



# Engaging Youth

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Coalitions often struggle with the issue of how and when to involve youth. Adult attitudes and behaviors toward youth need to be welcoming and supportive to foster youth involvement.

### Examining adult attitudes and behaviors toward youth

William Loftquist, one of the early researchers in the field of youth development, developed an innovative instrument for examining the nature of adult/youth relationships, *Inventory of Adult Attitudes and Behavior*. The Inventory, consisting of 24 statements that explore various aspects of planning, operating and evaluating the work of youth-focused organizations, is designed to give adults who work with youth an opportunity to consider how they think about and act toward youth. It works from the assumption that attitudes are closely related to behavior and that by examining our attitudes it is possible to make sound decisions about how we can best influence a coalition’s approach to working with young people.

The Inventory, scoring tool and description of what the scores mean are provided in this chapter.

**Tools which are provided on the following pages include:**

Inventory of Adult Attitudes and Behavior- Loftquist, W., Youth Leadership Institute

- Scoring Sheet
- Results
- Spectrum of Adult Attitudes Toward Young People- Summary

**The enclosed workbook CD includes the tools listed above plus the following:**

Involving Youth in the Coalition

- Recruiting Youth- Allen, S. Teen Power
- Selecting and Interviewing Youth- Allen, S. Teen Power
- Maintaining and Sustaining Youth Involvement- Paul, A. & Lefkovitz, B. Engaging youth



## Inventory of Adult Attitudes and Behavior\*



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This inventory was designed to give adults who interact with young people an opportunity to consider their beliefs, approaches and the framework from which they work with young people. It works from the assumption that attitudes are closely related to behavior and that by examining our attitudes it is possible to make sound decisions about how we can best influence an organization's approach to working with young people.

The statements below explore various aspects of the processes of planning; operating and evaluating the work of youth focused organizations. To what extent are young people involved in these processes, and how do the attitudes and behavior of adults within the organization affect the relationships of young people to the organization as regards these processes? Young people can participate in using the Inventory by indicating how well the statements describe the approach they see adults in the organization or system taking. This perspective is tremendously valuable. Let's face it; we don't always have the most accurate self-perception.

The Inventory includes 24 statements. Each person selects a number from the opinion scale and place it in the space provided to the left of the statement. The use of numbers from the lower end of the scale indicates that the statement is unlike the way the respondent approaches things. The use of numbers from the upper end of the scale indicates the person uses an approach similar to the statement.

### OPINION SCALE

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Never my approach		Seldom my approach		Sometimes my approach		Often my approach		Always my approach

### STATEMENTS

- \_\_\_ 1. As an adult leader, I engage young people in program decisions when I think this engagement will be a growth experience for them.
- \_\_\_ 2. It is most appropriate that adults determine what the programs for young people will be.
- \_\_\_ 3. Young people have a vantage point that is valuable for evaluating the successes and failures of specific programs.
- \_\_\_ 4. Training programs designed to improve organizational effectiveness should teach adults how to encourage young people to accept the organization's expectations, processes and programs as adults have designed them.

*continued*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Never my approach		Seldom my approach		Sometimes my approach		Often my approach		Always my approach
___ 5. Adults can share carefully selected management roles with those youths who are ready to learn, under close adult supervision, from the experience.								
___ 6. Young people are encouraged to assume leadership responsibility within a youth/adult partnership in carrying out youth programs.								
___ 7. In our organizational decision-making, adults should make the decisions.								
___ 8. I believe that allowing young people to participate in organizational roles can open valuable learning opportunities for them.								
___ 9. As an adult leader, I engage young people in making program decisions at the earliest point.								
___ 10. Asking young people to review adult-determined program plans will communicate to the young people that the adults respect them.								
___ 11. Adults are in the best position to evaluate the successes and failures of a specific program.								
___ 12. Training programs designed to improve organizational effectiveness should teach adults how to engage young people's participation in those organizational decision processes that will help the young people learn to make more responsible decisions in real-life situations.								
___ 13. Youth participation can enhance and enrich the various management roles within our organization.								
___ 14. Fewer mistakes are made in carrying out a program for young people if adults perform the leadership roles themselves.								
___ 15. Adults should allow young people to participate in making decisions that will provide learning experiences for them.								
___ 16. I believe that experiences of young people give them a valuable perspective that can become useful in efforts to plan, operate and evaluate the way the organization functions.								
___ 17. As an adult leader, I seldom ask for the opinions of the youth participants when I make program decisions.								
___ 18. If young people are active participants in the planning process of an organization, they can help make the program more relevant to their needs and desires.								

*continued*

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Never my approach		Seldom my approach		Sometimes my approach		Often my approach		Always my approach

- \_\_\_ 19. Asking the opinions of young people as part of program evaluation will help them sharpen their thinking and observational skills.
- \_\_\_ 20. Training programs designed to improve organizational effectiveness should teach adults how to foster young people's participation in decision processes to bring the perspective of young people to bear on improving the organization.
- \_\_\_ 21. Management roles within our organization, by their very nature, are adult roles.
- \_\_\_ 22. Allowing young people to assume some leadership roles can help them develop skills for the future.
- \_\_\_ 23. In our organizational decision - making, adults and young people together should make the decisions.
- \_\_\_ 24. I believe that allowing young people to participate in organizational decision making would mislead them into thinking they can influence matters beyond their control.

**Now that you have completed the Inventory, the results can be tabulated by using the form on the next page.**



## Inventory Scoring

Now that you have completed the Inventory, transfer the numbers given from the statements to the appropriate box below. Total numbers at the bottom in each column to determine your adult attitude and behavior style towards youth.

Statements	Style #1	Style #2	Style #3
1. ....			
2. ....			
3. ....			
4. ....			
5. ....			
6. ....			
7. ....			
8. ....			
9. ....			
10. ....			
11. ....			
12. ....			
13. ....			
14. ....			
15. ....			
16. ....			
17. ....			
18. ....			
19. ....			
20. ....			
21. ....			
22. ....			
23. ....			
24. ....			
<b>Total Points</b>	_____	_____	_____
<b>Rank</b>	_____	_____	_____



**Results of Inventory of Adult Attitudes and Behavior** - The Inventory which you just completed, identifies three styles or approaches to working with young people. These styles are described below as a Spectrum of Adult Attitudes Toward Young People.

**Spectrum of Adult Attitudes Toward Young People** - These three styles can be related to any relationship between or among two or more people. Our concern, however, is with relationships between adults and young people within the context of planning, operating and evaluating organizations whose missions are to promote the well being of young people. You can relate your scores on the Inventory to the three parts of the Spectrum.

**STYLE #1: Young people viewed as objects** - Within this part of the attitudinal spectrum there are several postures. One of these, most definitely an extreme, sees young people as the “property” of the adult and serves as a justification for abusive treatment of various kinds. The adult sees little value in the young person except as the young person serves the desires of the adult. As a result, the adult controls the young person to serve whatever interests the adult may have. This may include such behavior as child abuse and the use of young people for pornographic purposes, both of which are criminal behavior.

Less extreme, but within this same part of the of the spectrum, is this attitude that adults know what is best for young people and see young people as the objects of the good intentions. This is not an uncommon parental attitude, and it also is often seen in adults who work professionally and as volunteers with young people. Within this attitude there is little room for a consideration of what young people think about the design of the program or opportunity. As the adult sees it, the responsibility of the young person is to take advantage of the program or opportunity designed by the adult.

**STYLE #2: Young people viewed as recipients** - The emphasis within this part of the spectrum is on young people as the recipients of the benefits of the program or opportunity. This may include youth participation in the design of the opportunity, but the primary emphasis of this attitude of the controlling adult(s) is on how the young person will benefit from participation and not on what the young person has to offer to the design process. The adult is still well in control of the conditions under which the young person participates, but allows youth participation because of the value of the experience to the young person. This attitude is also based upon the notion that adults know what is best for young people and may lead one cautiously to begin to open the door to youth participation on the adult’s terms. This relationship cannot reasonably be described as an adult/youth partnership, though there is some opportunity for the building of a sense of youth ownership in the outcome of the decisions made. This attitude demonstrates a concern for preparing young people for the future as responsible decision makers.

**STYLE #3: Young people viewed as resources** - This attitude is based upon respect for the contribution young people can make to the planning, operation and evaluation of a youth-focused organization (or family or community) in the present. It acknowledges that any leadership and decision-making roles involved can be shared by adults and young people. This may mean that both young people and adults need to learn the skills and attitudes necessary for shared decision making, and it may require some change in policy and administrative practice within the organization, or perhaps a reformulation of the organization’s mission, if there is to be a shift toward this attitude from one of those described above.

*continued*



The Spectrum of Adult Attitudes Toward Young People		
Young People Viewed as Objects	Young People Viewed as Recipients	Young People Viewed as Resources
<b>Style #1</b>  The adult is in control with no intention of youth involvement.  <b>The objective:</b> Personal growth of young people  <b>The byproduct:</b> Conformity of young people and acceptance of the program as it is.	<b>Style #2</b>  The adult is in control and allows youth involvement.  <b>The objective:</b> Personal growth of young people  <b>The byproduct:</b> Increased organizational effectiveness.	<b>Style #3</b>  There is a Youth/Adult Partnership (Shared Control).  <b>The objective:</b> Increased organizational effectiveness.  <b>The byproduct:</b> Personal growth of young people and adults.

William Loftquist, the developer of this Inventory notes, “This exploration of the Spectrum of Attitudes and examination of the three styles related to it are intended to help identify and clarify these important matters. In the world of reality, however, things are never this clear and distinct. A blurred mixture is probably closer to what happens. For this reason it is useful to have a way to view the complex dynamics of the manner in which organizations operate and people relate to one another. Using the spectrum for planning the future of your organization and analyzing the ways adults and young people work together within the organization can assist you in becoming more focused and purposeful. For example, some people may be operating from a position of one style while others are working from another. Clarifying this can be useful in a staff development sense. Or the organization may have practices based upon different styles, creating inconsistencies that cause confusion. Shaping an agreed upon organizational culture around these issues can strengthen the organization.”

Loftquist adds, “We would challenge those involved in youth work to examine the ways you and your organization relate to young people, and to take specific steps toward respecting young people as resources. As this view of young people becomes the driving force behind policy, management and practice, we believe youth focused organizations will become more effective.” (Loftquist, 1989).

Loftquist, W. (1989). *The technology of prevention workbook: A leadership development program*. Tucson, AZ: Associates for Youth Development Publications. Property of Youth Leadership Institute (2005), <http://www.yli.org/>



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