

LEADERSHIP

INTRODUCTION

It is no surprise the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) has emphasized youth leadership development in its programming. Over the past decade, research shows that youth leadership development contributes greatly to the positive development of young people and their communities.

- Leadership development increases young people's awareness of their strengths and limitations, helps establish personal and vocational goals, and builds the self-confidence and motivation needed to achieve these goals;
- It builds skills needed for success in today's world, such as goal-setting, problem-solving and sound decision-making;
- It solves community problems and enhances civic participation;
- Youth demonstrate higher career aspirations, increased self-esteem, and improved high school completion rates;
- Leadership development promotes direct benefits for adults, organizations and communities, through stronger connections to young people in the community;
- It increases greater understanding of the problems facing other youth, and fresh perspectives for how to address these problems;
- Young people re-energize adults and counteract negative stereotypes of youth when they are successfully engaged in leadership within their communities.

Since 2007, DYCD has supported youth leadership efforts with its Teen ACTION ("ACTION" is an acronym for Achieving Change Together In Our Neighborhoods) and Youth Councils funded as part of Beacon and Cornerstone programs. More recently, youth leadership development was included as a requirement for middle school programs as part of the 2008 OST RFP and the SONYC expansion.

Building on that rich history and in response to requests from SONYC providers, COMPASS's Program Quality and Innovation (PQI) unit, Development Without Limits (DWL) and DYCD's program leadership partnered to create a framework for the youth leadership activity requirement. This framework was designed to answer the question: "What is youth leadership development?"

The purpose of the framework is to promote a common language for youth leadership development and to help providers map out and design quality youth leadership programming. As you will see, we have not provided a definition of youth leadership because we believe providers, along with young people, should define their approach to youth leadership. Instead, we have identified and defined components and supports and provided an overview of what we believe is needed for youth leadership development.

LEADERSHIP

FRAMEWORK HIGHLIGHTS

The framework consists of three main components: skills, action, and reflection, all of which need a supportive environment to succeed:

SKILLS In order for youth leadership to happen, providers must be intentional about focusing on key leadership skills (e.g., social and emotional intelligence, collaboration and communication skills). Don't assume youth will develop leadership skills just by placing them in a leader position. Youth leadership is for all youth. Focusing on key leadership skills is fundamental to the belief that leaders can be made.

ACTION Young people should *learn* leadership by *doing* leadership – not by doing worksheets. Don't recreate the wheel: use service-learning, civic engagement, youth councils, experiential learning, etc. to ensure youth are actively learning leadership. Let's have young people be leaders today, not just in the future.

REFLECTION Reflection is a critical part of youth leadership. Programs should allow young people to look back on, think critically about, and learn from their experience or action.

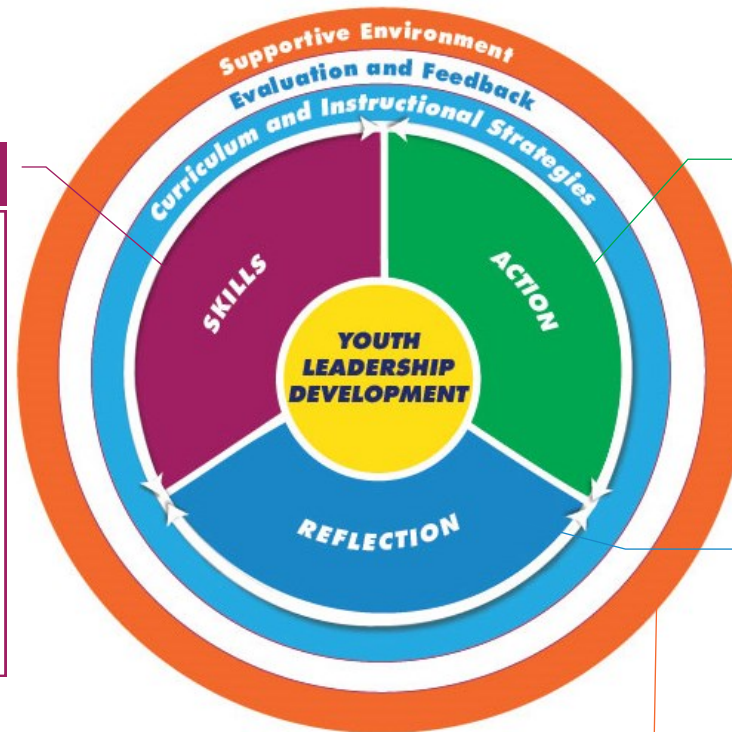
SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT In order for youth to assume leadership roles, providers must create a supportive and safe environment for youth leadership development. Are you ready for youth leaders?

TIPS

- The framework is just a guide and should be used to help design and map out youth leadership programming.
- Start off by asking yourselves how you (1) intentionally focus on key leadership skills; (2) design programming where young people can *learn* by *doing* leadership; (3) provide opportunities for participants and staff to reflect; and (4) create the right environmental conditions for leadership development.
- Reflect on what you currently do and where you can make adjustments to enhance existing programming. We'll be releasing a provider assessment tool in mid-November as part of our youth leadership training series.
- Identify where you might need additional support or training. We have technical assistance providers and a training series starting in November; take advantage of them.

For more information about youth leadership opportunities, please contact Krystal Cason, Child & Youth Development Content Specialist, COMPASS at kcason@dycd.nyc.edu.

WHAT IS YOUTH LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT?



FOCUS ON KEY LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Social and Emotional

Intelligence: Self-awareness (understanding one's strengths and weaknesses), self-regulation (being in control over one's emotions), motivation (using inner drive to accomplish tasks), empathy (understanding different points of view) and social skills (relating well to others)

Collaboration: Quality relationships with peers and adults, team building, problem solving, conflict resolution, planning and decision-making

Communication: Public speaking/writing and presentation skills

LEARN BY DOING LEADERSHIP

Motivate: Role modeling, motivating others and inspiring

Mastery: Skill mastery, persistence and ability to learn from mistakes and commitment

Engage school and/or community: Service learning, civic engagement, youth council, counselor or leader in training, etc.

REFLECT ON ACTION

Continuous: Ongoing component, happening before, during, and after an activity or action

Connection: Consider how feelings connect to action and connect action to ideas about how the world works

Challenge: Refine understanding, deepen learning, engage in critical thinking

Contextualize: Evaluate action, ensure action is appropriate and meaningful to the experiences of young people

Recognize accomplishments

Make new plans

CREATE THE RIGHT ENVIRONMENTAL CONDITIONS FOR LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Authentic opportunity: Youth voice and choice, participation on all levels with varied and progressive leadership roles, having the opportunity to give beyond oneself

Safe environment: physically safe, emotionally and psychologically safe, welcoming atmosphere, inclusive and diverse, and appropriate program space

Community building: Create opportunity for youth to feel part of a group

Mentor Access: youth-adult partnerships and relationships

Ask-listen-encourage: Ability of staff to carry out positive, purposeful interactions with youth

Reframing conflict: Role of staff in a conflict situation and ability of staff to turn a conflict situation into an opportunity for growth

The purpose of this framework is to promote a common language for youth leadership development and to assist providers in mapping out and designing the core components and supports that are needed for quality youth leadership programming.

CORE COMPONENTS

Skills

Leadership skills are essential for young people to feel satisfaction and contribute to their community. Youth leadership activities can offer young people the opportunity to develop their skills, work closely with others, share ideas and influence change. Such skills are fundamental to the belief that leaders can be made.

Action

Without action, young people cannot learn to be leaders. Motivating others, learning to master new skills, and persevering through challenges are critical steps to youth leadership development. Action can take on many forms but it should include the development, planning and implementation of a community based action project such as [service-learning](#), civic engagement, youth councils, etc. The aim is for young people to contribute to their community through solving problems and exercising their leadership skills.

Reflection

Reflection is a crucial part of youth leadership, which allows young people to look back on, think critically about, and learn from their experience or action. Reflection also allows everyone to hear another's perspective and provides opportunities to develop skills in thinking about and making moral and ethical judgments. Staff and young people can also use reflection to improve the quality of activities and experiences. Overall, reflection should be continuous, connected, challenging and contextualized ([The 4 C's of Reflection](#)). The process of reflection may include acknowledging and/or sharing of reactions, feelings, observations, and ideas about anything regarding the activity. Reflection can happen through writing, speaking, listening, reading, drawing, acting, and any other way you can imagine.

SUPPORTS

Curriculum and Instructional Strategies

In order to effectively address the three core components, it is critical to consider the design of the leadership curriculum and instructional strategies. The curriculum should intentionally include and identify the leadership skills, how the action and reflection components will be integrated into programming, and considerations and opportunities to create a supportive environment. Various practices or instructional strategies can also be used to support the core components: [active learning](#), [building community](#), [cooperative learning](#), [planning and reflection](#), [youth voice strategies](#), scaffolding for success, and [project-based learning](#).

Evaluation and Feedback

An important learning process for young people and staff is to evaluate and illicit feedback. Evaluations can focus on the usefulness of the program, the relevance of the activity, suggestions for changes, and identify ways in which participants might apply what they learned. Staff and community members involved in the program can also give (and receive) constructive feedback regarding skills, how individuals are perceived, and their effectiveness as leaders. It is important that an atmosphere of trust and acceptance be developed so that participants are comfortable with both giving and receiving feedback (Doherty, 2003).

Supportive Environments

Young people can become leaders when they feel safe and supported. This can be conceptualized as having genuine opportunities for youth to participate and lead, feeling safe both physically and emotionally, being exposed to settings where youth can learn and engage new content, build skills, and develop and have access to supportive staff who can carry out positive, purposeful interactions ([ask-listen-encourage](#)), turn a conflict situation into an opportunity for growth ([reframing conflict](#)), and help guide a young person through their leadership journey.