

Youth-Adult Partnerships: Are You There Yet?



How to Evaluate Your 4-H Youth Development Program

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Introduction

The recent emphasis in the youth development field is the focus on youth-adult partnerships. Now more than ever, young people are being considered for their potential service to community endeavors. However, some unanswered questions remain. For example, what constitutes a true youth-adult partnership? What characteristics are prevalent among a youth-adult partnership? Is a partnership the most ideal form of a youth-adult relationship for a particular 4-H youth development program or project?

Purpose

The purpose of this publication is to provide 4-H youth development agents and other youth development professionals with an assessment tool (i.e., *Involvement and Interaction Rating Scale*) that evaluates the perceptions and experiences of youth and adults working together on community projects. Specifically, the tool assesses youth involvement, adult involvement, and youth-adult interaction to determine the appropriate category of a group's youth-adult relationship, based on the *Continuum of Youth-Adult Relationships*. The scale also serves as a means for participants to evaluate their own experiences, which may be helpful in determining program quality and focusing on areas that need improvement.

A Look at Youth-Adult Relationships

Before assessing the quality of a youth-adult relationship, youth development professionals (i.e., county 4-H youth development agents) need to find out where their group is in terms of the type of youth-adult relationship. Many groups may see themselves as a youth-adult partnership, but this may not be the case. The *Continuum of Youth-Adult Relationships* model specifically targets community efforts that involve youth and adult participation. This model includes five key categories to identify groups consisting of varied levels of youth and adult involvement. Each category is a type of relationship where a youth-adult group may exist. The categories on the *Continuum of Youth-Adult Relationships* include: Adult-Centered Leadership, Adult-Led Collaboration, Youth-Adult Partnership, Youth-Led Collaboration, and Youth-Centered Leadership. The categories are described in detail on page 2.

The continuum focuses on individual choices and enables organizations to exist at any point depending on the level of engagement of youth and adults. The model does not highlight any one relationship as being superior to another. All youth-adult relationships, when perceived as positive, can be beneficial to the development of young people. Indeed, youth can benefit from being involved in youth-adult relationships from either category. Thus, 4-H agents and other youth development professionals must be deliberate in the type of youth-adult relationship they want. The *Involvement and Interaction Rating Scale* affords the opportunity to assess where group members perceive their youth-adult relationship along the continuum.

Continuum of Youth-Adult Relationships

Categories	Descriptions
Adult-Centered Leadership	Consists of programs that are conceived and driven completely by adults, without employing any youth decision making.
Adult-Led Collaboration	Programs or situations where adults provide guidance for youth, but youth have some input in decision making, albeit limited by adults' discretion.
Youth-Adult Partnership	Relationship where a partnership is achieved between youth and adults. Youth and adult participants have equal chances in utilizing skills, decision making, mutual learning, and independently carrying out tasks to reach common goals.
Youth-Led Collaborations	Youth primarily develop the ideas and make decisions while adults typically provide assistance when needed.
Youth-Centered Leadership	Includes programs or activities led exclusively by youth, with little or no adult involvement.

Using the *Involvement and Interaction Rating Scale*

The *Involvement and Interaction Rating Scale*, described in Appendix A and provided in Appendix B, is used as an assessment tool to measure youth and adult perceptions of their experiences working together, based on three areas, or constructs (i.e., youth involvement, adult involvement, youth-adult interaction). The 10-point scale ranges from: 1 to 2 (very poor); 3 to 4 (poor); 5 to 6 (fair); 7 to 8 (good); and 9 to 10 (excellent). However, to determine whether the total ratings are high or low, the scale can be interpreted as follows: 1 to 5 = low; 6 to 10 = high. The 26-item rating scale includes bipolar (i.e., positive and negative) statements to measure participants' perceptions of their experiences. A high rating of youth involvement indicates youth demonstrating high levels of youth voice and decision making, and working primarily with their peers to carry out a task (e.g., organizing an event, collecting signatures for a petition) related to the project. A high rating of adult involvement entails only adults working together in a given situation (e.g., raising funds or handling other administrative duties). Adult involvement utilizes items that measure adults' support through their commitment to nurturing youth voice and decision making and their dedication to the project. A high rating of youth-adult interaction indicates that youth and adults work collectively on one or more components of a project, fully exercising an equal opportunity to utilize decision making and other

leadership skills. High youth-adult interaction would also reflect mutual respect for one another.

County 4-H agents and other youth development professionals can use this instrument to assess where their group actually is on the *Continuum of Youth-Adult Relationships*, by examining the level of youth involvement, adult involvement and youth-adult interaction among the group. The levels of involvement and interaction will help determine the status of a group (e.g., Is my group a true partnership or an Adult-Led Collaboration?). Identical forms of the rating scale are given to youth and adult participants, although 4-H educators may want to color code the surveys. For example, surveys could be copied on green paper for youth and white for adults.

Conclusion

Empowering participants to assess their experiences provides 4-H youth development agents, youth, and adult volunteers with pertinent information that is useful to determine what may be necessary to improve or maintain quality within youth-adult relationships. The *Involvement and Interaction Rating Scale* provides a meaningful and practical tool that enables those providing youth services to move their programs closer to the type of youth-adult relationship they want and to identify where the group members believe they are. Moreover, the scale provides practical advice on how to move to another category on the continuum, if desired.

Appendix A

Instructions for Using the *Involvement and Interaction Rating Scale*

You are finally on your way to getting youth and adults to work together on community projects or within a youth development program. But is the quality of the relationship at a high, mediocre, or low level? What can be done about this? The first thing is to determine what type of relationship exists among the group by permitting the participants to rate their own experiences. Is it truly a Youth-Adult Partnership? The next step would then be for the 4-H agent or any other evaluator to determine whether these experiences are positive or negative, thus offering some sense as to what route to take in order to maintain quality or improve the situation of the group. Please see the steps below.

Steps to Using the *Involvement and Interaction Rating Scale*

- 1. Have the group members complete the *Involvement and Interaction Rating Scale*.** This should take place after the group has been working together for a while (i.e., near the middle of the project/program). Waiting until the middle of the program would give the group opportunities to gather some varied experiences about working together. Administering the scale too soon would not allow the participants to make an accurate assessment of their perceptions or experiences.
- 2. Compute mean scores (averages) to determine whether participants have positive (high) or negative (low) perceptions towards youth involvement, adult involvement, and youth-adult interaction.** The items on the scale are grouped accordingly. The scale ranges from 1 (very poor/negative) to 10 (excellent/very positive), determining whether group members have positive or negative perceptions toward each of the three areas (i.e., youth involvement, adult involvement, youth-adult interaction). You can have the group members calculate their own averages. An average score for each category between 1 and 5.4 would be classified as “low,” while scores between 5.5 and 10 would be classified as “high.”
- 3. For each group of items (“youth involvement” is one group of items, “adult involvement” is another group of items, and “youth-adult interaction” is another), take the averages of each group member, add the average numbers (of each group member) together, and then divide this number by the total number of group members.** You should have three separate averages for each group of items. This will give you an overall group average for youth involvement, adult involvement, and youth-adult interaction. Compare this average to the involvement and interaction table (page 4) to see how the group best classifies itself.
- 4. Determine whether there are “low” or “high” levels of youth involvement, adult involvement, and youth-adult interaction among the group.** Remember, an average between 1 and 5.4 would be considered “low” (↓), while 5.5 or higher would be considered “high” (↑).
- 5. Looking at the “Description” column in Table 1 on page 4, identify the group’s type of youth-adult relationship.** You should also refer back to the categories and descriptions of the *Continuum of Youth-Adult Relationships* on page 2 for more detailed information on the types of relationships. This is important if you want to understand the current status of your group and whether you want the group to be in a more appropriate category based on its purpose. For example, your group may be an Adult-Led Collaboration, but you want to gradually move them to a Youth-Adult Partnership or a Youth-Led Collaboration. Using this measure will provide you with a way to determine what needs to be put in place for the group to move in that direction.

Table 1. Level of Youth Involvement, Adult Involvement, and Youth-Adult Interaction existing among Youth-Adult Relationships.

Youth Involvement	Adult Involvement	Youth-Adult Interaction	Description
↑	↑	↑	Youth-Adult Partnership – High levels of youth involvement, adult involvement, and interaction are present.
↑	↓	↑	Youth-Led Collaboration – Youth take the lead with little adult direction. Adults become motivated when interacting with youth.
↓	↑	↑	Adult-Led Collaboration – Adults take the lead, while youth begin as only participants. Youth become engaged when interacting with adults on activities.
↑	↓	↓	Youth-Centered Leadership – High youth participation is prevalent, with little or no involvement/interest from adults.
↓	↑	↓	Adult-Centered Leadership – There is little involvement (decision making) or interaction from youth; if involved, youth may serve only as passive participants.
↑	↑	↓	Participatory Separation - This indicates that youth and adults both display high levels of involvement/interest, but participants are good at working on separate tasks and not as effective when working together.
↓	↓	↑	Social Participant Interaction – This situation occurs when one person may conceive of an idea or plan a program. During the beginning stages, there is no interest except for that of the organizer. However, as the idea or program develops, youth and adults come together to work/interact together.
↓	↓	↓	Youth-Adult Isolation – There is no interest in partnering and little, if any, progress is achieved. When this occurs, any decision to pursue a partnership should be seriously reconsidered.

Note. ↓ (1-5) = Low; ↑ (6-10) = High

Example:

Sarah is a 4-H agent who is working with a group of youth and adults who have come together to address environmental issues. The group has been working together for about four months, meeting every other Saturday. Things are going along well, but Sarah wants to have a more accurate assessment of what is going on among the group. She feels confident that the group is a partnership but is not 100 percent sure, due to some issues that often arise between the youth and adults (e.g., occasional indecisiveness). To have a more precise assessment, she administered the *Involvement and Interaction Rating Scale* (Appendix B) to the youth and adults. This will determine what category along the *Continuum of Youth-Adult Relationships* it best fit the group.

Once the participants have all completed the rating scale, Sarah should then compute a mean score for the groups' perceptions towards youth involvement, adult involvement, and youth-adult interaction. The rating scale ranges from 1 (very poor) to 10 (excellent). Calculating a mean for each participant and then taking the overall mean of the constructs (from all participants) can be done by plugging the numbers into an Excel file or an SPSS data editor.

For example, in measuring the level of adult involvement (which consists of eight items on the rating scale), Sarah discovered the information outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Participants' Perceptions of Adult Involvement.

Name of Partners	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5	Item 6	Item 7	Item 8	Mean per person
Mike	5	10	9	8	8	7	6	7	7.5
Sue	7	7	7	8	9	10	10	6	8
Dave	7	9	9	10	5	7	6	6	7.38
Mary	5	7	8	9	9	8	7	9	7.75
Pete	4	7	8	7	7	6	9	3	6.38
Joan	5	8	7	6	9	9	8	7	7.38
Gus	9	9	9	10	8	8	10	7	8.75
Helen	10	9	9	8	8	10	8	7	8.63

Overall mean of all participants' perceptions of adult involvement = 7.72.

Here, all of the group members were fairly positive towards their experiences, with the lowest (Pete) having an average of 6.38. The group's overall rating of adult involvement is fairly high at 7.72. This indicates that the participants (youth and adults) generally felt as though the level of adult involvement was positive. Now suppose the group rated youth involvement and youth-adult interaction as high (e.g., youth involvement = 8.1, youth-adult interaction = 9.5); then it would be fair to say that the group is, or at least has close resemblance to, a genuine youth-adult partnership. Table 1 can be used to identify the type of relationship for a group, based on the level of involvement and interaction. The first five descriptions are categories along the *Continuum of Youth-Adult Relationships*. This is useful in helping Sarah identify the type of relationship that best describes her group. The last three descriptions are forms of interaction that are clearly less desirable if a group wants to achieve higher levels of youth-adult partnering.

Sarah has discovered that the youth and adults perceive high (positive) levels of youth involvement, adult involvement, and youth-adult interaction among the group. She is pleased with this status! However, if this had been a relationship that she was not happy with, the results of the group members' responses would have given some indication as to what component(s) of the relationship needs improvement (whether more motivation for youth or adult involvement or more emphasis on youth-adult interaction.)

Appendix B

Involvement and Interaction Rating Scale

Involvement and Interaction Rating Scale

Please complete the following items. You DO NOT have to include your name. Your responses will be kept strictly confidential.

Project Location (City/Town) _____
_____ State _____ County _____

- 17-18
- 19-25
- 26 and over

1. You are (Check one):

- A Youth Participant
- An Adult Participant

2. How do you describe yourself?

- Asian
- Black/African-American
- Hispanic/Latino
- Native American
- White/European-American
- Other _____

3. What is your Gender (Check one)?

- Female
- Male

4. What is your age group (Check one)?

- 13-14
- 15-16

5. Please select one that best describes the area in which you live.

- Rural/Farm
- Suburban
- Urban/City
- Other _____

6. Is this your first time participating in a project that involves youth and adults working together (Check one)?

- Yes
- No (If not, what other project(s) have you worked on that involved youth and adults?)

Adult Involvement Indicators

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Adults display a sense of wanting to control youth.											Adults display a willingness to accept and nurture youth leadership.
Adults never listen to the suggestions of youth.											Adults always listen to the suggestions of youth.
Adults always take over everything when working on project activities.											Adults never totally take over everything when working on project activities.
Adults do not learn new skills from one another.											Adults learn new skills from one another.
Adults never take the ideas of youth seriously.											Adults always take the ideas of youth seriously.
Adults command youth to follow the directions of adults.											Adults encourage youth to come up with their own ideas.
Adults have no interest in being involved with this project.											Adults are very excited about being involved with this project.
Adults are not very concerned with community change.											Adults are very concerned with community change.

Youth-Adult Interaction Indicators

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
There is arguing/tension among youth and adults.											Youth and adults get along well together.
Youth appear uneasy and intimidated by adults.											Youth seem comfortable working with adults.
Adults appear uneasy and afraid of youth.											Adults seem comfortable working with youth.
Adults do not consult with youth on project activities at all.											Adults actively and consistently consult with youth on project activities.
Adults provide little or no direction and mentoring for youth.											Adults provide direction and mentoring for youth.
Youth and adults rarely agree with one another.											Youth and adults often agree on most decisions.
Youth and adults work separately on project tasks.											Youth and adults work together as partners on project tasks.
Youth and adults learn little from one another.											Youth and adults indicate mutual learning from one another.
Youth and adults rarely help one another develop new skills.											Youth and adults frequently help one another develop new skills.
Youth and adults never engage in respectful conversations.											Youth and adults always engage in respectful conversations.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR TIME.

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