

EQUAL PARTNERS

Organizing "For Youth By Youth" Events



Participants from *Youth Vision Jeunesse*, a drug abuse prevention forum held in Banff, Canada, presenting "A vision from Banff" to Kofi Annan during the Special Session of the UN General Assembly on the Drug Problem, June 1998. Equal Partners is based on our experiences while organizing this forum.

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Introduction

Today's young people are in a unique situation. Organizations, governments, and the population at large are recognizing that it's absolutely vital to involve them in planning and organizing events and projects for young people. They are taking notice of not only what young people have to say, but of their awesome capabilities, too.

Young people are competent workers, fountains of creativity and ingenuity, and a lot of fun to work with. Their enthusiasm and passion are inspiring to all those who work with them. However, knowing just how to channel all this positive energy can be a challenge.

This document will help you to create an environment that is beneficial to adults (youth workers and those involved with youth issues in other ways) and the young people involved in creating a "for youth, by youth" event. It gives advice on where to find young people, how to effectively involve them in organizing an event, and how to keep them motivated.

Both government and non-government organizations, especially in the West, are excited at the prospect of having young people in positions of decision-making and power. When you empower youth to create, organize, and manage a youth event, they gain respect for you and for themselves, achieve a sense of responsibility and "ownership" toward the event, and acquire leadership skills that are vitally important in the world today. Young people flourish when given the opportunity to act for themselves and their peers in a meaningful way.

The experiences of adults and young people who worked together on the UNDCP's *Youth Vision Jeunesse* Forum (held in Banff, Canada in 1998) provided the foundation of this document. This guide is designed to facilitate adult and youth collaboration while fostering growth in young people. In fact, this document is another example of the success that comes from young people and adults working together, as young people were involved in its creation.

Youth events are most successful when they are designed and implemented by young people. Their participation is reflected in the fresh and innovative atmosphere of the event. We hope this document offers insight into working with young people as it helps you achieve great success in creating youth events.

The purpose of this guide

Adults who work with young people have a professional tradition of developing programmes and events for, rather than with, young people. As a result, many adult-organized youth events have little relevance to the target audience.

Effective youth-focused events happen when adults and young people work together during event planning and execution. The good news is that adult-youth collaborations happen every day, in every part of the world.

This guide is intended to support what, for many adults, will be a new way of working with youth. It will also help adults to assist young people in developing and running youth-focused events.

It can be challenging for adults to work side by side with young people. Young people are often unfamiliar with adult work settings, structures, and systems, which adults often manage easily, without thinking. While it's true that young people lack the experience to fully comprehend the adult world, it's also true that adults do not understand young people as they understand themselves. For this reason, young peoples' central involvement in planning, organizing, implementing and evaluating youth-focused events is critical. There are plenty of good examples of young people and adults working in concert to bring about a youth-focused event. One such example is the *Youth Vision Jeunesse* Drug Abuse Prevention Forum, which took place in Canada in 1998. This event will be referred to throughout this document as a way of illustrating the good results that can come from a well-planned youth event, where young people drive the process.

Misconceptions and facts about working with young people

Because adults are used to making decisions for young people, it's natural that they may be concerned about sharing power and decision-making. Many of these concerns are founded on misconceptions. Here are some ideas that some adults have about young people, and some facts that have come from experience:

"Young people have the right to the full participation in the life of a nation . . ."

-International Charter of Youth Rights (draft)

Misconception

Fact

❖ Because of their greater experience, adults know what's best for young people.

❖ Young people are lazy.

❖ Young people are looking for trouble.

❖ Young people don't care about anything, and they don't want to get involved.

❖ Young people don't have the ability to persevere.

❖ Young people are the experts on their own needs and the needs of their peers.

❖ "Lazy" youth are often under-stimulated, or have never had a real opportunity to provide meaningful input. Young people will rise to the level of challenge set before them, however low or high.

❖ Young people are highly motivated to accomplish their developmental tasks, which involves taking both healthy and unhealthy risks. They will act in a positive fashion if the opportunities and the supports are there.

❖ More and more, today's young people are faced with managing adult pressures, often without appropriate guidance. Young people who seem to be uncaring may actually be feeling overwhelmed by the burden of living their lives without adequate support.

❖ Turnover does tend to be higher for youth-run events, and for many reasons. For one thing, young people do not remain young forever. They grow up and move on to other pursuits. Turnover can be beneficial, however, because fresh ideas can help to renew enthusiasm. Anticipate and plan for turnover in advance.

"You have to take young people into the planning of programmes if you want them to go as they're intended to go."

-Youth Vision Jeunesse delegate, South Africa.

Misconception

Fact

❖ Young people should be seen, not heard.

❖ Young people shouldn't be in charge, and they don't belong in adult roles.

❖ Young people can't be given too much responsibility.

❖ Youth-led events take too much effort and too much time is wasted.

❖ Young people are among the most energetic and creative resource the world has. Too often, this creativity is dismissed as impractical idealism, and not taken seriously.

❖ With the proper adult support, young people can respond extremely well to adult-level challenges.

❖ If properly supported, young people can take on surprising amounts of responsibility and leadership.

❖ Youth-led events are effort and time consuming, but they are relevant and effective. So, it's really a choice between organizing an event easily and organizing it effectively!









He who would do great things should not attempt them all alone.

-Native American proverb.



Why have a “For Youth By Youth” event?

Adults often take charge of developing youth events. They wield the power and make key decisions. The idea of turning some of this power over to a young person is a new and rather horrifying one to many adults, but if events and programmes are to be relevant to young people, they must be instrumentally involved in the development process. Events that young people create for other youth whereby all the participants are given a chance to make a meaningful contribution to the final outcome are called participatory youth events. If participatory youth events are done well, the benefits for young people, adults, and the event itself are enormous:

Benefits for Young People:

-  Participation promotes resiliency, leadership, and empowerment;
-  Participation reduces risk by helping young people develop a sense of ownership and responsibility to their communities;
-  When young people make the key decisions and control the event’s content, the event becomes relevant to them;
-  Young people learn they can have a real and positive impact on the world around them;
-  Young people learn to work with adults and with each other in a mutually beneficial way;
-  Young people develop skills and knowledge that will help them in the future;
-  Young people can express their potential;
-  A successful experience makes it more likely that young people will want to work with adults again.

Benefits for Adults:

-  Adults are exposed to creative and challenging new ideas, which can spark their own creativity;
-  Adults see young people at their productive best;

If we all pulled together
in one direction, the
world would keel over.

Yiddish proverb

Programmes for young people are more relevant, more effective, and have greater value when planned by young people;

Future employers have a skilled and competent pool of young people from which to choose;

Adults can guide and support a young person's developing skills;

A successful experience makes it more likely that adults will want to work with young people again.

Benefits for the Event:

The event is youth-designed and youth-run. The "look" is young, and the informal "feel" of the event allows for richer interaction;

Young people "own" the event, increasing the likelihood of success;

The event is more relevant to young people, since young people designed and implemented it;

A relevant event is more likely to have spin-off products that are useful to young people and their communities. An example is the Global Youth Network, which arose from the *Youth Vision Jeunesse* event;

Shared leadership with adults gives the event an inclusive community focus;

The pool of creative talent is larger when adults and young people work together;

A successful experience makes another youth-run event more likely in the future.

"It is imperative that youth participate in shaping the future of mankind."

-International Charter of Youth Rights (draft).

"Youth need to be in charge more. They need to have paying positions where they're paid to make decisions about other youth. I just don't think that people who look down from their skyscrapers know and can comprehend at all what really happens day to day down there."

-Youth Vision Jeunesse delegate, Canada.

A youth-run event: what we did

In the 1990s, drug use among young people increased after a long period of decline. There is now a worrying trend toward increased consumption of a greater variety of drugs, and riskier forms of drug taking.

Recent surveys show that although cannabis remains the most widely used illegal drug, young people are using heroin and LSD in greater numbers than before. Amphetamine-type stimulants are popular in some parts of the world. Solvent abuse remains a problem, especially among isolated, marginal, or remote populations. Many young people are now injecting substances, which exposes them to possible HIV and hepatitis infection. In addition, recent political, social, and economic changes have added a new dimension to the drug problem. The severe political and economic turmoil left after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, for example, has left some former bloc countries vulnerable to drug trafficking and increased consumption. High levels of youth unemployment, homelessness, and poverty have also contributed to drug use.

The international community expressed profound concern over these developments, and in response, the Demand Reduction Section of the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) division implemented a three-year drug abuse prevention project, starting in 1997. The goals of the project were to:

1. Identify youth-focused drug abuse prevention programmes.

These programmes create a better understanding of drug-related problems and potential solutions.

2. Stage a special event.

The event would highlight these programmes and their achievements, and advocate the involvement of young people in drug abuse prevention around the world.

3. Establish an ongoing, sustainable youth network.

This network will identify and share information about innovative prevention programmes. It will also help the UNDCP in its efforts to understand and monitor trends and patterns in drug taking.

"We are a group of young people from 24 countries who met in Banff to discuss our common problems with drug abuse, and to share our experience and successes in preventing it."

-from "The Vision From Banff".

"We are battling for a world without drugs."

-Youth Vision Jeunesse delegate, Senegal.

The *Youth Vision Jeunesse* Drug Abuse Forum

In April 1998, over 150 delegates from 24 countries arrived in the mountain resort town of Banff, Alberta, Canada for a five-day conference on substance abuse prevention. While financial support from the governments of Canada, Italy, the United Kingdom, Norway and Sweden, the UNDCP and the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA) organized the Forum. The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC) hosted the event. The purpose of the Forum was to enable young people to prepare advice for the UNDCP on drug abuse prevention among the world's young people. The Forum represented a unique and unprecedented opportunity for the United Nations to hear directly from young people on how drugs have affected them, their peers, and their communities.

A major product of *Youth Vision Jeunesse* was a report called "The Vision From Banff", which was presented to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on International Drug Control in June 1998. Two young people from the Forum planning committee presented this document to United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan. The report, developed and ratified by young people at the Forum, outlines the nature and extent of drug abuse problems as seen by young people, and provides a series of recommendations to the UN and international governments. The UNDCP started work on creating a handbook of prevention strategies that flowed from the recommendations of the report. This handbook will contain ideas that prevention workers can apply in a wide variety of situations and locations.

The Forum also provided a springboard for other youth-driven initiatives, all of which are designed to provide ongoing advice and direction to the UNDCP on youth drug issues. These other initiatives included a Global Youth Network, which focuses on collecting and providing information, identifying "best practice" principles, building capacity, and broadening the foundation of the Banff group's efforts.

**"The time to stop drugs,
The time to stop
destroying human bodies,
The time to stop showing
inhumanity to man,
Yes, the time to change
is now."**

-from a poem written
by a Youth Vision
Jeunesse delegate,
South Africa.

**"We came here from all
over the world speaking
different languages. We
sang and we danced
together. We listened to
each other and learned
many things that will
remain with us."**

-from "The Vision From
Banff".

Planning an event

Planning a “for youth, by youth” event should, logically enough, start with the young people themselves. Young people may come to you with an idea, or perhaps you have one. In any case, it’s important to talk about the event with young people while it’s still in the very early stages of development.

In developing the three-phase drug-abuse prevention project, the UNDCP took a page from the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child* and resolved that adults alone could not make decisions that affected youth. The UNDCP understood that young people’s participation in analysing drug problems and identifying innovative and effective solutions would be essential to its drug abuse prevention efforts.

A series of discussions resulted in a decision to hold the event in Canada. The UNDCP laid a foundation of expertise in the drug abuse field by securing the involvement of the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA) and the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC). On top of this foundation, young people would help to build a structure from which the Forum would emerge, and with it, the recommendations that would ultimately go to the United Nations General Assembly.

The roles of young people and adults: The “ladder of participation”

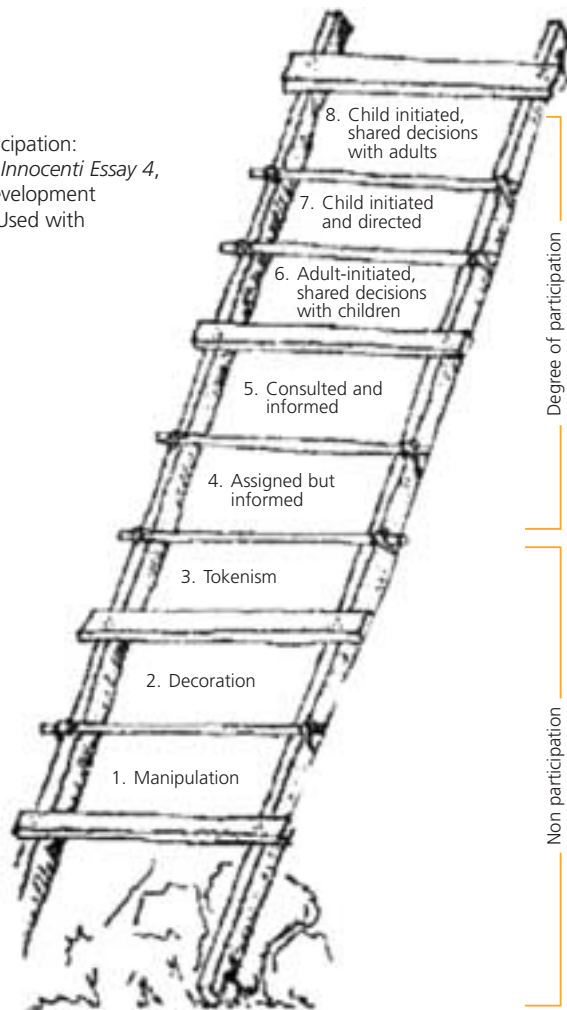
Involving young people doesn’t have to be an all-or-nothing affair. There are many ways in which young people can be involved in developing an event. The type and level of participation depends on many factors, such as timelines, the nature and type of event, and so on. In 1992, Roger A. Hart developed a “Ladder of Participation,” which described different ways adults and young people can work together.

The bottom of the ladder illustrates a situation in which young people are involved, but have little or no significant input into the event. This is the least desirable situation, which usually occurs when adult event organizers only wish to create the illusion of youth involvement. The top of the ladder describes a situation where adults and young people share equally the responsibility for executing a youth-initiated event. Overall, the organization and implementation of *Youth Vision Jeunesse* reflected steps six through eight on Hart’s ladder. Your event may involve young people in ways that reflect more of Hart’s steps, but it’s in the interest of the event and the young people, if their involvement reflects the true participation of level four and up.

Even the loftiest of
mountains begins on
the ground.

-Moroccan proverb.

Roger A. Hart, Children's participation: From tokenism to citizenship. *Innocenti Essay 4*, UNICEF International Child Development Centre, Florence, Italy, 1992. Used with permission from UNICEF.



The critical point to remember is this: At the highest levels of Hart's ladder, the role of adults is to coach and support young people as they develop, implement, and evaluate the event. Adults use their power and influence to help young people implement their ideas, NOT to override youth-generated process or content.

What will the event be about?

There's probably no other role that's more critical for young people than determining the event's content and structure. Young people know themselves best. They know what matters to them, what they like, and what they dislike. They are usually very concerned that adults don't shape the event to serve adult priorities. Young people must be able to plan the structure and content of the event so that it serves their interests.

To take an example of how young people shaped the focus of *Youth Vision Jeunesse*, they began by asking some basic questions. What are drug problems like in other countries? How do other countries prevent and treat drug problems among their young people? The Programme Planning Committee, which consisted of young people and adults, approached the Children's Environmental Research Group (CERG) in New York City. CERG has done participatory research with young people around the world, engaging them directly in examining the issues that affect their lives. CERG developed a process that enabled Forum participants to describe the nature of drug abuse problems in their own countries by using pictures and diagrams. Several months

No wind, no waves.
-Chinese proverb.


prior to the conference, CERG mailed these workshop packages to participating programmes, asked them to complete the workshops with the young people in their programmes, and then send the packages back to CERG. The resulting posters graphically depicted the problems the participating groups faced, and formed a foundation from which the Planning Group could further refine and develop the Forum's content.


How youth and adults were involved at *Youth Vision Jeunesse*


Before we get much further along in discussing content, it's important to discuss the structures that will best support young people in developing content. These will vary depending upon the nature and scope of your event. It's a good idea to begin by assembling a committee to discuss ideas, organizational structures, and funding. Make sure that young people have prominent roles on this committee. Young people need to have a strong presence at the earliest stages, either by direct participation or by establishing a means by which their input is received and incorporated into the planning.

Example: The *Youth Vision Jeunesse* organizers established two organizing bodies and two implementation bodies. The two organizing bodies were the Steering Committee and the Programme Planning Committee. Young people had substantial influence or direct participation in each of these two organizing structures:


The Steering Committee


 The Steering Committee consisted of representatives from Canada (including AADAC and CCSA), Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Italy.


 It managed the systemic, logistical, and organizational processes behind bringing the forum to life.

 These process elements were driven by input from the Programme Planning Committee.

The Programme Planning Committee

 This group consisted of twelve people, five of whom were young people from countries represented on the Steering Committee.

 It identified key content areas, the overall structure of the conference, and social events designed to make delegates feel comfortable and able to contribute their ideas freely.

 It worked with the Steering Committee to determine how to implement these ideas.

The implementation bodies (the Youth Crew and the Programmes/Programme Participants group) will be discussed under “Implementing the Event”. These two groups were, however, involved at different stages of organizing the event as well.

Your group or organization may come up with a different planning structure for your event. The type of event, how large and complex it is, and its purpose will guide how this structure looks. You may choose to have adults lead the process in one area, as was done at *Youth Vision Jeunesse*, or you may decide to let young people assume the largest role in all areas. Regardless, young people should have the greatest presence and influence throughout the entire development process.








Recruiting young people and adults

The size and scope of an event has a lot to do with determining who to recruit, and how many. Both young people and adults need to understand the amount of work and time being asked of them before they can decide whether to participate. Generally, the shorter the time frame and the more complicated the process, the more stable and committed your group has to be.

Where can we find young people and adults?

Adults who work in government, non-government, and community organizations are good prospects to work on your event, as are people from large and small businesses. Many companies, in fact, have programmes that encourage their employees to become involved in community events. These businesses may also be willing to provide funds or in-kind services to help you finance your event.

Look for adults who:

-  have good managerial abilities that allow them to identify young people's strengths and allocate tasks accordingly;
-  really enjoy and respect young people;
-  thrive in a creative, chaotic, and more carefree atmosphere than is typical of adult settings;
-  expect things to change as young people learn new skills;
-  are not afraid of controversy, and who will advocate on behalf of young people;
-  are well-informed about relevant youth issues;
-  know when to speak up, and when to let young people speak;

Light is good from
whatever lamp it shines.
-Chinese proverb.

- have high but reasonable, clear, and realistic expectations of young people;
- are prepared to negotiate these expectations with young people;
- hold all youth accountable for their behaviours and responsibilities;
- match tasks to the maturity levels and abilities of youth;
- Create opportunities for youth to use their existing skills.

Young people can be found in schools, community organizations, and religious institutions, but they can also be found wherever they gather to play and socialize. The young people that you recruit will depend largely on what your event is about, but generally, you will want young people who are enthusiastic, eager to learn, and able to assume ownership of the event.

• Look for young people who:

- participate actively in schools, government and non-government organizations, and community organizations;
- are able to work independently;
- have specific talents that are needed to organize a successful event, such as knowledge of different languages, skills in desktop publishing, etc.;
- have good organizational and leadership skills;
- are committed to the topic or issue addressed by the event;
- represent the experience and background of the young people who will participate in the event.

"You don't need a reason for being involved. You just have to be a human being who cares about other human beings."

-Youth Vision Jeunesse delegate, Norway.

Perhaps your event focuses on young people who have limited education or literacy skills, who live in poverty, live with violence, have physical or mental health concerns, or are involved with crime or substance abuse. These young people are typically overlooked as programme planners, because adults tend to see them only as programme recipients. If these young people are your target, it's critical to remember that they have important things to offer. For example, some of the young people involved with *Youth Vision Jeunesse's* Youth Crew, Programme Planning Committee, and participant groups were in recovery from substance abuse, and their input was crucial to making the Forum a success. Involve these young people in planning your event, and reward them appropriately. Your encouragement may be the first step in helping them connect to their communities. Remember, however, that young people who live with serious problems have special needs. These needs must be kept in mind when assigning duties and tasks to them.

Other things to consider when recruiting

Young people, like adults, obviously come in all shapes and sizes and from all sorts of backgrounds. Think about the following when recruiting:

Age



A pre-teen or early teen is at a very different physical, mental, and emotional stage of development than a young adult. Older youth will be able to take on more adult-type functions with less supervision, although they will still need lots of coaching and mentoring. Young people differ, of course, and it's possible to have a very mature fourteen-year-old who can handle more responsibility than a less mature seventeen-year-old can. The young people of *Youth Vision Jeunesse's* Youth Crew ranged in age from fourteen to twenty-four, and their support and coaching needs varied accordingly.

Cultural Differences





Because of the international nature of *Youth Vision Jeunesse*, it was critical for everyone to have a high degree of cultural sensitivity and awareness. The international composition of the Steering and Programme Planning Committees helped to alert organizers to differences in customs, diet, and language, among other things. Canada's multicultural nature made it possible to create a Youth Crew that came from diverse backgrounds. Training in cultural sensitivity also helped the Youth Crew to appreciate differences in customs and behaviour.

The man who moves a mountain begins by carrying small stones.


-Chinese proverb.

Urban and Rural Environments


 In some ways, the differences between young people from urban and rural areas are partly differences in culture. Blending urban and rural youth can be an enlightening experience for both groups. Create opportunities for your event team to exchange information and experiences related to their home environments.

 It might be particularly difficult for rural youth to find transportation. Make sure you accommodate the transportation needs of those who don't have access to public transit or people to drive them to meetings and events. Similar transportation and logistical issues may be germane to events involving children, and particularly girls and young women.


Gender

 The degree of relative equality between males and females varies widely around the globe. Female-only youth events can encourage girls to find and express their voices, especially in areas of the world where females tend to be overlooked or devalued. If the event includes both sexes, you might want to have a meeting or two where the males and females are separated. Let the group's thoughts on the matter guide you.


Financial Concerns

 Be sensitive to young people who might not join because they don't have the financial means to participate. The *Youth Vision Jeunesse* organizers budgeted sufficient funds to cover all participants' expenses, including out-of-pocket expenses where necessary.

Educational and Learning Differences

 Level of education and differences in learning style can affect how training is delivered, how readily new skills are transferred to event tasks, and retention of knowledge and skills.

Mental, Physical, or Emotional Differences

 Make sure that representative young people are involved in the planning and decision-making. Drawing on their experience, these youth can help to pinpoint and manage barriers and obstacles. It may also help to consult with a professional who is familiar with the population. Generally, be aware of what the young people you work with are capable of, and match the tasks to their abilities.

Some more tips for recruiting young people

- ✿ Approach school or programme administrators for help.
- ✿ Keep adult allies informed, and deal with emerging concerns immediately.
- ✿ Let young people promote the event to other youth.
- ✿ If adults have already determined the event's purpose and content, be open about this with young people from the beginning.

Once you've explained the nature of your event and addressed any concerns, administrators are usually very happy to help you find the young people you need.

Adults who understand and agree with the goals and activities of the event are less likely to sabotage it!

This has at least two benefits. First, when young people pitch the event to other young people, it reinforces their own commitment. Second, the young people being recruited will see the event as credible and relevant when a participating young person presents it to them.

Sometimes, it becomes necessary to organize a youth event in order to produce some specific products, especially in the international context. In which case, it is difficult to let youth determine the entire agenda of the event. Tell young people that, as part of your role, you are expected to come up a particular product with youth input. Then, actively solicit ideas from young people as to how they can help you get there. Many young people will still be happy to cooperate. One of the most damaging things you can do is to hide this sort of agenda from young people and manipulate them into believing that the initiative is truly theirs. Not only will they quickly learn that this is not the case, but a feeling of betrayal will set them against working with you or other adults on future events.

Organizing an event

The particulars of your event will dictate the tasks that need to be completed, the timelines within which they need to be completed, and the type of training and support needed. It's tempting for adults to determine these elements, but it's vital to let young people do it. They must learn, struggle, make mistakes, and try again. You will need to build sufficient time into your planning to allow learning and growth to take place. You will also need to cultivate the patience and discipline that will keep you from "rescuing" young people when they flounder. Remember, your role as an adult is to coach, to guide and to support, not to do for young people what they need to be doing for themselves.

Now that you have found the adults and young people who will work with you on the event, it's time to start developing it. First, let's get some logistical considerations out of the way:

❖ Where should you meet?

❖ Meet with young people wherever you find them. If you need them to come to you, ensure that transportation to your site is readily available and that your budget covers any costs.

❖ When should you meet?

❖ Meet at the young people's convenience whenever possible. You may want to consider after school or special activity programme hours, but young people who are not engaged in these activities will be available at other times of the day (or night!).

❖ How often should you meet?

❖ Let this be a joint decision between young people and adults. Once organizers have a clear idea of the event's demands, they can determine how regularly, how often, and how long the meetings should be. Flexibility is very important, so be prepared to reschedule and adjust meeting times. For some events, you may need to hold ad hoc meetings to generate solutions to a problem, or to generate new ideas.

Tell me, and I'll forget.
Show me, and I may
remember. Involve me,
and I'll understand.
-Chinese proverb.

Training young people and adults

Event organizers need to be sure that young people and adults are trained, not just in performing event-related tasks, but also in problem solving and working with each other. Identify tasks that young people and adults need to carry out, anticipate possible issues, and prepare for contingencies. Part of the training should be about the organizing and reporting structures within the event team. Adults and young people can receive training in the same things, but remember that the adult's role is to support and coach the young people in carrying out the required tasks. The specific focus of the training will, therefore, be different.

Creating an effective learning and meeting environment

The first joint session between young people and adults is crucial to forming a working group, and the proper environment helps to make it a success. Many attempts to involve young people fail because adults don't pay enough attention to the meeting and training climate. The right approach and setting will create a positive atmosphere, and help young people – and adults – to give their best.

- Keep the focus practical, skill based, and easily transferable to real-life situations.
- Help adults tie new information into their existing experience.
- Trainers should facilitate as well as teach.
- Use experiential learning as a model for training.
- Let young people lead the training activities wherever possible.
- Both adults and young people tend to learn best this way, rather than by passively listening to an instructor.
- Adult learners need to see how new learning relates to their personal and professional experience.
- Help adults and young people to share their ideas and experiences as they relate to the topic at hand. They can learn from each other.
- Experiential learning is defined as "learning by doing and reflecting". Skill-based learning activities, followed by reflective discussion, will help learners absorb new information in a meaningful way.
- Some of the young people you are working with may have certain skills or knowledge relevant to your event. Help them to organize a training session, and be their assistant while they lead the session.

He who learns, teaches.
-African proverb.

Use adults where they are most appropriate.

Some cultures, such as North American Aboriginal and some Asian cultures, hold their elders in great esteem. Involve elders as coaches and trainers where appropriate.

Certain tasks may require training and supervision by an adult who is formally licensed or certified in a particular trade or skill. For example, you may need to provide first aid training to the youth crew.

Tips for a successful learning event

To help make all of your meetings and training sessions successful, incorporate things that naturally attract young people. (Adults usually find that the following help them to learn, too!)

Provide a secure, comfortable training environment

People need to feel physically and emotionally safe in order to benefit from learning. Usually, it's a good idea not to use formal meeting rooms.

Try different training methods and settings.

Help people learn skills through coaching or mentoring, experiential learning sessions, games, and during fun activities that have a learning focus. Look for informal opportunities to apply and reinforce new knowledge and skills.

Let young people establish guidelines for group behaviour.

Young people are more likely to follow rules and guidelines that they set for themselves.

Remember that people learn in different ways.

Whenever possible, training should use as many of the five senses as possible. Some people learn well mainly by listening, others by doing, still others through touch and motion. Don't neglect taste and smell, if training those senses is appropriate!

Match training and tasks to people's abilities.

Everyone has something to offer, no matter how simple or small.

Ask the experienced,
rather than the learned.

-Arabic proverb.

• Coach and support young people according to their needs.

• Some young people will require more help than others. Other young people may be able to provide coaching and mentoring support.

• Respect a participant's right to refuse to participate.

• Some people fear appearing incompetent or foolish when trying a skill for the first time, especially in front of others. See if they're willing to try the task under more private conditions.

• Break complex tasks down into smaller pieces.

• Once people have mastered part of a task, they may feel more confident about trying a more challenging piece.

• Talk about learning experiences afterwards.

• This will help participants transfer their new skills to real life situations, and may reinforce important life lessons as a side benefit.

• Give plenty of encouragement.

• Point out what people are doing right and help them figure out how to do it better. This will yield better results than continually pointing out what they are doing wrong.

• Always provide food and beverages.

• Small snacks throughout the meeting or training session help to keep energy levels high. You might save a favourite food to serve near the meeting's end.

• Provide reference materials, if appropriate.

• A reference manual will help to reinforce learning after the training session is over.

Tips for organizing the event

There are many levels at which events may be organized. The work of a few dedicated community members may bring about a very successful neighbourhood event. Other events are organized at a civic level. Still others take place at a national level. Generally, the larger the geographic scope of an event, the more complex the planning, and more preparation time is needed. A large international event like the *Youth Vision Jeunesse Forum* takes many

To try and fail is not laziness.

-African proverb.

months of careful planning and coordination, but a complex local event may also require considerable time and attention. What follows is a partial list of things that the *Youth Vision Jeunesse* organizers needed to attend to. Some of these may apply to your situation as well.

❖ **Familiarize delegates with the event logo well in advance.**

❖ The logo should be clearly printed on pre-conference materials that are sent out months ahead of time. People assigned to greet delegates at airports and train or bus stations should clearly display the conference logo at the arrival area.

❖ **Consider hiring conference planning specialists.**

❖ Conference planners are professionals who will look after large and small organizational details. They will, for example, attend to the need for audiovisual equipment, refreshments, room bookings, etc. Event organizers can then focus on developing the event itself, rather than on details that are not immediately tied to the event's purpose.

❖ **Adult chaperones should always accompany young delegates**

❖ Chaperones should be responsible adults who set a good example for, and who will properly supervise young delegates. Clearly establish the chaperone's responsibilities and ensure that they are able to meet them. If the chaperone is to provide translation services, state this very clearly, well in advance.

❖ **Contact your government's Foreign Affairs department**

❖ Inform your government of your plans to bring people into the country. Embassies will be more likely to approve travel if they know that the travellers' expenses will be covered.

❖ **Know the host country's entry requirements**

❖ Some countries require visitors to carry passports and visas and also have health requirements. Pass this information on to your participants months in advance so that they can prepare.

❖ **When booking airline tickets:**

❖ Be aware that a personal name must be provided for each ticket. However, the name can be changed later in case you need to make a substitution.


❖ Purchase cancellation insurance. It may save you a great deal of money in case a ticket can't be used.


Implementing an event


If the event is well thought out and well organized, implementing it should be a matter of putting everything into motion. Every effort should be made to anticipate potential problems and contingencies in the planning and organizing stages, and to develop plans to handle them. It's a tribute to how well *Youth Vision Jeunesse* was planned and executed that both anticipated and unanticipated problems were readily managed.

The two implementation bodies of *Youth Vision Jeunesse* were the Youth Crew and the Programmes and Programme Participants. In addition to giving the Steering Committee and the Programme Planning Committee direction and advice during the organization phase, these two groups were directly responsible for making the actual event happen. Adults and young people working on *Youth Vision Jeunesse* were involved at levels seven and eight of Hart's "Ladder of Participation".


The Youth Crew


 Consisted of fifty young people from across Canada, and ten adult mentors.

 The Youth Crew was responsible for pre-event planning, writing and producing a daily newsletter, providing peer support, and facilitating small groups, as well as hosting delegates, conducting off-site tours, and leading activities.

 These tasks were assigned based on Youth Crew members' expressed interests and preferences.

Programmes and Programme Participants

 Consisted of young people and adults from the participating programmes. Generally, young people outnumbered adults by a ratio of three to one.

 Adults provided support, which allowed the young people to present information about their programmes, participate in discussions, and draft the recommendations to the UN.

With guidance and support from the Steering and Programme Planning Committees, the Youth Crew was responsible for ensuring the smooth operation of the actual event. Part of their training included anticipating and managing some of the following problems:

❁ **Some participants will not have money for incidental expenses.**

❁ *Youth Vision Jeunesse's* budget included a spending allowance for participants who arrived without pocket money. Organizers were also prepared to provide toiletries and other personal items. Wherever possible, organizers arranged with merchants in the town of Banff to provide free souvenirs and samples of their products, thus ensuring that money issues would not prevent someone from enjoying their stay.

❁ **Liability issues will need to be addressed.**

❁ Some recreational activities, such as skiing and rock climbing, carry the potential for serious injury. For legal reasons, most North American jurisdictions require written permission from the parents or guardians of anyone under the age of 18 before they can take part in such activities.

❁ **Some underage youth will behave inappropriately.**

❁ Eighteen is the age of majority in Alberta, and the presence of underage participants emphasized the need for proper supervision. All adults at *Youth Vision Jeunesse* assumed responsibility for the safety and proper behaviour of all young people at the conference, whether they were directly responsible for them or not. The Youth Crew was held to a very high standard, since they were expected to function as role models and ambassadors for Canada.

❁ **Some participants will be poorly prepared for the weather.**

❁ It is still winter in the Canadian Rocky Mountains in mid-April, and all participants were told to bring appropriate clothing. Many participants were from tropical or equatorial climates, however, and could not be expected to have cold weather attire. *Youth Vision Jeunesse* organizers arranged to either purchase clothing or have it donated to the conference. The Youth Crew helped to assess participants' clothing needs, distributed clothing, and collected it at the end of the conference.

⚡ There will be problems with language interpretation.

⚡ There will be a need for clear, instant communication among organizers.

⚡ Something will break down.

⚡ With representatives from 24 countries in attendance, language was bound to become an issue at some point. *Youth Vision Jeunesse* dealt with language issues in several ways. French, English, and Spanish were designated the official conference languages, and all participating groups were required to have at least one member who was conversant in one of them. (Even so, some groups arrived without fluency in any of the languages.) Translation services were provided for all plenary sessions. Many Youth Crew members spoke more than one of the official languages, and several of them spoke other languages. An honest and persistent attempt to understand each other (and a healthy sense of humour) made communication possible in virtually every instance.

⚡ The event venue was large, and the *Youth Vision Jeunesse* group was scattered among several buildings. The Steering and Planning Committees, and the Youth Crew, carried cellular phones and two-way radios, and were able to relay messages quickly.

⚡ Other methods of assuring quick communication include using a public address system, message runners, or even colour coded flags or markers to communicate different needs, situations, or instructions.

⚡ Equipment failure is always a possibility. Organizers arranged through the conference facility for technical support services to be available throughout the Forum's duration.

⚡ Smaller events may only require one or two technical support people. Young people are often skilled in computer, audiovisual, or other technical areas (though not always), so check with your group for the required skills.

Everyone laughs in the same language.

-Anonymous.

❖ Someone will want to change his or her accommodation arrangements.

❖ Participants will have differing dietary preferences and requirements.

❖ Some participants may not wish to return to their home countries.

❖ People will have a difficult time saying goodbye.

❖ For different reasons, some people ended up switching rooms. One organizer was given the task of coordinating room assignments, and all requests for room changes went through this person. This ensured that only one person, rather than several, communicated with the hotel staff.

❖ All meals were provided buffet-style, with a wide selection of vegetables, meats, fruits, beverages, and grain products. Most of the participants were able to find food that was to their liking, and arrangements were made for special dietary needs.

❖ Canada's constitutional commitment to a broad range of human rights and freedoms is attractive to those who are denied basic liberties in their home countries. Canada's national police force, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP), were alerted to the possibility of requests for political asylum or refugee status, as they are one point of access to this process.

❖ Whatever participants' reservations about going to a strange country may be, they will probably find it very difficult to say goodbye to new friends. *Youth Vision Jeunesse* organizers planned a celebratory closing event for participants, and a special evening out for the Youth Crew as a way of saying thank-you. They also allowed plenty of time for goodbyes, and adult supervisors made sure participants got onto their appropriate transports back to airports, train, or bus stations.

Youth Vision Jeunesse had its share of unanticipated events, but most were minor and easily dealt with through quick thinking and imagination. Miscommunications, mix-ups due to unfamiliar procedures and customs, and a range of other concerns are inevitable in virtually every kind of event, at every level of complexity. The keys to managing these challenges include resourcefulness, flexibility, responsiveness, and a positive attitude.

Evaluating an event

What is evaluation?

Evaluation is a deliberate process of determining the effectiveness and/or efficiency of event processes (how things were put together) or outcomes (what actually happened), or both.

❁ Evaluating an event is important because:

- ❁ it helps to focus the group's efforts when they know that their work will be evaluated;
- ❁ it identifies what worked and what didn't, what was too costly, and what was worth the cost;
- ❁ It provides valuable information to others who wish to stage a similar event in the future.

Evaluation planning starts at the very beginning of event planning. After all, it's hard to know if the event was successful if you don't know in advance what success will look like! Evaluation doesn't just take place at the end of the event. It's a continual process of assessing how things are going and making adjustments to accommodate new circumstances or situations. Documenting how things are going and how effectively planning milestones are reached are just as important as the final outcome evaluation.

Here are some ideas as to what sorts of things can be evaluated, as well as some questions you might want to answer as part of your evaluation:

❁ What kinds of things need to be evaluated?

- ❁ Event outcomes. Did the event bring about the desired results? Did it attract the expected number of people? Were the people happy with what they experienced? What would the participants have liked to experience, but didn't?
- ❁ Event processes. Did things operate smoothly at the event? Were there mix-ups, gaps in programming or services, problems with coordination of speakers or events?

The wise adapt themselves to circumstance as water moulds itself to a pitcher.

-Chinese proverb.

Were there technical difficulties? How effectively and efficiently were problems resolved? Were there any “happy accidents” that you can plan to incorporate deliberately next time?

- Planning processes. How did the planning process go? Were there difficulties in getting people to meetings? How productive were the meetings? Were there enough planning sessions, or too few? Were there personality conflicts, and how were they resolved? What helped to make the planning go well, and what got in the way?

Keep in mind that evaluation is an entire field of study unto itself. There are many resources on evaluation that will guide you in more detail. Having said that, evaluation can be as simple as asking, “Did you have a good time?”, or as complicated as a formal, expensive research study. Your time, budget, and the kinds of questions you want answered will determine the complexity of your evaluation.

• Possible methods of evaluation might be:

- comment boxes where people can anonymously leave questions or comments;
- coloured dots where each colour represents a point on a scale, ranging, for example, from “very bad” to “very good”;
- notice boards that use graphs to show how participants evaluated event components;
- a “graffiti board” where participants can anonymously scribble their reactions and comments;
- symbols that represent values ranging from one to five.


"It is the contributions of the Youth Crew members that will be remembered by delegates from other countries."

-letter to Youth Crew from Planning Committee representatives, dated April 30, 1998.


The young people and you may have other fun ideas for measuring people's responses. Use your imagination!

For your event, think about how young people can be actively involved in its evaluation. There are several ways in which young people can participate in designing and delivering evaluation measures:

 **Participatory action research.**

 This is one of the most effective and engaging forms of evaluation for young people. Programme implementers and recipients take an active role in designing evaluation tools such as surveys, and carrying out data collection and analysis.

 **Qualitative data gathering.**


 Young people can take part in qualitative evaluation techniques such as narrative research, role-plays, and discussion. These methods can yield very rich data on the event.

How *Youth Vision Jeunesse* was evaluated

Evaluation was an important aspect of *Youth Vision Jeunesse*, and organizers designed surveys for daily administration to participants. Each survey, prepared in English, French, and Spanish, ranged from one to three pages long. The surveys were to be conducted by trained, multilingual youth on the Youth Crew. The idea of doing daily surveys was abandoned, however, since both the Youth Crew and the delegates were kept very busy and there was little time to do even a brief interview. As a result, the surveys were handed out to participants during field trips on the last full day of the Forum, and in most cases, the participants filled out the surveys themselves.

The survey data was entered into a spreadsheet and tabulated. All participant comments were included.

 **Presentation of findings.**

 Young people can present evaluation data in the form of dramatic plays or videotape.

Remember that evaluation takes place throughout the event's lifespan, not just at the end of the event. The group can use the results of evaluation to change, improve, or expand the original idea. Use positive results to justify additional funding and keep the effort going.

"Open your ears and your mind to what we have said."

-Youth Vision Jeunesse delegate, Canada.

Lessons learned

• Participants considered the Forum to be a great success.

• Social activities were important.

• The CERG workshop was an excellent exercise.

• Most participants felt that the Forum provided the right balance between discussion and social activities. Some participants expressed concern about the quality of the simultaneous translation during plenary sessions, and that there was insufficient time to fully explore issues.

• Participants felt that the social activities were critical to making the Forum a success. This speaks to the need to carefully balance the work of the event with activities designed to build relationships, trust, and collaboration.

• Because most participants had worked on this exercise in the months before the Forum, they were well prepared to take part in the discussions. This exercise also served as an important means of structuring the Forum and identifying key discussion points.

Maintaining momentum



You've held your event. The participants have said their goodbyes and gone home. You've packed up all of your materials and moved them out of your event site. Now it's time to move on to your next step.

For the UNDCP three-phase project, the next step was to finalize the recommendations from *Youth Vision Jeunesse* and present them to the United Nations. Young people from the Planning Committee travelled to New York City in June 1998 and formally presented the recommendations at a Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly. These recommendations were forwarded to the heads of all the member States, and many of these States formally pledged their support toward fulfilling the recommendations in their own countries.

Following these recommendations, the UNDCP set up Stage Three of its project: the Global Youth Network. This network, building on the work of the participating programmes at *Youth Vision Jeunesse*, provides ongoing advice to the UNDCP on drug abuse prevention programmes. It also provides a forum through which young people from around the world can continually share the work they are doing to prevent substance abuse.

One of the most remarkable discoveries of *Youth Vision Jeunesse* was that regardless of nationality, drug abuse problems look very similar worldwide. This awareness created a perfect foundation for sharing programme information, which can be adapted to suit other circumstances and situations.

Events are not an end in themselves, but only a beginning point for further work. Too often, recommendations from forums and conferences are shelved and never referred to again. It is very important to anticipate, right from the beginning, what kinds of recommendations are likely to emerge, and how they could be addressed. Implementing the recommendations is the final step in letting young people know that their ideas mean something, and that they are supported in taking action. To do anything less is to defeat the purpose of the entire exercise.

The beginning and the end reach out their hands to each other.

-Chinese proverb.

"We hope that our message to the UN will be highly considered."

-Youth Vision Jeunesse delegate, South Africa.

Conclusion

Planning an event side-by-side with young people may be a new experience for you, but time, experience, and trust makes the task easier. After your first successful event, you may wonder why you never worked with young people in this way before! The information in this guide will get you started, but the best resources out there are the young people themselves. When in doubt about what you need to do, ask a young person, and then help them to do what they tell you. Be each other's guides.

Good luck!

**Of a small spark,
a great fire.**

-Chinese proverb.

Acknowledgements

This document wouldn't have been possible without the helpful feedback of many people, youth and adults alike. Special thanks goes to:

- Former Youth Crew Members, and The Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC) Youth Advisory Council : Riley, April, Katherine, Charity, Renee, Lilianna, Will, Armande, and Andrea
- Contributing writers Kim Endres and Dione Nobrega
- Employees of AADAC and non-AADAC Field Staff who researched and provided feedback on the initial drafts: Heather Good, Shiela Bradley, Ronda Trumper, Cheryl Houtekamer, Suzanne Leacock, Gerry Mancini, Nancy Nimmon, Barb Robbins, Celeste Williams, Chris Windle, Carol Johns, Darlene Gartner, Charlene Roth-Diddams
- Members of the *Youth Vision Jeunesse* Steering and Planning Committees: Mark Miyamoto, Barb Davis, Dennis Jones
- Gautam Babbar, Giovanna Campello from the Demand Reduction Section of the UNDCP
- The UNDCP would like to acknowledge the support of Canada, Italy, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom whose financial contributions have made this publication possible.

**We will be known forever
by the tracks we leave.**
-Native American
proverb.

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Youth events are most successful when they are designed and implemented by young people. Their participation is reflected in the fresh and innovative atmosphere of the event. We hope this document offers insight into working with young people as it helps you achieve great success in creating youth events.

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