

# Cooking up Youth Engagement

**The CAFÉ TA Center  
Recipe for Youth Engagement Events  
Inspired and Baked by  
The Florida Youth Council**



## Welcome to The CAFÉ TA Center’s “Recipe for Youth Engagement Events”!

Why a “recipe”? Because planning a youth engagement event is just like making your favorite recipe – there are specific steps to take, you need the right ingredients, and there are important steps to take to have everything come out right.

In this case, we’re going to explain how to conceive, plan, and implement a youth engagement by using the example of making a lasagna. Everyone loves lasagna, and it’s a great meal to feed a lot of people at once. But just like a successful youth engagement event, there are essential steps to make it come out right. You have to make sure you have access to a kitchen with all the right tools, you need to make sure your dinner guests know when and where dinner is happening, and you need to think about the special ingredients you might want to include, like sweet Italian sausage all the way from Greco’s Market in Chicago, or fresh mozzarella from your local market.



**Let’s get cooking!**

### Introduction and Context

Before we launch into making and baking our lasagna together, let’s share some context about youth involvement. You see, many organizations recognize the need to engage young people, provide them with ways to be heard, and empower them so that they can become the next generation of advocates and leaders. The youth voice is important on its own, because young people deserve to be heard. It’s also important for advocacy movements to create space for the next generation of leaders to ensure their efforts are sustained over generations. The challenge comes not only in finding ways to make that happen, but in empowering youth to plan and deliver their own authentically youth-driven activities.

You might wonder why it’s important to have youth plan and deliver their own activities, and the simple answer is that that’s the most essential ingredient in this lasagna. The Voice of Youth is like grandma’s special seasoning that turns our lasagna into an authentic dish that even the pickiest eater will devour. When a young adult encounters something created by other youth, there are fewer barriers to participation, and recognition that it’s all about youth talking to their fellow youth. That’s one of the benefits (among many) of having young people plan deliver their own activities. The power of youth-led planning and delivery of programming for youth (i.e. a youth-driven approach) is that it establishes credibility, a sense of safety and belonging, youth-to-youth accountability, and trust among the youth who attend.

This document, then, offers a “how-to” for a group of youth or an organization to empower young people to plan and implement an engagement in which youth come together for a common purpose, whether it be training, advocacy around a specific issue, relationship-building, fun, entertainment, and connection, activity planning and delivery, or other youth-related activities. By following this recipe, youth (and those who support youth) will understand how to plan and implement programming in a youth-driven manner that genuinely empowers the youth voice.

In that spirit of youth-driven authenticity, CAFÉ TAC has created this guide in cooperation with The Florida Youth Council (FYC), another program that like CAFÉ TAC is part of a cross-disability non-profit organization called The Family Café.

The FYC hosts an Annual Youth Summit each year, and this tool uses the FYC’s Annual Youth Summit as a case example to demonstrate how youth can plan and deliver activities for youth, and do so in a safe and effective manner. We’ll use the lasagna recipe as a metaphor to keep it spicy!

### **Chef Extraordinaire: The Florida Youth Council (FYC)**

Let’s meet the creator of our lasagna recipe: The Florida Youth Council (FYC). The FYC is a group of individuals ranging in age from 15 to 30, each of whom has lived experience with a disability. The FYC is all about getting youth and emerging leaders involved in self-advocacy, peer mentoring, and other activities that will improve the quality of life for youth and emerging leaders with disabilities. Together they are the leaders who plan, design and deliver the FYC’s Annual Youth Summit, a two-day statewide event for youth disability advocates that’s been held annually since 2007.



This document is a review of how the FYC plans and delivers their Annual Youth Summit. You can use it to replicate their effort on whatever scale and for whatever purpose is relevant to the youth engagement efforts you’re planning to undertake—because the principles of youth-driven planning and implementation are the same no matter the endeavor. Need a personal size lasagna? Need spaghetti instead? Just scale back the efforts or modify the recipe to create what you need – following the steps will still get you there!

### **Rules of the Kitchen: Key Principles of a Youth-Driven Process**

Have you ever watched a kitchen staff in a restaurant prepare the food? Each person has a job, and if they don’t follow the rules there is chaos and, well, the food ends up being bad. Our lasagna is going to be great because we are going to follow some key principles in this youth-driven approach.

Whatever your youth engagement efforts look like, putting youth in the role of head chef makes sense. It makes what you’re doing authentic and ensures that what you plan and how you make it happen matches the needs and expectations of the youth you want to involve.

Here are some key principles that are central to the success of any youth-driven effort that should be present in the kitchen where youth-driven recipes are made:

1. Youth are empowered to make decisions.
2. Youth hold each other accountable to implement what they’ve decided.
3. Youth direct their own planning.
4. Youth direct their own implementation of plans.
5. Youth direct their own recruitment for youth leadership roles.
6. Youth leaders create and use governance structures to guide their meetings.
7. Youth determine how to allocate their resources.
8. Youth represent their interests through advocacy.

### **Reviewing the Lasagna Recipe: The Annual Youth Summit**

Before you endeavor to make anything – especially a fantastic lasagna – you need to read through the entire recipe so that you know what will be needed, the order of activities, the timing, etc. As an

example, we'll review how the FYC plans and hosts their Annual Youth Summit in Orlando, FL. Approximately 200 youth attend. This is a two-day event that includes an overnight stay at the hotel where it is hosted. This is a gourmet lasagna, mind you, and your first attempt at making lasagna does not need to be as grand! The following steps are the ones the FYC takes to plan and deliver – we mean bake – the Youth Summit.

As the FYC is a program of The Family Café, The Family Café provides resources and support to the FYC to help them realize their vision. Many youth-led efforts rely on partnerships and collaboration with sponsor organizations that can assist with details that youth may not know about or be able to do. Think of it this way: as a youth you probably don't own a house with a kitchen to make your lasagna, so a sponsoring organization provides that kitchen, the tools, possibly the budget for the ingredients, and the utilities to get the job done.

It's important to keep in mind that for a youth-led effort to be authentic, the youth must be the head chef and lead the process, with the partners playing a supporting role without taking over. It's the partner's role to provide resources and advice, and to create a space for youth to make their own decisions and implement them. The sponsoring organization should always strive to teach and empower, not just "do it for" the youth organization. It's up to the youth to bake a great lasagna! And if it doesn't taste great, they learn and make it better the next time.

Everything awesome starts with a great idea. What is yours? Why are you inviting people? What information should they be leaving with? Maybe it's a deeper relationship with your youth? Or because you would like them to grow in a particular area? Is there an issue that needs to be addressed? Maybe you just want to get together, build community, and have some fun! The best events are planned out, on point, organized, and purpose-driven. Whether you already have a team or need to create one, start first with your why. So, what is your goal? Here are some possibilities:

- Learning New Skills
- Creating Connection between Youth and Community
- Attracting more Youth to your Organization
- Serving Youth
- Having Some Fun



Here are the basic steps the FYC takes in implementing their Annual Youth Summit, along with some things to consider for each one. You can see the steps for making the lasagna to the far right to help you understand the concept.

Step	Annual Youth Summit Planning and Delivery	Notes	Steps for Making Lasagna
1	Define the theme of the upcoming Annual Youth Summit.	A theme is something that the youth believe all youth will like. For example, one year the FYC's chosen theme was role playing games like D&D, and the next year was Anime. You can have fun imagining how the themes shape the event and connect to the message the youth want to convey.	You've decided to make dinner for the group. And, you've decided to make lasagna. What type? Vegetarian? Meat? Any special ingredients? How many people are you serving?
2	Assign roles within the youth leadership so that different youth have different responsibilities that complement one another.	You may not know the roles yet, so you might need to keep this in mind as you review the steps. As you read through them, you can identify roles. For example, someone needs to be responsible for creating the brochure. Someone might need to be the emcee. It can be a good idea to figure out what talents and abilities each youth organizer brings to the table, so you can find the role that matches.	What are the first steps before you even start making the lasagna? Review the ingredients. Buy the ingredients. Assemble the proper baking utensils. Who is doing these tasks?
3	Begin to advertise that there is going to be a Youth Summit, and focus on the theme.	Not much has been determined yet, so this is almost like a "save the date" to get on the radar of potential attendees.	You know when you're thinking about dinner and you ask, "Mom, what's for dinner?" And Mom announces, "Lasagna." That's what this step is all about – making sure everyone knows what's on the horizon, and what's for dinner.
4	Determine the learning objectives that the youth leaders hope to share with the attendees.	Try to keep the learning objectives simple and limited to a few. The Youth Summit combines fun with learning, so the learning objectives should be clear and connect with the chosen theme. For the FYC, this includes figuring out what topics the keynote speaker and breakout sessions will address. The theme can weave the fun into the learning!	In the case of lasagna, the learning objective is really the experience of the person who will be eating our lasagna. What do we hope they will think or feel, and what will they take away with them after the meal? Ideally, they'll like it, and they will be full, and they will complement the chef.

Step	Annual Youth Summit Planning and Delivery	Notes	Steps for Making Lasagna
5	Discuss the available budget that will need to be applied and followed for the event.	Not everything needs to cost money. In this case an annual grant helps fund the event, thanks to the FYC's relationship with its funding partner. Knowing what the budget is, what can be done within it, and what collaborative partners might be willing to contribute is key.	There are costs to making the lasagna. Do you have sauce, noodles, cheeses, meat, spices, etc.? Do you need to pay for a kitchen space or does your sponsoring organization have one available? Think through all of the costs, and list them. This is the budget you need to make a lasagna.
6	Lay out the order of events for the 2-day experience.	<p>Try to brainstorm, first, without budget constraints. Then go back and apply the budget.</p> <p>If you're hosting a youth event for the first time, perhaps look to other similar events for ideas.</p>	Assembling the lasagna and placing it in the oven does not take much time, perhaps 30 minutes. But, maybe the trip to the grocery store takes a while, and you have to coordinate with a driver because you don't have a license yet, or maybe you don't have a car or money for an Uber. What is the baking time? How long should it stand before serving once you pull it out of the oven? Make a detailed schedule of the time for each task, and when each task will occur.
7	Review and confirm the budget.	This is the moment during which the sponsoring organization (if there is one) assists the youth leaders to make sure that what they've envisioned can be paid for.	With your plans in place to make a great lasagna, it's probably wise to check with the sponsoring organization to ensure that they're on board with having lasagna, and that they approve the cost if they're paying for it. All of your plans thus far will help create confidence that your lasagna will turn out just right.
8	Contact and secure main presenters and speakers.	Review the learning objectives and contact appropriate speakers and book them to present. Make sure they understand how to connect with a youth audience, and consider youth speakers when possible. Sometimes they will enhance your learning objectives.	This lasagna requires special cheese, and special sausage. Without them, it's just an ordinary dish. But your goal is to make a fantastic lasagna. So go find that special cheese and sausage.

Step	Annual Youth Summit Planning and Delivery	Notes	Steps for Making Lasagna
9	Work with the sponsoring organization to secure the hotel and make arrangements for a block of rooms, meals, meeting space set up, and other hotel-related details.	Youth leaders should attend or be present whenever possible to learn how to manage these types of details. The FYC hosts their Annual Youth Summit at a hotel, but no matter what type of location you use, be it a hotel, community center, school, church, or private space, there will be a need to coordinate things with the event site.	Work with the kitchen staff (or do it yourself) to preheat the oven, and to ensure that all of the utensils are ready to assemble the ingredients. Do you have the right baking dish?
10	Plan and create the brochure and invitation/registration process.	A detailed brochure serves as the invitation. Make sure the registration process is clear and simple. Depending on the size and scope of your event, you might not require registration, but you should have some kind of system in place to record who attends so you can stay connected with them after the event.	By the way, since this is a one-of-a-kind lasagna that you're going to be proud of serving, you should prepare a simple but classy menu to share with those who are going to eat it. Help them build their appetites.
11	Market and advertise the brochure and invitation.	Everything is planned, and although you're not completely ready to deliver the event, it is time to start inviting youth to register to attend.	Send an invitation along with the menu to those you want to invite for dinner. You can only invite as many people as you can feed based on your budget. If you only have enough money to make one lasagna, then don't invite more people than one lasagna will feed. Require an RSVP, which means that you are asking them to respond to let you know that they are planning to come.
12	Manage the registrations and accommodations that may be needed.	The registration process can be complicated, so a system and a tool for collecting, processing, and managing the attendees is needed. This step is crucial for effective hotel room tracking and meals.	Keep track of who is coming so that you can know how many place settings you'll need for dinner.

Step	Annual Youth Summit Planning and Delivery	Notes	Steps for Making Lasagna
13	Prepare the details for the Youth Summit, including a check-in process, name tags, handouts, instructions for activities and locations, etc.	Basically, create an instruction packet that explains all that an attendee would need to know in order to have a great experience.	Serving lasagna includes being a wonderful dinner host. Have the table settings ready with names for seating, and pay attention to details like where to place coats, and background music, and lighting, etc.
14	Conduct the event.	Everyone who is involved in planning the event will most likely be involved in hosting it. Each person will have a role or more than one role. Remember, you are putting this on for others, so you need to find a balance between enjoying it and making it special for attendees.	It's time for dinner. You've baked the lasagna, and you've created the ambience. Serve and enjoy!
15	Planning Meetings	Communication and planning meetings should happen regularly and consistently throughout the entire process to ensure that problems are identified and addressed, and to manage the event to success.	All throughout the preparation process, from the moment you decided to host a lasagna dinner to the moment you're serving it, you should have open communication with everyone involved.

**So that's the high-level approach to planning and hosting a Youth Engagement Event like the FYC's Annual Youth Summit. Whether you're planning something similar, or larger, or smaller, the same steps apply!**

*Let's get into some additional specifics with the checklist below. This is where the lasagna really gets made! We hope the recipe idea helped you understand that planning a youth engagement takes careful planning and attention to detail. In the next section we're going to leave the lasagna off to the side and get down to the nitty gritty details of how to plan and deliver your youth engagement event.*



# Youth Engagement Planning Approach and Guidance

## Key Definitions

Remember, if the youth are not empowered to create and implement their own activity, then their passion will be missing, and the youth attendees will notice. A supporting or sponsoring organization can assist a group of youth to be successful, but they need to do the work and make it their project.

**Youth**—Who are your youth? What is the age range?

**Voice**—By Voice, we mean that the ideas and actions truly come from the youth – it is their Voice.

**Youth-driven**—Youth-driven again means that the youth follow through on doing what they have decided, not relying on others to do it for them.

**Engagement**—Engagement is the general term for youth interacting with youth for a purpose. The purpose can be very serious, like leadership and advocacy training, or it could be more light-hearted like getting together to build community, play games, and have fun. Or, you can combine elements of both!

**Sponsoring Organization**—The sponsoring organization is the entity that may be needed to assist with funding, contracting, policy review, etc. Sometimes youth don't know what they don't know, so the sponsoring organization can be like a consultant. The youth learn how to make their vision a reality from the sponsoring organization, and the organization builds its relationship and credibility with the next generation of leaders.

## Planning the Youth-Driven Event

Before you begin to plan any event, it is important to make clear what your purpose is! This may be something very easy, however it's often the most overlooked step in the process. If you decide in the beginning what your goal is, then you can work backwards and make sure your purpose is seen throughout your agenda.

You will want a theme that is broad enough to build an entire event around but not so broad that it's unoriginal or boring. There are many ways to think of a theme.

Start something active: think of something active for everyone and level it up!

Think of a holiday: Everyone loves a good Christmas-themed party or Halloween!

Special word: Use key words to focus on so the attendees have an idea of what to expect. Words like "We" or "Together."

Present opportunities: Maybe something is happening in your area like a prom or a football game. Your event could be a before or after prom party! Or maybe a pep rally to support local schools.

## Who is the Nucleus of the Youth Group?

These are your youth leaders, or the ones who will take responsibility to gather the youth voice and energy and channel it into a successful event. Get commitments from the leaders so that they understand what is at stake.

## Who is the Sponsoring Organization?

The sponsoring organization can be any entity that wants to be involved in empowering the youth. It might also be an informal group of adults who are helping to look out for a group of youth. Make sure that the sponsoring organization knows what it is responsible for and get a commitment from the leaders.

Remember, whether the idea to create a youth engagement event starts with a sponsoring organization that wants to involve youth in what they're doing, or if it comes from youth that are looking for a partner to support their vision, it's essential that youth drive the process throughout.

### **First Planning Meeting: High Level Summary**

Why? Who? What? Where When? How?

This is where your youth leaders and others get together for their first brainstorming session. What do we want to do? What are youth asking for? What might they like? What does this look like if we do it?

Start answering the Who, What, Where, etc. Make notes. You're brainstorming, so let the ideas fly!

Woo! You're doing this! You are inspired and ready to start thinking of your big day! To make any theme come to life think carefully about what you want your youth to know. It is important to think specifically about what kind of things you are using:

The Setting: Is the stage right? Did you pick the right place? Do the colors offset the theme? These are questions you have to answer once your theme is chosen. Picking the right setting is key to a successful event.

Seating & Space: Do you have enough seats or tables? Yes, this might seem trivial, but you want more space to fill than less. You don't want an event with youth missing out.

Decorations & Music: Having a theme throughout the event as a room-to-room experience helps engage your attendees and it also shows that you are committed to the message you're trying to share with your youth.

Lighting & Sound: This can be something that can control the comfort of your guest. Some guests might not be ok with loud sounds or bright lights so assessing earlier or doing a walkthrough with your team is key to make sure your setting is inviting enough for everyone you host.

### **Ongoing Planning: Breaking it Down**

Now it's time to make decisions about what you brainstormed above. Sift through your ideas. You don't need to make decisions in a particular order. Maybe there are things that must be a certain way – call those out so that the other decisions will fit with the things you know must be accounted for.

This is also the place where you should focus on the content of your event. What is it about? Are there specific things you want to address and discuss? Are there things you want your attendees to learn or take away from the event? Do your presenters and speakers understand what you're trying to accomplish, and is what they're preparing aligned with your vision? Do the theme and your event content go together?

The location is set, and the menus have been discussed, but wait. What are your guests going to do at your event? Yes, you probably have content to deliver and learning objectives to account for, but the best events are interactive and get attendees to actively participate. Are your attendees going to just sit and listen? No! You want them engaged and ready to learn.

Here are some ways to develop activities for your guests to participate in:

- Stationary games: These are your larger-than-life games like tic-tac-toe or four square. Maybe even miniature golf. These games bring out competitiveness and problem-solving skills to any event.



- Everyone plays: These types of games get the whole room involved. Games like Eye Spy or Charades. These games help with developing teamwork with your guests.
- Ice breakers: This activity is wholly based on getting to know your guests. These games are more driven to get to know the individual. Activities like Two Truths and a Lie or “What would do if you had superpowers for a day?”
- Creative activities: You also want to have activities where attendees get to create something based on the theme of the event. Everyone loves having something to take home after attending a gathering. Why wouldn't you?
- Quiet spots: These spots are very important as well. Sometimes we can all get a little overwhelmed or over-stimulated. Having and knowing there's a designated spot for such things helps promote an inclusive and understanding environment for your guests.

## Giveaways & Prizes

Here's the fun part! What do you give them at the end of a game or activity? How do you reward your guest for a job well done? With prizes! You will keep them engaged if they know they're winning. Here are some ideas that might work for you:

- Gift cards: One of the go-to prizes for any event is these. You can get them based on the theme of your event as well.
- Trophies & medals: This can be a pricey prize but a trophy winner at the end of any game will keep anyone invested no matter the age!
- Donated prizes: During your event you will have those who want to donate gifts to give out to the guests. This is also a great opportunity to promote those who donated their time, energy and gifts.
- Swag bag: a goodie bag filled with all things "youth event" — what better prize than that?

## Food & Drinks

If you planned any event before, you know this part will come up again. Where there be food or snacks? Is it free? Sometimes the planning of these things can appear multiple times because of how important a step it is towards a successful event. Whether you're serving food for free, for a price, or for your team, here are some things to help plan that.

- Main meals stations: Deli station, Hotdogs, burgers, pizza, etc. these are the meals that keep your team and guest belly's full.
- Snack & Drink station: Here we will have the cookies, chips, candies and assorted drinks. It will be your one stop shop to for drinks on the go so your guest stay on the go.

## The Logistics

### Date & Time

Scheduling is everything when planning an event. Scheduling up to six months in advance or more is always advised. Those who are going to help, like the families, the volunteers, the planners. They all have lives outside of this so you must account for it. The duration of your event goes with how long the planning is going to take. Is it three days? Just a Saturday? Two hours on a Sunday? Here are some things to think about when planning the time.

- Normal event: 3 hours
- All Nighter: 8-12 hours

- Weekend event: Friday to Sunday
- Summer camp: 7 days

### Location

Most of your events will likely happen in a place you own, or sometimes a place that is donated. Other times you will have to explore your options:

- Churches & Community Centers: Most of the time these places can be rented for a big discount or even for free!
- Rented Facilities: For some events, you will need to find an off-site facility. Places like skate parks and gaming centers have specialized equipment and will save you money when it comes to activities and clean up!
- Community Areas: If you want the community to come out be sure to have a place they will find your event! For example, you might use a well-known local park.
- Hotels or Rented Spaces: For our group, this is the best of both worlds. Sometimes we have two of our members share, but mostly we try to give everyone their own rooms offering them privacy. This might be a more expensive route but often hotels will work out deals to help cut costs.

### Registration

When it comes to handling getting your youth to register, the best advice is to do it ONLINE! Of course, for accessibility, you will have flyers placed with a QR code to help future attendees use the online system.

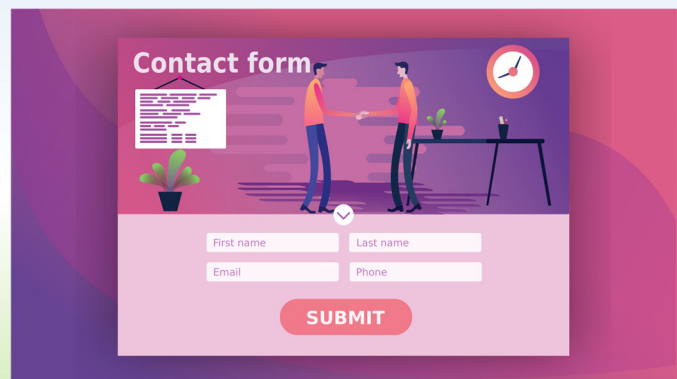
Using an online system will automatically save information that can be used to advertise more events in the future!

Things to make sure you account for:

- Liability & Consent (especially for Youth under 18)
- Photo Release
- Insurance form - if doing activities parents are not present

Important information to collect on your form:

- Name
- Birth Date
- Grade
- School
- T-Shirt Size
- Allergies and Medical Information
- Parent or Guardian Name(s)
- Parent or Guardian Contact Information



### Transportation

For our events, we leave this to parents, caregivers, etc. This is because transportation can be a very big expense! If this is something important to your event. Here are some options: chartered buses, vans, and flights.

## Volunteers

Volunteers are always going to be essential for the success of your event! It's important to place people where they fit best and take the time to train them. What is the task you would like them to complete? To get started we have made a list of things to consider.

- Activity leaders
- Band/music/entertainment
- Clean-up crew
- Floaters
- Follow-up team
- First Aid
- Photographer/videographer
- Registration team
- Security
- Tech

## Safety

During your event, it is important to know where the youth are at all times! Everyone attending is your responsibility. Here is a list of questions you should ask to ensure your event is safe.

- Are the rules clear to everyone participating?
- Who is responsible for security? What do you do if something goes wrong?
- Who is in charge if there is a medical emergency? Are allergens marked?
- Is everyone's contact information available quickly?
- What needs to be done in case of a fire, or big emergency?

## Detailed Planning: The Work Plan

When you made decisions in the previous step, you automatically implied that there will be action items necessary to follow through on those decisions. Break down your decisions into the actual steps that need to happen to make the decision a reality. For example, if you decided that your event will be located at the local church in its basement, then what are the steps necessary to make that a reality? Follow the steps for each action item you've identified.

Once you've created all of the steps, who is doing what, and when they happen, you have completed your Work Plan!

## Implementation Kickoff Meeting

You've done a lot of planning. Different individuals may know their parts, but everyone may not understand how it all fits together. By having a meeting where everyone gets to understand how their part fits within the whole initiative, you will create solidarity, clarify tasks, and set yourself up for success. The Work Plan lets people know what to do, and when, as well as what the expectations are.

## Manage the Work Plan to Success: Tips for Success

You're in charge of the Work Plan. Here are some quick tips to ensure that you manage it successfully:

- Make sure you communicate with each person who has a task to do. Ask them if there are hurdles they need help with. Provide support as needed.
- Catch people doing a good job, and tell them they're doing a good job!
- Provide updates to everyone so the team can be in the know.
- Always look ahead to the next tasks so that you can identify barriers that need to be overcome.
- If someone is falling behind, fix the problem fast rather than letting it fester.

## Host the Event: Tips for Success

You've worked hard to bring together all of the moving parts of this initiative, and you're ready for the day of the youth engagement event you've planned. Here are some tips to help the day go smoothly:

- Have your team on site the day before, if possible, so you can get familiar with the setup.
- Establish a way to communicate as challenges arise (cell phones, walkie talkies, etc.)
- Make sure that there is sufficient signage to direct your participants to the correct locations.
- Remind your team to smile and have fun!
- As challenges arise, deal with them calmly, and one at a time.
- Be sure to collect feedback from participants so you can improve the event next time.

## Team Meeting

Well before your event kicks off, get your team together and run through last-minute things. It might be the first time everyone is hosting a meeting, so they may be nervous. Go over logistics so that jobs will be clear.

- The Schedule
- Everyone's Roles
- Safety Precautions
- Activity instructions & Rules



## The Big Day

Celebration!! You made it to the day of the event! Let's make sure it goes off without a hitch. Most of the things that need to happen occur before the big day. However, on the morning of the event, there are always last-minute things to check. Create a final run-through list:

- Do you have all your supplies?
- What still needs to be set up?
- Are all your key volunteers still coming?

- What's the schedule of the day?
- How long will it take to clean up afterward?

### **Celebrate!**

You and your team have worked hard to imagine, plan, and deliver a wonderful youth engagement event. Congratulations! Don't forget to take time to celebrate together and strengthen your bond as a team.



### **Review and Improve**

Schedule a time for a follow-up to discuss the good and bad of your event! For some teams, this can happen hours later. For others, it's better to wait a few days, but the sooner the better. Ask some of the following questions to help with future planning:

- Did you have any standout volunteers handle a tough situation?
- Any standout Youth?
- If there were challenging incidents or problems at the event, who followed up? How can you prevent them next time?
- Was anything damaged during the event?
- Name the highs & lows of your event

You should also think about how to collect the information you need to find out how you did from the start.

- Will you have a survey attendees can complete?
- What questions will you ask?
- How will attendees be able to complete it?

Don't wait too long to review the feedback that you received from participants. Maybe after a couple of weeks you can schedule a debriefing meeting with your team to review the feedback and make note of ideas for changes and improvements for next time.



## Advice from The Florida Youth Council



### **When asked how much time they need to spend planning the Youth Summit, members of the Florida Youth Council offered the following:**

Josh stated, “In terms of overall elapsed time, we have to start thinking and planning 6-7 months ahead of time.”

Shevie mentioned, “A majority of us get overwhelmed when there is too much info too fast, so it’s better to plan stage by stage.”

James explained that they “Start following the last Summit, doing a debrief of what worked and what didn’t work.”

“Overall,” added Shevie, “it takes about 30-40 hours of time per month for six months leading up to the Youth Summit, but the time and tasks are divided up by the full Council of almost 20 members.”

### **With respect to the most important steps in the preparation process, FYC members shared the following:**

Sidney, “You have to have good communication, both sharing and hearing ideas, and work as a group to plan and make decisions.”

Kel explained that, “We draft a plan and brainstorm with others about the ideas about a theme, and about breakout topics.”

James emphasized the need to, “Make an agenda to reflect what we’ve decided to do, and be able to assign roles for who will do what to plan and create the Summit.”

Shevie explained that, “It was absolutely critical that you remain adaptable in your preparations.”

JJ finally, added, “Since it’s a youth-driven event, it is usually attached to a sponsor group that can assist with finances. So a key strategy for funding is to collaborate with and partner with a sponsoring organization.”

### **What strategies do you recommend to keep the whole thing youth driven?**

Josh said, “Even though it sounds a little scary, you have to have youth who will tell the adults ‘no’, and, on the other hand it’s a strength to also involve supportive adults who ‘get it’ and who can support you and be mentors.”

Leah added that you need to, “Keep things fun and interactive, so youth are engaged and sustain the youth-driven energy.”

Sidney explained that, “Parents have varying types of understanding of what ‘youth driven’ means, and this may present challenges. Some are too involved, some need to be there to help, etc. We have to say ‘no’, you cannot come in. So, having something for the parents is helpful, too. The parent-only session is a good way to help explain to parents the importance of independence.”

### **When asked what the most challenging aspect of hosting the event is, FYC members explained the following:**

JJ emphasized that it is important and very difficult to, “Get parents to allow their youth to experience independence.”

Morgan said that you, “Need to get to know your participants so that you can be prepared to meet them where they’re at and provide accommodations.”



Regarding guiding policies, JJ said, “It is challenging setting up rules and regulations/parameters for who can attend. For example, youth must be able to be unaccompanied at our event.”

**When asked what advice they would give to other youth who want to host their own event, FYC members shared the following:**

Leah said, “Things will change in the middle of your event, so be ready to adapt.”

Nigel offered, “Have patience with your team, with yourself, with attendees.”

Shevie stated, “You need to implement ideas, not just have ideas. Get others to help you with your idea and goal. Follow through is critical. You need accountability, because nothing gets done if people aren’t committed to doing their role, and sometimes there needs to be a way to hold someone accountable.”

JJ suggested to, “Find someone who has done an event, and work with them to plan your event so your first one is not totally on your own—avoid pitfalls, and give yourself a better chance of being successful.”

James explained how important it is to, “Change things up each year if you can, and things that are repeated just make sure that they differ (like the movie occurs each year, but choose a movie that is relevant).”

Josh mentioned the importance of, “Seeking feedback from specific communities and perspectives. You do not have to achieve the best and greatest event the first time. Start with a smaller focus, and then grow.”

**Here are some of the FYC’s members’ favorite and most joyful memories:**

Sidney: “My favorite things are the fun activities, and I really enjoy karaoke at the end of the summit.”

Leah: “I really like when we have our dance, we meet more people and have fun.”

JJ: “At the dance Alex got people to form a circle and show off their dance moves.”

James: “I went to the dance in my D&D outfit, and I got to hand out the D&D prizes because I was in costume.”

Nigel: “I like the digital creation class at the Summit, and the disability cooking class. I got to meet different people with different disabilities.”

Morgan: “I love the energy at the dance.”

Kel: I was able to talk to one of the parents about her son who has challenges similar to mine, and make some suggestions that helped her.”

**Regarding advice to give any adults who are trying to assist, FYC members shared the following:**

Shevie explained how important it is to, “Determine how much funding is available to support this event.”

JJ emphasized that, “You have to allow the youth to figure out and share what they are interested in.”



Start with the youth. Help and support, but don't take over. Don't assume you know what the youth like and don't like."

Josh added, "Let the youth lead and guide, but be there to support. Asking questions is helpful, rather than telling the youth the answer. Be patient."

Sidney explained that adults should, "Stick around in the background and be ready to assist. Try not to take over, and do what the youth ask you to do, and not what you think needs to be done."

Nigel commented, "Obviously help if you see a safety issue."

Leah added, "When you have a suggestion, can you be a mentor and teach us, rather than just tell us? Explanation is great, not dictation."

Kel explained that, "The youth are not going to attend things that they're not interested in. So let the youth decide what is at the Summit."

## Helpful Links

**The Florida Youth Council** - <https://floridayouthcouncil.org/> - This is the website for The Florida Youth Council.

**The Annual Youth Summit** - <https://floridayouthcouncil.org/summit/> - This page houses information about the Annual Youth Summit, including event registration.

**YouthMove** - <https://youthmovenational.org/> - Youth MOVE National is a youth-driven, chapter-based organization dedicated to uniting the voices of youth nationwide.

**Youth Engagement Guidance: Strategies, Tools, and Tips for Supportive and Meaningful Youth Engagement in Federal Government-Sponsored Meetings and Events** - <https://library.samhsa.gov/product/youth-engagement-guidance/sma16-4985> - This manual offers guidance on how to engage youth during government-sponsored events and meetings. It includes resources to support youth services, youth development, youth leadership, civic engagement, and youth organizing.

**Transitions ACR Creating and Sustaining Youth Advisory Boards Toolkit** - <https://www.umassmed.edu/TransitionsACR/resources/youth-council-toolkit/> - This toolkit is designed to assist organizations in developing and sustaining Youth Advisory Boards (YABs) for youth and young adults (ages 14-30).

**New Guidelines: Effective Youth Engagement Practices** - <https://gmhan.org/news/youth-engagement-guidelines> - These guidelines were formed in collaboration with 80 young people from 22 countries across the globe, all of whom have lived experience of mental health. They outline best practice, and give a true sense of what young people value in their engagement.

**Youth Prevention Resource Center Event Planning Guide** - <https://www.prevention.org/Resources/2d6b9b5e-c306-462a-88f9-be749cb3f656/YPRC%20Event%20Planning%20Guide.pdf> - This guide was developed to assist in *planning and implementing an event* through your peer leadership group activities.

**How to Hold a Youth Summit Planning Guide** - <https://thork.people.uic.edu/fair/HowtoHoldaYouthSummit.pdf> - This resource is part of Search Institute's national Healthy Communities • Healthy Youth (HC • HY) initiative, which seeks to motivate and equip communities across the country to build assets for youth.



The CAFÉ TA Center

[cafetacenter.net](http://cafetacenter.net)

855-CAFÉ-TAC



The Florida Youth Council

[floridayouthcouncil.org](http://floridayouthcouncil.org)

888-309-CAFÉ



The Family Café

[familycafe.net](http://familycafe.net)

888-309-CAFÉ

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