

# Engaging Youth in NYTD



Capacity Building  
CENTER FOR STATES

Involving youth in meaningful ways enhances the collection and use of data on youth in foster care.

## Youth Engagement

Effectively integrating youth voice into a State's efforts to collect and use National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) data requires consistency, patience, and a commitment to a positive youth development framework. A successful youth engagement plan includes a blueprint for recruitment, youth and adult training and support, and evaluating and enhancing approaches to youth engagement.

### Recruitment

Develop a set of strategies to reach a broad and diverse range of young people who can provide input on your NYTD data collection efforts. Strategies may include:

- ▶ Develop easy-to-read materials that help youth understand NYTD, why it is important, and how it connects to their lives.
- ▶ Be tech savvy! Know how to communicate through social media outlets that youth use, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Snapchat.
- ▶ Create clear and written task expectations or job descriptions for the youth and articulate what supports or benefits will be received for participation (for example, monetary compensation and professional experience).
- ▶ Engage existing State and local youth councils in your efforts. If one does not exist, consider forming a youth leadership board in your jurisdiction to review issues important to them. NYTD can become a regular topic.
- ▶ Involve youth who are currently in foster care from a variety of placement settings. Youth from different placement types will have a different perspective on the system and services available.
- ▶ Include young adults formerly in care. These young adults may not benefit from program changes, but they care deeply about making the system better for those who come behind them, especially siblings and friends.
- ▶ Enlist current and previous NYTD survey respondents. They understand the process as the State currently has it designed and can best inform what changes might make the efforts more successful.

### Why Engage Youth in NYTD?

Engaging and sustaining youth involvement in NYTD implementation creates a pathway for States to strengthen the skills of its workforce and accomplish key program goals for transition-aged youth. A youth/adult partnership also provides critical opportunities of growth for the young person.

#### ▶ **Benefits to Youth:**

Intentionally promotes responsibility, opportunities for leadership, communication skill-building, and modeling for how to build social capital in a supportive environment

#### ▶ **Benefits to Adults:**

Facilitates feedback from recipients about services to better understand their needs, strengths, and challenges and offers adults fresh perspectives on their own professional approaches to the work

#### ▶ **Benefits to State/System:**

Plays a critical role in the State continuous quality improvement (CQI) system for independent living programs. As stakeholders in that system, young people can contribute to improved data to inform decision-making and program design.

## Youth and Adult Training and Support

Embracing positive youth development principles is an important aspect of engaging youth as partners.<sup>1</sup> Almost any role can be creatively arranged to allow for higher responsibility and influence. To effectively train and support the youth/adult NYTD team, States should consider the following:

- ▶ Provide an overview of NYTD, give task-specific training, and set clear expectations for youth in their NYTD role.
- ▶ Provide training to young people on how to effectively share personal and sensitive experiences with a positive purpose.
- ▶ Conduct meetings, calls, and other relevant business during the hours when young people can participate.
- ▶ Provide training to adults on what it means to authentically engage and support youth as partners.
- ▶ Plan time to bring youth and adults together before official meetings to build relationships. Teamwork is at its best when people have a chance to get to know each other and build trust.
- ▶ Be sensitive to and prepare for assisting youth with overcoming barriers to participation. These often include transportation, child care, scheduling, and clothing.
- ▶ Compensate youth for their time and expertise and consider providing meals or snacks—a welcome incentive for many youth. Remember, no one else can provide this perspective!
- ▶ Support youth after the completion of activities to process lessons learned and harness future growth opportunities.

## Evaluating and Enhancing Youth Engagement

State plans should establish consistent opportunities to give youth and adults feedback about how they are meeting expectations in their NYTD roles. Adults should provide encouragement and recognition to youth at all events and meetings where youth participate. Their well-being and development depends on it.

The evaluation should assess organizational or system readiness at management and frontline levels; assess for gaps in resources to support recruitment and retention efforts; and determine whether efforts to establish a youth/adult partnership have resulted in youth shared decision-making and responsibility.

When evaluating and making midcourse corrections on a State's effectiveness in engaging youth, it is essential that the youth themselves be a part of the assessment process and development of any needed improvement plans.

**For more information, visit**  
<https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/>

<sup>1</sup>National Clearinghouse on Families & Youth for the Family and Youth Services Bureau. February 2007. *Putting positive youth development in practice: A resource guide.*

## Examples from States:

**North Dakota** facilitates quarterly work-group discussions with the ND Youth Leadership Board. At these meetings, State officials gather youth perspectives on survey questions/prompts to improve clarity. The youth board also reviews the incentive process for survey participation and reviews the NYTD data submitted every six months.

**Oregon** partners with FosterClub, Inc. to conduct outcome data collection for the NYTD baseline and follow-up surveys. Foster care alumni are employed as Oregon Connect Coordinators to administer the NYTD surveys and offer information on eligible services and supports. Rapport-building is essential to their success.

**South Carolina** contracts with the University of South Carolina for NYTD. The team works closely with youth throughout NYTD implementation from data collection to use of the data for CQI efforts. The State youth advisory board has translated the data into youth-friendly podcasts and developed handouts for case managers and youth in care to strengthen youth engagement in the transition-planning process.

**Oklahoma** contracts with a private provider to collect outcome data and hire a young adult with lived experience in the position of NYTD Team Lead. Responsibilities involve locating eligible youth, tracking and collecting surveys, and developing an effective outreach strategy for connecting with youth through social media. Consistent and discreet involvement on the State's Facebook page increased interest in NYTD and its relevance to their lives.