Overview

In this activity, the participants are introduced to a framework that helps them to understand how attitudes and perceptions can guide behavior. The activity challenges them to rid themselves of any negative assumptions they might have toward each other and to begin to envision new possibilities for collaboration and partnerships.

Background Information

Attitudes and perceptions of adults affect the degree to which young people are engaged in community activities, including program development, implementation, and evaluation. Research and experience have identified four broad perspectives for approaching youth in the context of community transformation: youth as objects, youth as recipients, youth as resources, and youth as partners.

These four perspectives constitute an entire spectrum of attitudes. Manifested in practice, these attitudes dictate one’s practical approach to youth in community transformation. This framework can help adults and youth to consider how their personal perceptions influence the formation and success of youth-adult partnerships. Used as a learning and reflection opportunity, this continuum can inspire adults and youth to envision new possibilities for collaboration and partnership.

**YOUTH AS OBJECTS:** Adults exercise arbitrary and near total control over youth. (to)

**YOUTH AS RECIPIENTS:** Actions of adults are based on what they believe is good for youth. (for)

**YOUTH AS RESOURCES:** Young people provide input into decisions, but they are still primarily in a helping role. (for and with)

**YOUTH AS PARTNERS:** Youth and adults equally share decision-making power and responsibility. (with)
When to Use This Activity

Understanding and appreciating the spectrum of attitudes is fundamental to building the skills, awareness, and attitudes needed to develop and sustain youth-adult partnerships. It is best introduced early in a training program after some work has been done to foster intergenerational communication and to build a climate of trust and appreciation. It provides a framework that can be referred to and periodically reinforced throughout the training program.

Objectives

• to help the participants understand the spectrum of attitudes toward young people and apply it to the development of youth-adult partnerships for community transformation
• to encourage the participants to envision possibilities for collaboration between youth and adults
• to equip the participants with a common framework for approaching the work together

Time Required

45-60 minutes

Group Size

10-40 participants

Needed Materials

• Flip-chart
• copies of handout 1, “The Spectrum of Attitudes Overview,” found on page 38 one for each participant
• copies of handout 2, “The Spectrum Applied to Community Transformation,” found on page 39 one for each participant
• copies of resource 1, “Identify the Statement,” found on page 40-41, one for each team of four or five.

Needed Preparation

• Cut apart the copies of resource 1, “Identify the Statement,” along the dotted lines to create sets of statement slips. You will need one set of statements for each team of four to five. Alternatively, create a card deck for each team by copying each statement onto an index card, one per card.
Activity Steps

1. **If you held** a previous training session, begin by reviewing the key themes. Invite the participants to recall and share what they learned.

**INTRODUCE THE SPECTRUM OF ATTITUDES: 10 MINUTES**

2. **Explain that** to build effective youth-adult partnerships, it is helpful to consider the attitudes and perceptions we bring to the task. In fact, attitudes and perceptions of adults affect the degree to which young people are engaged in community activities, including program development, implementation, or evaluation. Introduce the spectrum of attitudes as a tool developed over time, based on research and experience in the field of community youth development. Explain that it provides a framework for promoting communication between youth and adults and can help us to examine underlying assumptions and envision new possibilities for how we can work together as partners.

3. **Distribute to each participant a copy of handout 1, “The Spectrum of Attitudes Overview,”** then provide a brief overview of the handout using these key points:
   - Research and experience have identified four broad perspectives for approaching youth in the context of community transformation: youth as objects, youth as recipients, youth as resources, and youth as partners.
   - These four perspectives constitute an entire spectrum of attitudes.
   - The left side of the continuum represents an attitude where young people are viewed as objects, being told what to do because the adult knows what is best for them.
   - As recipients, young people participate in learning experiences that adults see as being good for them. However, the real contributions of young people are seen as deferred until some later date and learning experiences are seen as practice for later life.
   - When youth are viewed as resources, their actions have immediate value to the community and there is an attitude of respect focusing on building self-esteem and being productive.
   - As partners, youth share leadership and decision-making roles with adults.

4. **Ask the participants** to brainstorm a few examples of each type of relationship. Be prepared with your own examples to illustrate the differences if the participants struggle with ideas.

**UNDERSTAND THE SPECTRUM OF ATTITUDES: 10 MINUTES**

5. **Distribute a copy of handout 2, “Spectrum of Attitudes Applied to Community Transformation,”** to each participant. Spend a minute or two walking through the handout, highlighting the examples and helping the participants to understand the chart. Be sure to answer any questions they may have.

6. **Invite the participants** to form pairs to discuss the handout, highlighting what resonates with them, where they have had experiences that remind them of the chart, and any questions they may have.
7 Reconvene the whole group. Ask the pairs to share major themes or any insights that came up when they discussed the chart. Address any questions that arose.

APPLY THE KNOWLEDGE: 20 MINUTES

8 Direct the participants to form teams of four or five. Provide each team with a set of statement slips (or cards) you prepared from resource 1, “Identify the Statement.” Ask the teams to review the statements and decide whether each is an example of youth viewed as objects, recipients, resources, or partners. Encourage them to look back at their handouts for tips.

9 Gather everyone as a large group and then review each statement, encouraging the participants to discuss differences of opinion. Share the correct answers using the answers provided here. Help the participants to understand how subtle differences in perception make a big difference in our approach, relationships, and outcomes—even when doing the same task. For example, for statement 7, if youth were required to unload the truck as part of a court-ordered community service or alternative to suspension, it would become an example of youth as objects. However, if the youth and adults worked together to share responsibility for obtaining the donations and decided together that adults would take on the driving responsibilities and the youth would unload the truck, then it is an example of a partnership approach.

   **Answers:**
   - 1, 5, 13, and 15 describe youth as objects
   - 3, 7, 11, and 16 describe youth as recipients
   - 4, 8, 10, and 12 describe youth as resources
   - 2, 6, 9, and 14 describe youth as partners

10 If time permits, ask the participants to refer back to handout 2, “Spectrum of Attitudes Applied to Community Transformation,” and invite them to imagine another example across the continuum, drawing from their own experience. Work through one example first with the entire group and then invite each person to fill in another row with their own example. As an alternative, you could have the participants form youth-adult pairs to come up with another example. Ask a few volunteers to share their examples and clarify as needed.

REFLECT AND DISCUSS: 10 MINUTES

11 Conduct a large-group discussion using the following questions:
   - What was challenging about this activity? What was easy?
   - What surprised you when you listened to people’s responses?
   - What similarities did you see in people’s perceptions? What differences?
   - How have you seen this framework come up in your work or your experience?
   - What other applications do you see to this type of a spectrum, for example, how youth view adults?
   - How might you apply this to your work?
   - How might you share this framework with other youth or adults you work with?
12 Conclude by noting that the spectrum framework can help youth and adults to consider how their personal perceptions influence the formation and success of youth-adult partnerships. Partnership is about moving away from seeing youth as objects or recipients. It is about combining the skills of youth and adults to develop more effective programs. The continuum can inspire youth and adults to envision new possibilities for collaboration and partnership.

13 Before the participants leave, provide them with a brief overview of the next training session (if you are planning one). Be sure to note how the next session connects with the one they just completed.
Youth as Objects

Adults exercise arbitrary and near total control over youth. Programs and activities are TO youth. Youth feel like tokens.

Youth as Recipients

Based on what they think is in the youth’s best interest, adults determine needs, prescribe remedies, implement solutions, and evaluate outcomes with little youth input. Programs and activities are FOR youth.

Youth as Resources

Youth help adults in planning, implementing, and evaluating work. Programs and activities are FOR and WITH youth.

Youth as Partners (Youth-Adult Partnerships)

Youth and adults share decision-making and power equally. Program, activities, and community leadership efforts are in partnership WITH youth.

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## The Spectrum Applied to Community Transformation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF ACTIVITY</th>
<th>YOUTH AS OBJECTS</th>
<th>YOUTH AS RECIPIENTS</th>
<th>YOUTH AS RESOURCES</th>
<th>YOUTH AS PARTNERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community Assessment</strong></td>
<td>Demographic research on young people in the community is incorporated into the assessment.</td>
<td>Demographer goes to the school and presents research and assessment findings to youth.</td>
<td>Qualitative data is obtained from youth by adult researchers to include in the assessment (e.g. conduct focus groups, one-one-one key informant interviews).</td>
<td>Young people provide leadership in the assessment process by creating assessment questions, conducting research, and analyzing results in collaboration with adult researchers.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Community Planning Meeting</strong></td>
<td>Information on youth crime and violence statistics is presented at community meeting by local public health official.</td>
<td>Youth observe a community planning meeting as part of a field trip for a social studies class.</td>
<td>Young people are invited to attend and fully participate in the community planning meeting.</td>
<td>Youth and adults work side by side to plan the meeting in all aspects—who attends, purpose, structure, agenda items, and help to evaluate.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Community Beautification Project</strong></td>
<td>Juvenile justice work crews assigned to pick up trash in vacant lot.</td>
<td>Youth attend keep our community clean workshops sponsored by their schools.</td>
<td>Environmental group invites youth to clean up trash from vacant lot and asks group to create an inspirational rap to educate other youth.</td>
<td>Youth and adults decide to work together to clean up trash in vacant lot and to establish a community garden they will design, plant, and manage together.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Project to Improve Child and Youth Nutrition in the Community</strong></td>
<td>Statistics about child malnutrition and poor eating habits of youth are used for advocacy with stakeholders and widely publicized in local media.</td>
<td>Young people are provided with free healthy meals at lunch.</td>
<td>Young people are asked to select from five healthy menus options to determine next month’s free meal menu.</td>
<td>Youth and adults work together to understand youth eating habits and opportunities to increase nutrition and decide to replace vending machines in schools with carts of healthy snacks that will be available throughout the day.</td>
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<td><strong>Project to Reduce Violence in Schools</strong></td>
<td>Metal detectors are set up at entrances to schools, and schools adopt “closed campus” policies and post anti-bullying guidelines in all classrooms and throughout the school.</td>
<td>All youth attend an anti-bullying workshop as part of a school assembly and are given a test to see how much they have learned.</td>
<td>Young people learn how to become peer educators and educate peers on anti-bullying and intimate-partner violence reduction strategies.</td>
<td>A team of teachers and students work together to assess school safety and identify top priorities. Team develops new safety protocols and puts in place a “peacemakers group” of teachers and students to lead anti-violence and peace-building activities.</td>
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**Fill in Your Own Examples**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Identify the Statement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Young people take a test at the completion of a health and nutrition class to determine how effective the teacher was.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Young people and adults jointly determine which community groups will be invited to a community assessment workshop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>To help young people develop their advocacy skills, adults have young people conduct interviews of local government leaders using a script written by the program director.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Young people participate in focus-group interviews to help the outside funders understand the value of the program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The local convenience store prohibits more than three young people under the age of 18 being in the store at the same time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Young people present to city council the research findings from a study they designed and conducted with their high school science teachers on local water quality and its impact on child health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>To help young people improve their fitness, adults have them unload the cases of donated food off the truck each week.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Young people provide adults with ideas regarding how to make the community meeting more youth friendly.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9 Youth work with local chamber of commerce to conduct a jointly planned “sting” operation to determine which stores sell liquor to minors.

10 Young people create a glossary of youth slang to include in the external evaluators report to the funder.

11 The adults managing the local community center allow young people to use the spare meeting room in their facility.

12 Young people review the public announcement of the community meeting, and make editorial suggestions to the adults regarding how it could be written in teen-friendly language.

13 Youth are denied recess by school officials and required to instead remove graffiti from the school playground.

14 To promote exposure to civil life, youth are invited as observers to the monthly city council planning meeting.

15 Youth and adults create a public mural of their shared vision for the community.

16 Youth participating in a program are required to sign in and out to prove to funders that there is good program attendance.