transportation: Do we have partners or community members who can help transport youth to meetings?
- If serving multiple counties, how will youth get to meetings? What considerations have you made for multiple counties?
- Do you have a youth-friendly meeting space?
- Will youth be bringing children to meetings? Are we going to offer childcare?

FIRST MEETING (SAMPLE AGENDA)

- Eat and icebreaker.
- Why are we here? Overview of purpose of the council.
- Who wants to help plan the next meeting? Find a date/time.
- Ask them what they want to decide at the next meeting. (Examples: Creating some basic guidelines for the group, recruitment of other members, etc.)
- Set regular meeting dates/days. *For example: 2nd and 4th Monday of the month, 3rd Thursday of the month.*

SECOND MEETING (SAMPLE AGENDA)

- Eat and icebreaker.
- Establish basic guidelines for participation in the council. See toolkit for more ideas.
- Create a process for tackling tasks.
  - Who will lead meetings? Who will take notes?
  - Do we want to rotate from month to month or have positions to fulfill duties?

THIRD MEETING (SAMPLE AGENDA)

- Eat and icebreaker.
- Create a purpose or a mission in the community.
- Discuss what to name the council/group.
- Create some goals for the upcoming months.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Authentic Youth Engagement is best described by focusing on the experiences of young people when they are engaged:

- They are respected, valued, and trusted and they feel appreciated, safe, and comfortable

- They feel they are working in an environment that facilitates their engagement, and they are involved in meaningful ways both as teachers and as students

- Their voices are being heard and treated as worthwhile

- They are given the opportunity to be involved and make decisions, gain leadership skills, and see their ideas realized

- They are able to participate in social aspects of their involvement

- They see change and progress happening as a result of their contributions

- They are in a space where they have ownership and control in decision-making processes

See Authentic Youth Engagement: Youth-Adult Partnerships Guide, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative.

Positive Youth Development (PYD) refers to intentional efforts of other youth, adults, communities, government agencies, and schools to provide opportunities for youth to enhance their interests, skills, and abilities.

Tokenism: Young people are given a limited voice and little choice about what they can say and how they can communicate. *See Hart's Ladder of Youth Participation.*

Youth/Adult Partnership: Both partners have equal opportunities to utilize skills, make decisions, and independently carry out tasks to reach shared goals. Each acknowledges learning from the other. Optimally, a balance is created among young people interacting with other adults and young people and adults working together to reach common goals. *See Authentic Youth Engagement: Youth-Adult Partnerships Guide, Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative.*

Youth-Driven, Youth-Led: Young people have the initial ideas and decide how the project is to be carried out. Adults play a supportive role. *See Hart's Ladder of Youth Participation.*

Youth Thrive: A research-informed framework based on resilience, positive youth development, neuroscience, and trauma that contributes to healthy development and well-being and reduces the impact of traumatic and negative life experiences for all youth. The research led to the identification of five protective and promotive factors that mitigate risk and promote well-being, as well as the concomitant critical outcomes that constitute healthy adolescent development. The Youth Thrive protective and promotive factors are Youth Resilience, Social Connections, Knowledge of Adolescent Development, Concrete Support in Times of Need, and Cognitive and Social-Emotional Competence. *See Journal of Child and Youth Work, Volume 25.*

APPENDIX

Below are sample forms and policies that can be used in Youth Leadership organizations to help create policies and procedures around Youth Leadership Groups.

Authentic Youth Engagement 101 - attachment
Create Youth-Friendly Spaces

Sample forms

Medical information release
Release of information form
Transportation permission form
Critical incident reporting policy and form and mandatory reporting

Sample policies and procedures

After-hours youth contact
Confidentiality and release of information
Responding to youth mental health crisis
Social media
Socializing with youth outside of workplace
Volunteer policies
Workplace safety
Mandatory reporting