

Engaging Youth not Traditionally Asked to Serve



YSA
YOUTH SERVICE AMERICA

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Introduction

ANSWERING THE CALL TO SERVICE

WHAT EXACTLY DO WE MEAN BY "YOUTH NOT TRADITIONALLY ASKED TO SERVE"?

We see enthusiastic young people eager to answer the call to service. With the growing number of youth ready to engage in service projects and organizations eager to recruit these youth passionate to serve, it is easy to fall into the practice of recruiting from the same pool of kids. Consequently, certain young people who are just as eager to give back and serve their communities are often times left out of the conversation. YSA believes that youth who are not traditionally asked to serve (YNTATS) are equally as eager and capable of being leaders in their communities. It is up to us to create an environment where they too can experience the great benefits of being a positive voice in one's community.

YSA's Lead Agencies are the leaders of Global Youth Service Day in their communities across the United States. As a youth-serving organization, they are responsible for engaging hundreds to thousands of young people in a GYSD event through their coalition of local partners. Incorporated in this resource is their shared experience with engaging YNTATS, which is an invaluable perspective for YSA and the Global Youth Service Network.



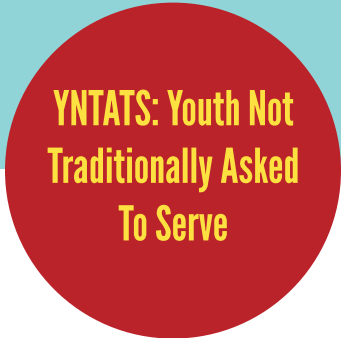
Ten Tips

These tips were all
suggested by our
GYSD Lead Agencies

ENGAGING A NEW GROUP OF YOUTH IN THE CALL TO SERVICE

1. Understand the demographic of the youth you want to engage.
2. Discover and engage the interests of the youth when choosing and planning project(s).
3. Play to the strengths and qualities of youth.
4. Utilize targeted soft skills when working directly with youth.
5. Reach out to influential persons in the lives of youth.
6. Collaborate with organizations already doing great work with youth in your community.
7. Brainstorm and provide transportation and accommodations for youth.
8. Research and integrate the conventional schedules of youth.
9. Ensure adequate staffing for the projects(s).
10. Planning ahead and staying organized to succeed.

Defining YNTATS



**YNTATS: Youth Not
Traditionally Asked
To Serve**

WHO IS INCLUDED IN "YOUTH NOT TRADITIONALLY ASKED TO SERVE"?

When we use the term "youth not traditionally asked to serve", or "YNTATS" for short, we are referring to a demographic of youth that are too often left out when we recruit youth for volunteer service projects. We also recognize that YNTATS look different across communities. This resource provides best practices, examples, and tips from YSA's GYSD Lead Agency Program to assist organizations in identifying, recruiting, and engaging YNTATS in their communities. We strongly believe all young people have the ability to improve their community. We hope this resource helps you reach out to those you may not already be working with!

Some examples include:

- **Minority youth**
- **Youth in the system (foster care, juvenile detention centers, parole)**
- **Youth with special needs**
- **Youth from underprivileged backgrounds (homeless youth or in poverty)**
- **Youth with non-traditional family backgrounds (single parents, divorced parents)**
- **Youth exposed to violence or abuse**
- **Youth with mental or physical disabilities**
- **Youth with limited English proficiency**

Understanding the Demographic

It is important to know the individual circumstances of the YNTATS you are targeting. Whether it's youth with physical disabilities, minority youth, or at-risk youth, it is important to recognize the comfort zone of the youth you are engaging. As project leaders might be new to the process of collaborating with YTNATS, it is always a good idea to recruit the help of staff or other individuals familiar with YTNATS to keep projects stay within this zone. Be aware of the limitations and the restrictions when it comes to (for example) project supplies, encounters with other people, and their environment. Know their needs (i.e. medical, social, legal) and be sure there is more than enough support for them and their accommodations. Whatever the case, everyone's goal is to plan a fun, safe, and engaging project for the benefit of the youth.

Take time to listen to the youth and learn their culture!

FROM OUR EXPERTS:

"Always consider and ask key staff about possible safety issues of the population you are trying to engage. For example, some supplies or materials may not be appropriate for specific youth. However, with appropriate preparation, any project can be amended to meet the needs of a group or organization." - Caroline Ledlie, Youth Villages AmeriCorps

Check out [these](#) sample projects from Youth Villages for youth in the system.



Understand the demographic (Continued)

We must be willing to learn, participate, share, and be open to the circumstances and culture of all of our youth volunteers. The United States is not a homogeneous country. Many groups across the US have different cultures, with different traditions and customs, which we must learn to embrace if we want to effectively engage them in community service.



FROM OUR EXPERTS:

"For SHIFT's work with Native American youth, it took time to earn their trust as an outsider in their community. Once the youth bought into our organization's work on scoliosis, they were more engaging and willing to get involved and personalize the project for their community."

- Sami Petersen,

Founder, SHIFT

Scoliosis



Engage their interests

YSA believes youth identifying the community need or issue they are passionate about is the fundamental first step when facilitating a meaningful, youth-led community service project. Using what we call the “spark fire” model, it is important to incorporate their spark (skill, talent, or interest) of the YNTATS into the planning and implementation of a project. Not only does this ensure more buy-in to the project, it also empowers the youth to know their actions can make an impact on their respective communities.

What is your spark?

A “spark” is an activity or interest that truly engages kids to be their best, such as creative arts, athletics, or learning a specific subject. Identifying the “spark” of the YNTATS you are engaging can serve as a great foundation for your project.

What is your fire?

The “fire” is the area, topic, or community issue the YNTATS is passionate about and would like to address through a project.

Combining sparks and fire can ignite a flame within young people, empowering them in ways that continue to amaze us.



"One of our past service learning projects included building a mobile vending cart for students to learn basic life and vocational skills. Nicknamed the "Mobile Vendicator" by our youth, the cart has been used to sell snacks and drinks, handmade crafts and crops from our community garden. Individual groups have raised funds for supplies to knit beanies for newborn babies or to raise funds for organizations such as Heifer International and Habitat for Humanity. One project successfully raised more than \$1,600 to purchase a water filtration system for a school in Haiti, using not only the Mobile Vendicator, but through car washes and selling t-shirts. "

Find their Strengths

Just because these youth are not traditionally asked to serve does not mean they are incapable of doing so. YNTATS possess perspectives and talents that help ensure a youth-led community service project engages an entire community. Our goal is to facilitate the planning of youth-led projects that allows for the strengths of these youth to shine. Rather than viewing their circumstances as a setback, consider them as an opportunity to incorporate a fresh set of skills to a service project.

Thus, it is essential to bring out, identify, and discover their strengths and perspective.

For example, many youth in facilities may be much more compassionate and knowledgeable about community problems because these youth have been on the receiving end of charity or seen these issues first hand.

LET THEIR SPARK
SHINE THROUGH



FROM OUR EXPERTS:

"A youth who used to lead a gang can motivate their peers to serve even if they read on a 2nd grade level. These youth are also very talented at public speaking and can do prevention speeches at local schools and can speak persuasively." -Tammy Holland, *Texas Juvenile Justice Dept.*

Utilize Soft Skills

Working collaboratively is a learned skill for everyone. However, unlike a traditional youth volunteer, YNTATS may face obstacles which present extra challenges. While some YNTATS come from non-traditional backgrounds, others have been exposed to maltreatment. It may take some time, not only for them to warm up to new people, but also to work in a collaborative environment. For this reason, when working with YNTATS, it is important to utilize and model soft skills such as patience, collaboration, and communication. It is also important to remain flexible and adaptable because, as with any youth, their attitudes and circumstances may change at a moment's notice. Additionally, creating a

safe and
welcoming
environment
where the youth



**BE PATIENT,
FLEXIBLE, AND
UNDERSTANDING**

FROM OUR EXPERTS:

"Have an open mind, and never assume that youth do not want to serve. Sometimes they just need help to identify an issue that they are passionate about. Be willing to work through hesitation or an initial refusal to participate and continue to strive to engage them on a deeper level." - Caroline Ledlie, Youth Villages AmeriCorps

ADDITIONAL TIPS:

For Youth with Disabilities

- Train staff and other people involved in the project on disability etiquette, awareness, and language
- Try not to have exclusive assignments for disabled-people during your project

Outreach Strategies

It can be difficult to earn the trust or respect of YNTATS. For this reason, it would be of benefit to reach out to the positive, influential forces in their lives. Not only do these individuals know the youth best and can help identify their spark (See pg.8), the youth will more readily listen to counsel coming from these individuals when talking about service.

FROM OUR EXPERTS:

"Meet with a supervisor or mentor from the YNTATS's organization and have the supervisor talk directly with them about service. Hopefully these youth will remember the service projects and work with/for these organizations later in life."

- Edison Nicholson, *Youth Leadership
Institute of Erie*



ADDITIONAL TIPS:

- Reach out to YNTATS through channels of information they are familiar with (e.g. social media platforms, neighborhood and church newsletters, gathering places, agencies, organizations in their area)
- Invite other adults in their life to participate in the project and serve as a source of encouragement & engagement
- Use role models in their communities (e.g. business leaders, veterans, local sports stars, entertainers, politicians, youth leaders) that have demonstrated a commitment to service

Collaboration and Coalitions

More than likely there are organizations in your community that are already working with YNTATS. Not only can these organizations provide you with greater insight about YNTATS based on their experience, they can also share the responsibilities of planning a youth-led service project. By partnering with organizations that share your goal of engaging YNTATS, you increase the scope and impact of not only your organization's mission, but also the community service projects young people are leading in your community.

Potential partners:

- Nonprofits (Social Workers or Case Managers)
- Churches (Youth Pastor)
- Local schools

GETTING THE
YOUTH TO THE
PROJECT

"Building strong relationships with contacts, like transition coordinators, truancy officers, special education teachers and guidance counselors, at the local high school and school district, is very helpful because our largest pool of students come from these places." Ja'Von Clark, *Lawrence County Social Services Inc.*



FROM OUR EXPERTS:

"Rely on your partners for recruiting so you can focus on programming and organizing your projects." - Edison Nicholson Youth Leadership Institute of Erie - Erie, Pennsylvania



Transportation and Accommodations

Often times transportation is the greatest obstacle preventing YNTATS from participating in service projects. Whether it be a child with a single parent, or a youth on parole, it can be difficult to coordinate feasible transportation for YNTATS.

Therefore, it is important to brainstorm options and methods for the youth to get to and from all necessary locations. Many youth may not have access to transportation and may rely on public transit. Keep this in mind when selecting project locations, and remember to be flexible.



FROM OUR EXPERTS:

"Flexibility and adaptability are essential for working with YNTATS and the organizations that serve these youth. Any given day, circumstances and attitudes can change. Always be prepared to amend and adapt to the needs of the group." *Caroline Ledlie, Youth Villages AmeriCorps*

Plan around their schedule

When facilitating youth-led community service projects, it is necessary to consider the schedules of the young people you are collaborating with. This is even more important when working with YNTATS. When planning meetings, trainings, or any other function related to the service project, be sure to keep in mind how feasible it will be for YNTATS to be in attendance. If this means limiting the number of meetings or cycling locations in order to accommodate the needs of the youth, we need to remember that the youth's voice comes first!

FROM OUR EXPERTS:

"Working around the schedule in facilities is the hardest part. In TX, they operate on a 16hr schedule and every minute is planned out. They need to work with the Superintendent of schools in each facility to free up the schedules of the youth involved in the program." - Tammy Holland, *Texas Juvenile Justice Department*



MEET THE YOUTH
ON THEIR LEVEL

ADDITIONAL TIPS:

For Youth in the system

It can be challenging to accommodate the schedules of a youth in the system, whether inside a center, on parole, or in a halfway house. They have regular meetings with counselors, parole officers, and tutors that many typical youth do not have to deal with.

- Consult with the adults responsible for the youth (e.g. parole officers, foster care provider, detention center superintendent) to know what best works for their schedule
- Be sure to factor in transportation when working with the youth's schedules.

Ensure adequate staffing

When planning most service projects, it is always good to have an appropriate amount of supporting staff for the youth. With YNTATS it is no different. Be sure to research and consider the needs of the YNTATS. Some youth may legally require additional supervision. While accounting for other factors such as gender, ratio of staff to youth, age, and clothing all play a role in the YNTATS's reaction to the staff. Ultimately, we want to have a team of staff and a support system that is most compatible with the needs of the youth.

Helpful tips:

Streamline the work for the staff involved, ensure everyone knows their role. Ask the youth and the staff where there are holes- they will be the most knowledgeable about the projects.

IT TAKES A
VILLAGE



ADDITIONAL TIPS:

- Keeping in mind the demographic of your staff is almost as important knowing the demographic of your youth. Things like **gender ratio, age, clothing, and numbers** are all important when organizing staffing. Having a diverse staff across various departments (**medical, educational, safety, psychology, and food providers**) equips you with the tools to deal with unexpected situations.

Stay Organized and Communicate

As we all know staying organized is always a key part in ensuring the success of any service project. While working with youth especially in the realm of service can be a fulfilling and exciting opportunity, it can also be filled with volatility. The attitudes and circumstances may change at a moment's notice and the odds of such happening increase when collaborating with YNTATS.

A key part of staying organized is communication between you and the partners (schools, other non-profits, government agencies, etc.) involved with the project. Keeping everyone informed of the project's logistics, schedule, contact list, and the needs of the YNTATS is essential to ensuring the success of the project.

**STAY INFORMED.
STAY ORGANIZED.**

FROM OUR EXPERTS:

"Nonprofits outside the system have a unique opportunity to engage youth are willing to serve. It just takes some forethought and planning with people who work with these youth on a daily basis." -Tammy Holland, *Texas Juvenile Justice Department*





SPECIAL THANKS:

Courtney Maduike - *YSA Community Development Intern*

Caroline Ledlie - *Youth Villages AmeriCorps*

Edison Nicholson - *Youth Leadership Institute of Erie*

JaVon Clark - *Lawrence County Social Services, Inc.*

Tammy Holland - *Texas Juvenile Justice Department*

Sami Petersen - *SHIFT Scoliosis*

If your organization is doing a great job of engaging YNTATS and you are willing to lend your expertise, we would love to include any additional information in this resource! We want to make sure this is a working document that continues to improve and expand on the best practices and experience of our partners.

Email partnerships team at outreach@ysa.org with any additional information your organization may be willing to share.



Global Youth
Service Day



Youth
Changing
the World