

YOUTH ACTION TOOLKIT.



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Lesson One: Your Place in the Work

Topic 1: Welcome!

Hey there! If you're reading this, it's because you're a young person who cares about people experiencing homelessness. Not only that, you care enough to do something about it! Everyone has their own stories and pathways into this work, and you're no different. Whether you're a part of a youth action board (YAB) or an individual who wants our housing systems to function better, this work needs you - and this toolkit is designed to help set you up for success.

Throughout the next four lessons, we'll get some info on advocacy, get an overview of homelessness in the US, and explore a few obstacles to look out for. Then, we'll go over a few pointers on how to establish and run a YAB. This toolkit may not have all the answers, but we hope to join you in asking the big questions. What does it mean to advocate for yourself while advocating for your community? What does it

mean to be a young activist doing work that has historically been led by older people?

Whether you want to advocate against anti-camping ordinances in your community or arrange a monthly outreach event (or anything in between), there's a way for you to get involved. There are so many reasons to get involved in advocacy – helping your community, building your skills, or just being a part of something larger than yourself. Everyone brings their own strengths and skills to this work, and this toolkit is designed to help recognize and uplift those strengths.

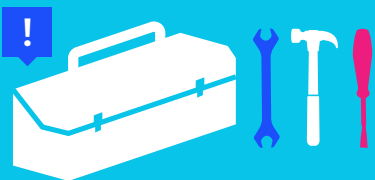
It's clear that our systems work better when they are informed by the people they impact – and you don't need anything to start but yourself. **Let's get to work.**

A note about language

We'll be using the term "young person" quite a bit throughout this toolkit. What defines "young" or "youth" changes from place to place. Many service providers would use the traditional age range of transitional-aged youth from ages 18-24. However, we recognize that aging out has a harmful tradition in the context of youth services, and we are not in the business of perpetuating that tradition or excluding anyone from our definition. **If you identify as a youth advocate, this is a tool for you.**

Similarly, we may use the term "older adults" or "collaborative partners" – these terms also do not have an age range, but are meant to indicate non-youth advocates.

The term "young people" may also be used as shorthand for "young people with lived experience of homelessness." We recognize the limitations of these terms and strive to keep learning and finding adequate language.



A note about how to use this toolkit:

The first three lessons are meant to be used by any young person interested in homelessness advocacy. The fourth lesson will introduce tools to be used by groups of youth advocates, or youth action boards.

TOPIC 2: ACTIVISM



Advocacy, in short, is the active support of an idea or cause. It can take many forms, ranging from basic education about the importance of an issue to direct lobbying about a specific piece of legislation. Advocacy can include a variety of activities, such as **meetings, letters, phone calls, site visits, mobilizing others, and more.** The target audience for advocacy efforts is also wide-ranging. Federal, state, and local policymakers and other key decision makers all can be targets of advocacy.

Overall, the people who have made the big decisions about this issue have been people who have not experienced homelessness. However, for as long as homelessness has existed, people who have lived through it have advocated for systems and services that serve them and their communities more completely.

Have you ever heard the phrase, **“Nothing About Us Without Us”?**

It originates from Central European political traditions, and the phrase was coined in English by the disability rights movement in the 90’s. It’s used to indicate that no policy should be decided without meaningful and direct

participation of members of the group affected by that policy. That sentiment is at the center of the way we look at youth advocacy. Lived experience of an issue is expertise on that issue. Period.

Historically, the role of young people with lived experience of homelessness has been limited to telling stories for fundraising purposes. While telling your story in the way you want to can be a powerful and positive experience, this tradition can often be exploitative – especially without adequate compensation for time and effort. Like all advocates, your experiences inform who you are in the work and give you perspective. But when you’re not paid or asked about your opinions, this practice can be tokenizing. It’s important to be in touch with where you come from and as open as you want to be, but it’s also about expanding the role young people can play in homelessness advocacy. This can mean informing policy, drafting community plans, and coming into positions of leadership.

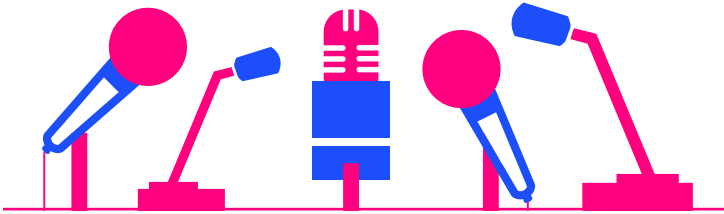
People who have experienced homelessness have a long history of advocating for their communities using different mediums, including



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activism. Activism is the combination of art and activism, focusing on how art can be used for political action, and how political action can be poetic and creative. It uses creativity to raise awareness, mobilize, and inspire the people looking at it. It can be an effective and powerful way to get a point across.

TOPIC 3: COMMUNICATION



Learning how to communicate your point effectively is an essential part of any kind of advocacy. No matter your skill set, some forms of communication will be required of you – whether that’s through phone, email, text, blogging, social media, etc. It is important to note that there are many ways to communicate. Below you will find a few tips and tricks specifically about public speaking, but their lessons can be applied across the board.

✓ PUBLIC SPEAKING TIPS & TRICKS

Give the audience your full attention.

- Try to **block out any distractions** you may have. For example, silence your phone or put it in a trusted location somewhere other than the space you and your audience will occupy.
- It is okay to take a few deep breaths before speaking.

Pace yourself.

- Remember, public speaking is not a race but rather a marathon! **It is okay to take your time** while also maintaining a vibrant energy in order to keep your audience engaged.



✗ WHAT TO AVOID:

Fillers, stuttering, unnecessary pauses, monotony.

- Remember, **it is okay to take a deep breath** to collect your thoughts and continue at a pace that is comfortable for you.

Responding to problematic/patronizing responses.

- **Identify allies beforehand** who can have your back, either in the larger group setting or in a smaller group afterwards
- If your speaking opportunity allows it, be prepared to utilize the audience in your response. If a question or comment makes you uncomfortable, it is completely fine to say **“I’d rather not respond to that,”** or “would anyone else like to respond to this statement?”

Telling a story isn't necessarily telling your story.

- Even if you are sharing parts of your experience, it's not necessary for the audience to have all the information. **Focus more on your vision** for the future.

Posture matters.

- Try not to slump if you are able. Remember that **body language is a form of nonverbal communication.**

Make Eye Contact.

- Eye contact is a part of posture. If you are speaking directly to someone, try to **look at them in their eyes as much as possible.** If you are speaking to a group, try to keep your head on a swivel (moving from one side to the other slowly).

There should always be a beginning, middle & end.

- **Organize your thoughts** in a way that is clear and concise.

Know your audience.

- Be clear on who you are speaking to and try to use language they can understand. The only way to accomplish your goal is if **the message reaches the people it needs to.**
- Be professional but **don't lose yourself** or your personality

Be prepared for questions and remarks.

- Leave yourself time at the end for people to ask any necessary questions. It may be helpful to **practice with friends beforehand.**

X WHAT TO AVOID:

Mitigating requests.

- In some cases, you may receive requests for opportunities that do not reflect your experience. Consider this a "choice point," or an opportunity for you to **suggest someone else who may be a better fit.** This is particularly important when considering speaking requests that are specific to race, ability status, gender identity, sexual orientation, etc.

What to do when you're asked to do something that may not feel right.

- Do not be afraid to **inform the requester** in the most respectful way possible that it does not feel comfortable for you. Be honest with yourself and remember that your physical well being, mental health, and values are a priority.

Be okay with saying “I don’t know.”

- **No need to fake it.** It’s much better to say you are unsure and follow up with more information than to provide the wrong information.

Accessibility & Inclusivity.

- Remember to **be open to diversity within your audience** in regard to any accessibility issues. Please be aware that not everyone can see, hear, move, or speak well or at all.
- Be prepared to ensure that the space the audience occupies is accessible.
- **Speak clearly** and be prepared to provide descriptive details of any visuals.
- Work with interpreters, translators, and/or CART (Computer-Aided Real-Time Captioning) writers.
- If using a microphone, ensure that ALDs (Assertive Listening Devices), hearing loops, and induction loops amplify sound from your microphone.
- **Keep in mind any audience members’ needs** that may not be obvious to the naked eye. For example, someone might need to take breaks at set times for insulin injections.
- Most importantly, **do not be afraid to check-in with registration** to get a better understanding of any accommodations that need to be implemented. Preparation is key!



Lesson Two: Homelessness Work 101

Topic 1: Intro to Homelessness Work

Homelessness is a huge and complicated problem, and it plays out differently everywhere. Here, we'll go over some of the national statistics, with a particular focus on how the most impacted groups are affected.

- Annually, one in 30 youth ages 13 to 17 and one in 10 young adults ages 18 to 24 endure some form of homelessness. LGBTQ youth have a 120% increased risk of experiencing homelessness compared to youth who identify as heterosexual and cisgender. Black-identified youth are also overrepresented, with an 83% increased risk of having experienced homelessness over youth of other races or ethnicities.
- Latinx youth make up 33% of 18- to 24-year-olds reporting homelessness.
- Black youth—especially young men aged 18 to 25—who identify as LGBTQ reported the highest rates of homelessness.
- Nearly one in four Black young men, ages 18 to 24, identifying as LGBTQ reported homelessness in the last 12 months, and this does not even include those who only reported couch-surfing. Such findings are consistent with the disparities that have been found among in-school suspensions, incarceration, and foster care placement.



ACRONYMS

The homelessness field loves acronyms, and they can be every disorienting as a new advocate in the work. Here are just a few you may hear!



CE: Coordinated Entry

An approach to allocating homelessness resources that allows service providers to make consistent decisions from available information to effectively connect people to housing and service interventions.

CoC: Continuum of Care

An integrated system of care that is designed to promote community-wide commitment to ending homelessness. CoCs make the big decisions about where local housing funding goes.

ES: Emergency Shelter

See definition below in "Housing Models."

HMIS: Homeless Management Information System

A local technology system designed to collect and track client data and the services they access. Each Continuum of Care (CoC) is responsible for selecting an HMIS system that meets HUD's standards of data collection and reporting.

NOFA: Notice of Funding Availability

PSH: Permanent Supportive Housing

See definition below in "Housing Models."

RRH: Rapid Re-Housing

See definition below in "Housing Models."

SRO: Single Room Occupancy

TAY: Transition Age Youth

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TAY VI-SPDAT: Transition Age Youth, Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool

The youth and young adult version of The Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT) was developed as an assessment tool to figure out how to prioritize limited housing resources. The main difference between the TAY-VI-SPDAT and the regular SPDAT is the TAY-SPDAT is designed to prioritize services for individuals 24 or younger.

TH: Transitional Housing

See definition below in "Housing Models."

TLP: Transitional Living Program

A specific housing program that is designed around transitional housing.

VI-SPDAT: Vulnerability Index - Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool

The Service Prioritization Decision Assistance Tool (SPDAT) was developed as an assessment tool for frontline workers at agencies that work with homeless clients to prioritize which of those clients should receive assistance first.

YAB: Youth Action/Advisory Board

Any advocacy group made of young people. For the purposes of this work, we use "YAB's" to mean any youth-identified group of people working on housing justice and homelessness advocacy.

YYA: Youth and Young Adults

HMIS: Homeless Management Information System

HMIS is a local technology system designed to collect and track client data and the services they access. Each Continuum of Care (CoC) is responsible for selecting an HMIS system that meets HUD's standards of data collection and reporting.

CATEGORIES

The Department of Housing and Urban Development

(HUD) is part of the executive branch of the U.S. federal government and is responsible for developing and executing policies related to housing.. The person who leads HUD, known as the Secretary, is appointed by the President and serves as a member of her cabinet. (See Topic 3: Government for more information).

HUD's definition of homelessness is focused on eligibility. Their definition allows CoC's to categorize people based on their experience with the intention of identifying the best housing strategy for the person experiencing homelessness.

Category 1

Literally Homeless

Category 2

Less than two weeks from having somewhere to go.

Category 3

Families and youth tenuously housed.

Category 4

Fleeing unsafe situations (including living with a trafficker or trading sex for a place to stay).

(potentially at risk of category 1 or 2 category 3 is considered homeless under other federal definitions but limited in amounts that can be served via CoC funding)

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 USC 11302)



defines children and youth as homeless if they "lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence," including sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or similar reasons; living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, or campgrounds due to lack of alternative accommodations; living in emergency or transitional shelters; and living in cars, parks, public spaces, abandoned buildings, substandard housing, bus or train stations, or similar places.

The Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Act (42 USC 5701 § 387)



defines "homeless youth" as individuals who are not more than 18 years of age if seeking shelter in a Basic Center Program, or not more than 21 years of age or less than 16 years of age if seeking services in a Transitional Living Program, and for whom it is not possible to live in a safe environment with a relative, and who have no other safe alternative living arrangement

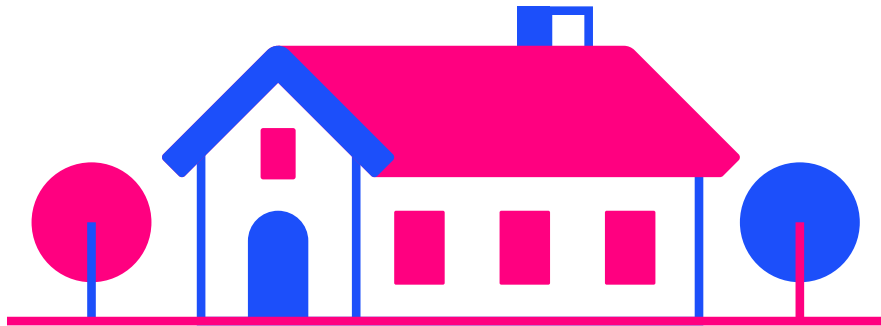
As you can see, homelessness definitions differ between HUD and McKinney-Vento. But why? Congress wanted HUD homelessness eligibility to be narrower because housing resources are finite and scarce, so communities should triage those resources to those whose housing crises are most immediate.

Congress wanted Education eligibility to be more expansive because public education is a right (not a finite material resource), and Congress wanted to ensure that even when a

young person's housing was unstable (for example: having to live with a friend or relative for economic reasons but able to stay safely for longer periods of time), their education would be stable.

We believe that housing should be viewed in the same light as education, a human right. However, Congress hasn't done the work to make this a reality. This supports the need for YABs and advocacy around this issue.

TOPIC 2: HOUSING MODELS



RAPID

Rapid Re-Housing (RRH)

The Rapid Re-Housing time frame is generally up to 24 months with the goal of achieving long-term housing stability. Rental assistance is structured with youth paying 30 percent of their income or less, allowing them to build savings as their income increases. Apartments should be appropriate for independent life beyond rental assistance. This can include a roommate in high rent areas or use of tenant-based rental assistance. Projects utilize a Housing First approach that provides immediate access to stable housing with low barriers to enter and maintain assistance. Housing First also offers voluntary but persistent services, with high expectations and high levels of engagement.

Rapid Re-Housing can often come with individualized case management. Services are intensive (daily or 2-3 times per week) and may continue even after youth have been re-housed. Case managers foster independent living skills (budgeting, cooking, basic maintenance, setting boundaries, etc.), support youth with lease obligations, and coordinate clinical support as needed. Case managers help mediate problems, and allow mistakes and learning in a supported environment.

HOST

Host Homes

Host homes offer a home-like, non-institutional environment rooted in the community. Most often, host homes are led by volunteers working with a program to open up a room in their house to a young person. Sometimes, the young person may be involved in things like meal cooking or caring for the house; other times, it can just be a room to sleep in. Host homes are flexible in nature and have been found to be

effective in urban, suburban, and rural settings. Host homes may be used as short-term emergency shelter allowing youth to remain in their community, as respite care combined with family engagement services, or as transitional housing. This model may work especially for unaccompanied youth who can build long-term and authentic relationships with caring adults.



TRANSITIONAL

Transitional Housing and Transitional Living

Transitional Housing and Transitional Living is time-limited (up to 21-24 months) supportive housing for youth who are not ready to live independently. They can look like having an individual or shared space. This model has a focus on developing life skills and staying in school or securing work. Services are customized and unique to each transitional housing program and youth population. Many programs are finding great success in implementing a housing first approach offering low barriers and voluntary services.

Programs use positive youth development focusing on skill-building, leadership and community involvement. Programs tend to have low or no-barriers to entry and to stay in the program. Many programs provide specialized services and community supports for vulnerable sub-groups, such as pregnant and parenting teens, youth with mental and behavioral health difficulties, youth fleeing domestic violence or trafficking situations, transition-aged youth, those leaving juvenile justice, or LGBTQ youth.

PERMANENT

Permanent Supportive Housing

Permanent Supportive Housing is generally thought of as non-time-limited supportive housing with specialized age and service appropriate services for people with complex needs. This housing model targets youth experiencing homelessness likely to have the highest service needs – including those with mental health needs, substance abuse disorders, trauma and or high medical needs. Permanent Supportive Housing uses a harm reduction and trauma-

informed care approach, with voluntary comprehensive support services to address the physical, socio-emotional, intellectual, and life skills development of youth on a pathway to independence. This model includes a “moving on” culture that encourages youth, when and if they can, to move to independent or adult permanent supportive housing. Youth pay 30 percent of their income in rent and hold the lease.

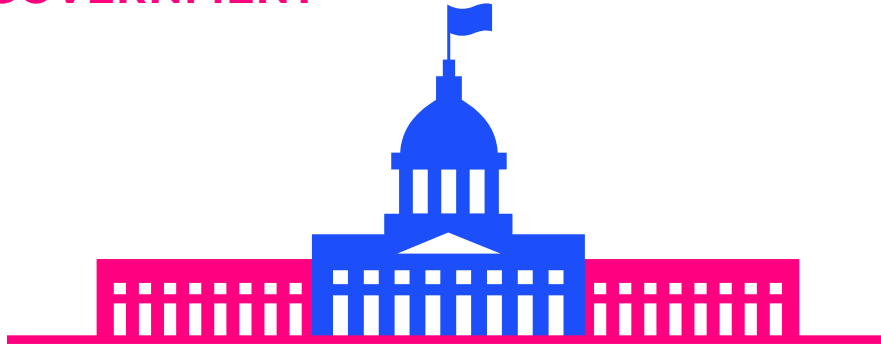
SHELTERS

Shelters

Shelters are a type of homeless service agency that provide temporary residence for homeless individuals and families. They are not intended to be a long-term solution for housing instability, but rather a solution in the interim between individuals getting public housing or going back into market

housing. Typically, shelters are centered around specific populations – children and families, victims of domestic violence, etc.

TOPIC 3: GOVERNMENT



In most cases, much of the funding for different housing programs comes from government funding. Sometimes, an analogy about a house is used to describe the **federal**, **state**, and **local** governments play in funding programs. The **federal** government, funding many, many programs, provides the foundation for the house, maybe some of the structure. Then, state governments come in and build the

walls and the roof. The work is a bit more detailed, but still general. Finally, local systems decide the details, like how to decorate the house, what to put inside of it, what plants to put outside, etc.

While it may sound like a silly analogy, it pretty accurately describes the fact that any program is the result of many different requirements coming

from many different funding streams. Additionally, many programs are funded by private groups as well, with their own thoughts and requirements for how a program is run. In this section, we'll go over a bit of how these public funding streams work. There's a lot to cover here, and we'll just scratch the surface!

The **federal** government is divided into three branches: **executive**, **judicial**, and **legislative**. Each branch has different powers, responsibilities, and requirements. Here, we'll go over their roles. Our focus will be on the federal powers at play, but there are many ways to learn about how your state and local systems work as well. Check out True Colors United's State Index on Youth Homelessness to see your state's efforts!



Executive

- President of the United States and her cabinet.
- The power of veto
- Can enforce budget requests, regulations, and guidances
- Appoints their cabinet, including the HUD Secretary



Judicial

- Judges and courts, circuit and federal.
- Deals with civil, federal, and criminal court cases
- Responsible for all major legislation change
- Examples: marriage equality, Brown versus Board of Education



Legislative

- House & Senate = Congress.
- The power of the purse (\$)
- Passes annual appropriations bills and other legislation
- Provides funding for local homelessness services continuums of care
- Sends funding bills to the president to sign



To get an idea of **how much money comes out of the federal government** for housing systems, here's a brief list:

\$2.513 billion

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants (FY2018)

\$2.243 billion

Continuum of Care (CoC)

- Applies to **HUD** annually for competitive funding in the **NOFA**
- Responsible for data collection (**HMIS**), measuring performance, operating coordinated entry.
- Emergency Solutions Grant (**ESG**): Formula grant to states for outreach, rapid re-housing, prevention

\$715 million

Vouchers

\$400 million

Private foundations, individual donors, often make up a significant part of organizational budgets

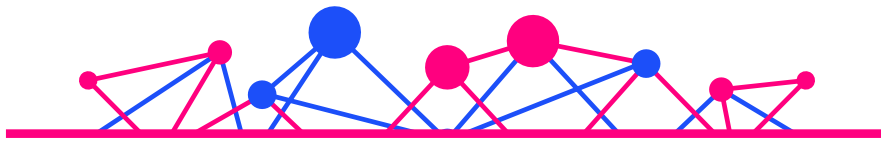


Whew!

Even though it seems like a lot of money, most people would say that it's not enough to address homelessness in the US. **Your voice matters** and it's the job of elected officials to listen to citizens and work to address their needs. Members of Congress are most interested in what their own constituents have to say, so try to focus your advocacy efforts on your own representatives and senators. If constituents do not tell federal

policymakers why it is important to make ending homelessness a federal priority, policymakers may never know they need to do so. Just as it is their job to listen to you, it is your job to **tell them what your community needs.**

TOPIC 4: INTERSECTING SYSTEMS



While **the homelessness system is huge and complicated**, it also interacts with other huge and complicated federal systems. Most often, we talk about other systems as they relate to inflow and outflow – in other words, how many people are exiting one system and entering into the homelessness system. For example, when a young person leaving the juvenile justice system or child welfare system doesn't have a solid exit plan, that can too often lead to

experiences of housing instability. So how can we figure out how to make that not happen anymore? It requires communication and collaboration between systems, as well as the expertise of people who have lived experiences with multiple systems, so decision-makers can have a more full idea of how these systems interact.



Lesson Three: Overcoming Potential Barriers

Topic 1: Adulthood & Tokenism

What is Adulthood?

It is important to note that **adulthood** refers to the power adults have over youth. It is the belief that adults know more about what youth need than youth themselves and that youth are inexperienced, ignorant, or troublesome. It is the systematic discrimination and prejudice against young people solely based on their age. **Adulthood** can manifest as behaviors and attitudes based on the assumption that adults are better than young people and ultimately know what is best for young people in addition to feeling entitled to act upon young people without their agreement.

Adulthood doesn't just happen on an interpersonal level, it also happens on a systems level - that means that prejudiced behaviors against young people are a part of the foundation of youth services.

Signifiers of Adulthood

Adulthood can come in many shapes and forms, both verbal and non-verbal. Here are a few examples of ways it can show up:

"I know what's best because I am the adult, you are the child."

"You'll understand when..."

"Because I said so."

"Wow! You're so smart for your age."

"You have no choice in the matter because I am the adult".

Not being invited to the table about decisions that directly impact you and other young people.

Realizing that adults are limiting what you can and cannot contribute in terms of your voice being heard.

Tokenism

The practice of doing something only to prevent criticism and give the appearance that young people are being treated fairly.

Example: One person cannot represent many. A young person should not be considered 'the youth voice' at the table. It should be acknowledged that everyone at the table brings different perspectives to the issue.

Remember, internalized adulthood can manifest in various ways. Understand you have value even if you have been conditioned out of it.

Ways to Address Tokenism

Do not be afraid to voice your concerns and/or discomfort.

Remember, your values, beliefs, and attitudes are all valid. What you say matters.

It is okay to disagree with adults and/or not to carry the same beliefs that they project.

Example: "I respectfully disagree and here is why..."

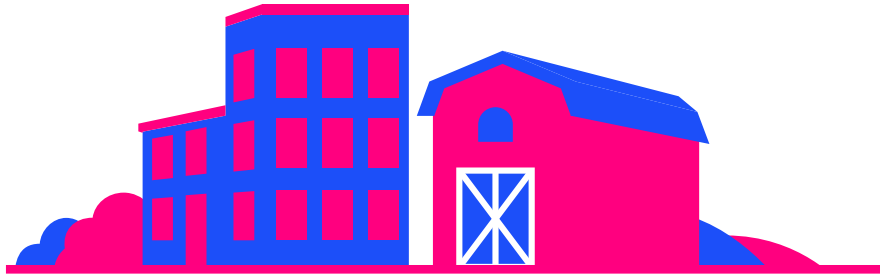
Connect with other young people about what you've been experiencing.

This can help with processing internalized adulthood and create a collective sense of knowing that you are not alone.

Know that your voice and what you say has power.

Create spaces with other young people to create and implement change as it relates to adulthood.

TOPIC 2: REGIONAL CHALLENGES



When building youth power on a community level, the challenges can vary depending on where you are. In this section, we'll cover a few considerations for youth activism in both rural and urban areas.

Rural

Communication and Transportation

One of the biggest challenges in a lot of rural areas is access to communication and/or transportation. Many young people don't have access to wifi or reliable cell phone service. A few tips:

Be open to having flexible meeting times allowing folks more opportunity to engage.

If possible, work with local community entities (churches, libraries, businesses) to host meetings.

Record meetings and share with all members.

Utilize a shared drive that people can access as they see fit.

Be flexible with people's ability to attend meetings. There are so many things that can inhibit people from being involved in the ways that they want to (wifi access, phone access, transportation) it's important to assume best intent.

Raising awareness around the issue in rural areas

Consider who are the "champions, challengers, and changers" in the area.

Champions are proponents of your mission. Most likely to support the urgency around solving the issue of youth homelessness and most encouraging of collaboration with

young people with lived experience.

Challengers are people who do not understand the need to prioritize youth homelessness. They may be supportive of ending homelessness overall but think that youth are not a priority.

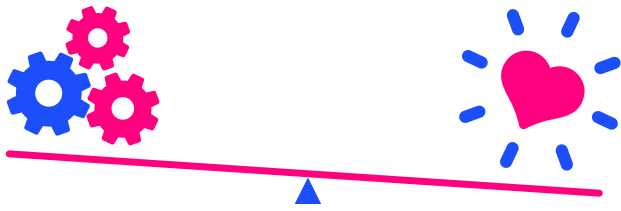
Changers are people who are somewhat middle of the road. Also, may be supportive of ending youth homelessness but may not agree that collaborating with young people is the way to get there.

Work with champions to develop a strategy to win over changers and challengers!

Urban

The experience of homelessness in urban areas comes with its own set of particular challenges. One main challenge is criminalization and policing. Often, law enforcement makes the lives of unhoused people difficult by harassing them and using anti-camping ordinances to confiscate survival tools, tents, etc. Cities often have more resources than rural areas, but that can also mean that those resources are more impacted – meaning that people sleeping outside are often told to shuffle around without the promise of getting any real, long-term housing support.

TOPIC 3: WORK LIFE BALANCE



What is Self Care?

Self Care can refer to a variety of actions that individuals take to tend to their mental, physical, and emotional well-being in a way that activates your best self. In addition to tending to your mental, physical, and emotional well-being, one can look at Self Care through the lens of taking care and honoring your body, mind, and spirit. One of the most beautiful things about Self Care is that it is individualized based on who you are as a person. Self Care can look and feel like different things depending on your interests and how you navigate within the world.

Self Care is a very active and powerful tool and practice to regain the strength to continue to lead and engage in meaningful work.

Why Self Care?

It can be easy to neglect taking care ourselves. Oftentimes, we can become too consumed in the work we're doing and may begin to develop feelings of stress and anxiety. Many may experience feelings of, "If I am

Self Care helps to prevent burnout:

Self Care can reduce the negative effects of stress, can help you refocus, and prevents countertransference. So many of us have been to the point where the feeling of 'burning out' challenges you to push your capacity to get things done to the point where you can't take it anymore. This can ultimately lead up to you giving up and or losing hope. Practicing Self Care can help prevent you from experiencing that.

Self Care helps you to differentiate between your identity as an advocate and all of your other identities:

Self Care allows you the space to step back when it is needed to ensure that you are processing and understanding how you are feeling. It is important to keep that chain of communication open with your colleagues when you feel that it is necessary to step back.

Self Care helps you to advocate for yourself in terms of recognizing your self-value:

Advocating for yourself can look a number of ways, from taking personal time to affirming your power and expertise in this work. Negotiating pay may be a part of that conversation! Don't be afraid to put your number out first and ask for more than what you want. Be kind yet firm, research common pay/averages, and remember to ask for advice from your peers.

Self Care can help keep a balance between professionalism and your personal life:

It is important to keep personal issues separate from the work you are trying to achieve. It is crucial to be present and aware of how and when the two might intertwine. Self Care can help to prevent and keep a distinct separation between the two. Remaining professional allows you to be conscious of decision-making and how much of yourself you can contribute to the conversation.

Practicing Self Care can help you to remember that you are a dynamic individual who has various interests and passions that don't necessarily overlap with this kind of work.

Self Care allows for your door to stay open:

It is important to note that the work that you engage in will require you to have tough conversations, instances that make you uncomfortable, and maybe even moments where you think, "Why does this matter?" Self Care will allow for you to be your best self for the people you are advocating for and working alongside. Allowing your door to stay open means that you are not only taking care of yourself but that you have the capacity to help and assist those you work with.

Personal Examples of Self Care from members of the National Youth Forum on Homelessness:

- Allowing myself to not always be the "YES! Person." It's okay to say no and express your comfortability levels.
- Creating art can help to release any emotions and process what that looks like in addition to being able to communicate your thoughts! This can include painting, sketching, making music, writing poetry, photography, etc.
- Listening to music between meetings and during travel.
- Getting in touch with my non-activism interests. Dancing is always fun!
- Setting time aside to meditate and or practice Yoga.
- Going on walks.
- Cooking a home cooked meal!



Lesson Four: YAB Basics

Topic 1: Where to Begin

So, you want to start a youth action board (YAB) in your organization or community? Or are you already a member of a YAB but want to learn a few tips and tricks on how to make it the best it can be? In this lesson, we'll go over all the logistics—like space, governance, and how to keep people coming back. Most importantly, we'll talk about strategies on how your YAB can have its biggest impact on your community.

Where to Look

Recruitment for your YAB should primarily target young people with lived experience of homelessness. A great first place to start is with young people currently being served by local programs, as well as those who have recently transitioned out of services to self-sufficiency. This should be done with an equity lens, as well as with intentional outreach to those who are disproportionately impacted by youth homelessness. For clarity, it is not enough to have a racially or gender homogenous group of young people making decisions in your community, even if they all have lived experience of homelessness. It is also important to apply this equity lens to disability, HIV status, immigration status, etc. The ideal YAB membership is reflective of communities disparately impacted and disempowered locally.

Low-Barrier Entry

Forming a YAB is about building equity and creating collaboration opportunities for young people in the work to eliminate youth homelessness. With that goal, lived experience and genuine interest should be the only real qualifications. Of course, it's important for potential members to clearly understand the time commitment and workload, but it's just as important to not replicate professional barriers (e.g. formal education requirements, a resume, references that often keep those directly impacted away from decision-making tables).

Where to Have Meetings

When determining where to hold YAB meetings, it's important to prioritize ease of access and young people's sense of safety. A location's accessibility by public transportation and its ADA compliance are key

considerations, for example, but also consider that the presence of law enforcement or armed security may compromise the sense of safety among young people who have been justice-involved. Another consideration is that any of your YAB members may be parenting, so it's smart to proactively determine how to accommodate for that. Ideally, the location where your YAB meetings are held is a youth-centered space where not only accessibility and safety needs have been met, but also where young people are comfortable and see themselves reflected. To reduce conflicts of interest and empower YABs to discuss local services candidly, you may identify neutral public spaces as a best option for YAB meetings. Some examples are libraries, parks, or community centers.

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we've also recognized the necessity of making YAB meetings accessible remotely. When possible, anticipate holding meetings remotely and ensure YAB members have both the access and technology to fully participate. Options for facilitating YAB meetings remotely include but are not limited to Google Meet, Zoom, and Facebook Workplace.

How to Keep People Coming Back

Keeping YAB members engaged requires meeting their needs. If your YAB is not getting paid for their time, see what conversations can be had with your sponsoring organization to secure payment.

Additionally, YAB meetings often consume time when some young people would be having meals elsewhere, while others would be going without due to food insecurity. Providing a good meal to your YAB, at each meeting, is not only a best practice, but can help foster community.

TOPIC 2: LOGISTICS

Forming a focused and sustainable YAB starts with identifying the group's core values and developing its vision and mission statements. The process of identifying and developing these as a group helps to ensure that YAB members are aligned with each other and working toward common, clear goals in the work to end youth homelessness.

What Are Core Values?

The core values of the YAB are fundamental beliefs which help dictate the culture of the board and help determine its right paths. A best practice is to come up with 3 to 5 core values.

What Is a Vision Statement?

Your YAB vision statement is what young people ultimately want to see in their community and in larger society, particularly as it pertains to youth experiencing homelessness. It should be relevant to the work, concise (no more than 2 sentences, ideally), simple, ambitious but achievable, and align with the core values you identified.

Let's refer to the National Youth Forum on Homelessness for an example of an effective vision statement:

The National Youth Forum on Homelessness envisions an accountable and compassionate world where all youth and young adults live with independence, value, and respect.

What is a Mission Statement?

The mission statement summarizes the purpose of your board, states what the goals are, and provides examples of how the work will be done. It should be informative, but concise and clear.

Let's refer to the National Youth Forum on Homelessness for an example of an effective mission statement:

The National Youth Forum on Homelessness works to uplift youth and young adults to positions of power through education and advocacy. We inform and influence national policy and local practice to ensure that youth homelessness is rare, brief, and non-recurring.

Recommended Trainings

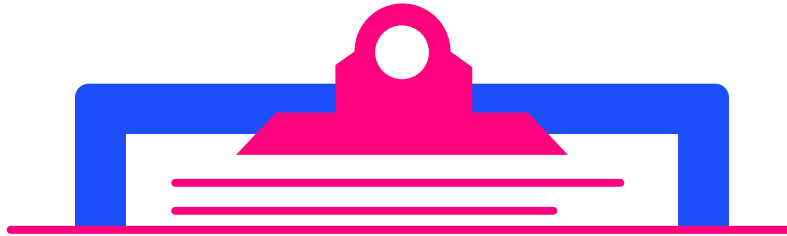
A newly established YAB will likely need support to function effectively, which may include but is not limited to trainings on the following topics:

- SMART goals (see section on SMART goals in Topic 4)
- board structure and governance (with attention to how meetings will be run and how decisions or votes will be reached)
- housing systems (with attention to common terminology)
- public speaking and workshop facilitation

Doing the Work Effectively

The YAB will find it helpful and a best use of time to form workgroups or committees to tackle large tasks or projects. In the context of the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project (YHDP), this has been especially appropriate during the request for proposals process. The YAB may decide to form workgroups or committees based on its members' interests and skills. For example, strong writers may be grouped together to draft documents and external communications, whereas members with acumen in technology or social media may be grouped together to maintain the board's web presence and arrange virtual meetings.

TOPIC 2: LOGISTICS



Different Mediums

People have different preferred methods of communicating! Some people respond quickly and thoroughly to text messages while others only use Facebook; still others might prefer phone calls. It's important to ask everyone what works for them.

Ideally, there may be a form that everyone agrees to and is happy to access for regular updates. If so, that's great and makes things a bit simpler! Establish what that main mode of communication will be and make sure it definitely works well for everyone. It will be helpful to share regular reminders about upcoming phone calls, notes from meetings, and group communications here via a group chat, text, or email.

However, in most communities there are differences across YAB members. If so, it may be helpful for one person to volunteer as the person who sends reminders to the three most preferred modes of communication. That usually means one person sending out a mass text, a group Facebook message, and maybe calling those who stated that was the best way to be reached. Using all those modes may be best for sharing notes and other communications as well.

Conflict Resolution

Some conflict is inevitable in relationships. While it's important to be respectful of different work styles, personalities, and visions, it's not uncommon to disagree with other YAB members or have difficult work dynamics.

It could be helpful to find a neutral ally that can assist as a mediator. This person can listen to both sides of the conflict and help provide perspective and next steps. It's also important to prioritize open and honest communication.

Communicating While Working Remotely

It's likely that at one point or another, due to unforeseen circumstances, you'll need to conduct business virtually or remotely. As we've seen with many organizations shifting to remote work due to COVID-19, it's best to have protocol and tools in place for this to be done with minimal interference of the work or sacrifice to its quality. Explore options like Google Meet, Zoom, or Facebook Messenger rooms for hosting meetings. Additionally, a group text messaging software like GroupMe or WhatsApp could be useful.

Here are more tips for remote work:

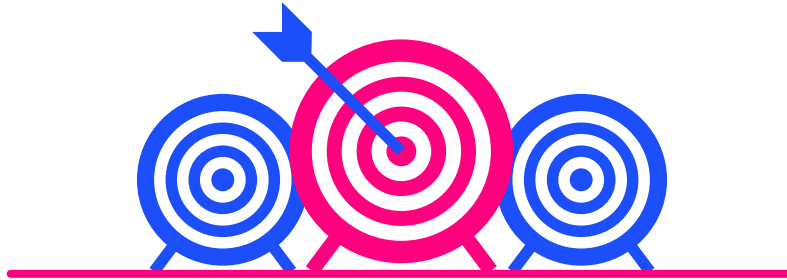
- Poll members on their availability before scheduling meetings.
- Keep meetings to an hour or two, whenever possible, to avoid burnout.
- Send agendas prior to meetings, allowing for additions or changes when possible.
- Do not share meeting links or call-in information outside of the group, to minimize the risk of "Zoombombing" or the release of confidential /sensitive information.
- Collaboratively set standards of communication and meeting etiquette.



Tips and Tricks

- Create and send out a meeting agenda ahead of time so people know what to expect and if they need to prepare in any way.
- Have one or two people to facilitate.
- Have someone volunteer to be a notetaker. That person should also be able to send out notes within 24-48 hours after the meeting so people who missed the meeting can catch up and everyone can keep track, too.
- Create “next steps” or “action steps” at the end of every meeting (and make sure the note taker writes them down, especially who volunteers to take some action and by when).
- In addition to notetaker, does it make sense to also include timekeeper?

TOPIC 4: PROJECT MANAGEMENT



What is a project anyway?

A project is temporary in that it has a defined beginning, middle, and end, and therefore defined scope and resources. And a project is unique in that it is not a routine operation, but a specific set of tasks designed to accomplish a singular goal or create something new. A project is always limited by scope (how small or big you want it to be), schedule (what are the deadlines), and budget (how much money is available). All of these factors impact the quality of the project.

For example, if you've ever baked anything, you've executed a project! You will need to think about how many people you want it to feed (scope), how much time you have to prep and

bake and cool (schedule), and how much money you want to spend on the ingredients (budget).

For most projects within your YAB, you're going to need to work as a team. In order for that to happen, it's often helpful to take on certain roles or responsibilities so everyone is clear about who is doing what and by when. Usually, a project manager is responsible for ensuring things happen on time, on budget, and on scope. However, the entire project team executes all the tasks that make up the project. This way, someone is designated to keep track of the progress and all the moving pieces in order for your project to be successful.

SMART Goals!

An important part of managing a project is setting goals. Once you have goals and different parts of the project listed out, it's easier to decide who can take on what and when they need to have it finished. SMART is an acronym that stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely. Every goal you set should be SMART, which will help you to keep focus and will increase the chances that that goal is achieved.

Specific: Well defined, clear, and unambiguous.

Measurable: With specific criteria that measure your progress towards the accomplishment of the goal.

Achievable: Attainable and not impossible to achieve.

Realistic: Within reach, realistic, and relevant to your life purpose.

Timely: With a clearly defined timeline, including a starting date and a target date. The purpose is to create urgency.

If your YAB has established workgroups, it could be helpful to go through each workgroup's plans and do a separate SMART goal process for each of them. Leave a page in the back for the mission of yab is _____, the vision of the YAB is _____, tools and trainings, workgroups, etc. I do this work because... My three strengths are... Also age/place for yab members to share each others contact info.