

# **Creating Local Youth Action Boards to Prevent and End Youth and Young Adult Homelessness: *A Process Manual***

*Created by:*

*Jamila Bradley, Alice Colegrove, Lauren Leonardis, and Ayala Livny for the  
Massachusetts Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth,  
2018*

## Table of Contents

<b>OVERVIEW</b>	3
<b>PURPOSE</b>	3
<b>STEPS FOR YAB DEVELOPMENT</b>	4
<b>YAB STRUCTURE AND PROCESS</b>	6
<b>SUGGESTED INITIAL MEETING TOPICS</b>	8
<b>MANAGEMENT, CHALLENGES, AND GROUP DYNAMICS</b>	9
<b>APPENDIX A: GUIDING PRINCIPLES</b>	11
<b>APPENDIX B: SAMPLE MEETING AGENDAS</b>	14
<b>APPENDIX C: CREATING TRUTHS &amp; VALUES</b>	18
Example of Truths and Values taken from Boston Youth Action Board	23

## OVERVIEW

A Youth Action Board (YAB) is a group of youth and young adults who have experienced or are currently experiencing homelessness, and work with communities to improve systems and service delivery. Using the values of Authentic Youth Engagement, Trauma Informed Care, and Positive Youth Development (*see Appendix A*) ensures a Youth Action Board that is truly youth-led, youth-centered, and not exploitative, decorative, or tokenizing. This document has been created as part of the MA State Plan to End Youth Homelessness<sup>1</sup>, and is meant to provide guidance for communities to develop Youth Action Boards across the Commonwealth.

*“Authentic youth collaboration is about more than inviting a young person to share the stories of their past; it is also about providing the space for them to share their visions for the future.”*

*- True Colors Foundation<sup>2</sup>*

## PURPOSE

A YAB’s aim is to engage youth and young adults (YYAs) experiencing homelessness in providing real and authentic feedback and education to improve the services and systems designed to support them. The YAB’s expertise is derived from lived experience, but extends beyond advocacy and storytelling to offering communities insight and suggestions for improving systems and service delivery. Through the YAB, members are empowered to develop their own strategies, missions, values and goals.

*“Through all of this I have learned that I can apply a lot of where I come from and what I know, not only to get myself out of a cycling mess, but to help others. I can be weak and help others be strong and that gives me strength. We deserve to finally be heard to be respected and given leadership roles. Many times we hear, ‘we can’t, [there’s] no money, sorry, no way it will never happen.’ I am finding out now that we can. It’s just so beautifully overwhelming -- I care so much and I am growing as I go, just like all of us working with the YAB.”*

*- KH, 19, Boston*

<sup>1</sup> MA State Plan to End Youth Homelessness, Recommendation 6, Outcome 2, Strategy B: *Create tools, trainings, and resources to develop, support, and sustain local YYA leadership and YABs.* p. 23; Available online at: <https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2018/05/01/Massachusetts%20State%20Plan%20to%20End%20Youth%20Homelessness%20-%202018.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> "Youth Collaboration Toolkit." 40 to None Network. Accessed March 27, 2018. <https://network.truecolorsfund.org/youth-collaboration-toolkit/>

*“A YAB is important for so many reasons. One of which being that it brings us together... It gives everyone a voice, including the youth. It allows us the skills we need to better our lives. Fight for ourselves. Our worth. It gives us a chance to live, if even only for a few moments.”*

*- MN, 23, Boston*

## **STEPS FOR YAB DEVELOPMENT**

In order to develop a Youth Action Board, a number of steps must be taken. These include:

- 1) Identifying stakeholders and facilitators
- 2) Developing funding stream
- 3) Recruiting young adults
- 4) Holding initial meetings
- 5) Developing group norms and values
- 6) Identifying projects

The document below outlines some suggestions and structure, as well as resources to develop Youth Action Boards.

## **IDENTIFYING STAKEHOLDERS**

It takes a broad community of individuals and organizations to successfully create a YAB. Below you will find outlines of particular roles.

### *1) Internal Stakeholders*

The internal stakeholders are responsible for the YAB organization and coordination. Roles are as follows:

YAB Facilitators: a YAB requires staff to be responsible for recruitment, outreach, agenda development, social media management, meeting facilitation, and networking. The YAB facilitator(s) are also responsible for securing professional development and leadership opportunities for YAB members. Though this does not have to be a full-time position, it does require an ongoing time commitment and should be a specified part of a paid position. It is also possible to hire an outside consultant to develop a YAB; however, the work generally requires some time commitment from the host agency.

*“To be someone who starts a YAB I think you have to be super sensitive and understanding. [You have to understand] people’s triggers and give youth ...a voice. [You] have to be a good networker, and be a strong facilitator of respect. It takes a lot but - it can be done.”*

*- KH, 19, Boston*

Agency Host: An identified agency or organization that has capacity to host regular YAB meetings. Ideally this is an organization where YYA are already gathering, such as a drop-in center or educational program. The host must be youth-friendly and ideally provides a space that is safe, trauma-informed, and accessible.

Primary Funding Source: In order for the YAB to run effectively, funding must be secured to provide staffing, food for meetings, YAB stipends, and additional costs.

YAB Members: 18-25 year-olds with lived experience in homelessness or housing instability are the core of a YAB. YAB members are responsible for attending meetings, providing feedback, developing group norms, initiatives, and determining the group's projects and focus. It is important to note that many young people do not identify with the word "homeless," and some creativity may need to be used to identify and connect with young people. Using terms like "couch-surfing", "staying with a friend," "in-between places", or "experiencing housing instability" can be alternatives. YAB members should be recruited from a variety of subpopulations and organizations, with the shared experience of housing instability, including: LGBTQ youth, pregnant and parenting youth, immigrant youth, minority youth, youth exiting from child welfare and juvenile justice systems, and other young people affected by housing instability.

## *2) External Stakeholders*

External stakeholders are fundamental contributors to a successful YAB by helping to facilitate outreach, resources, leadership and advocacy opportunities, in addition to securing the YAB a legitimate and respected space within the community. Examples of external stakeholders include: Local Government agencies, State Government agencies, and other youth serving agencies.

## YAB STRUCTURE AND PROCESS

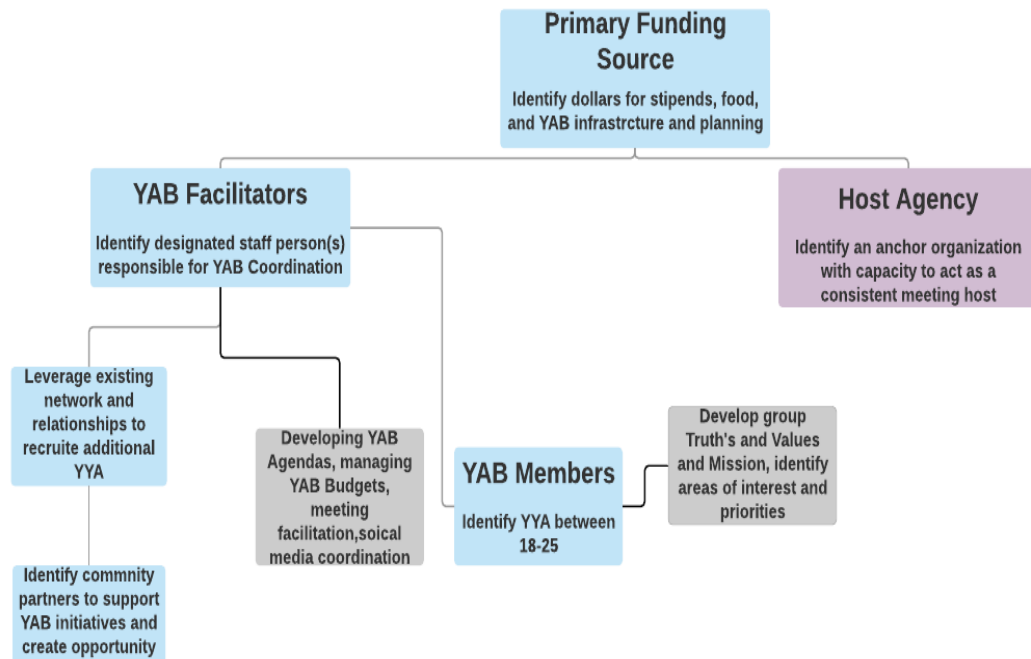
Many components are necessary to create successful YAB meetings. Food, stipends, supportive environments, and safety are fundamentals in working with and engaging young people.

### Organizational Structure

The structure of a Youth Action Board may look as follows:

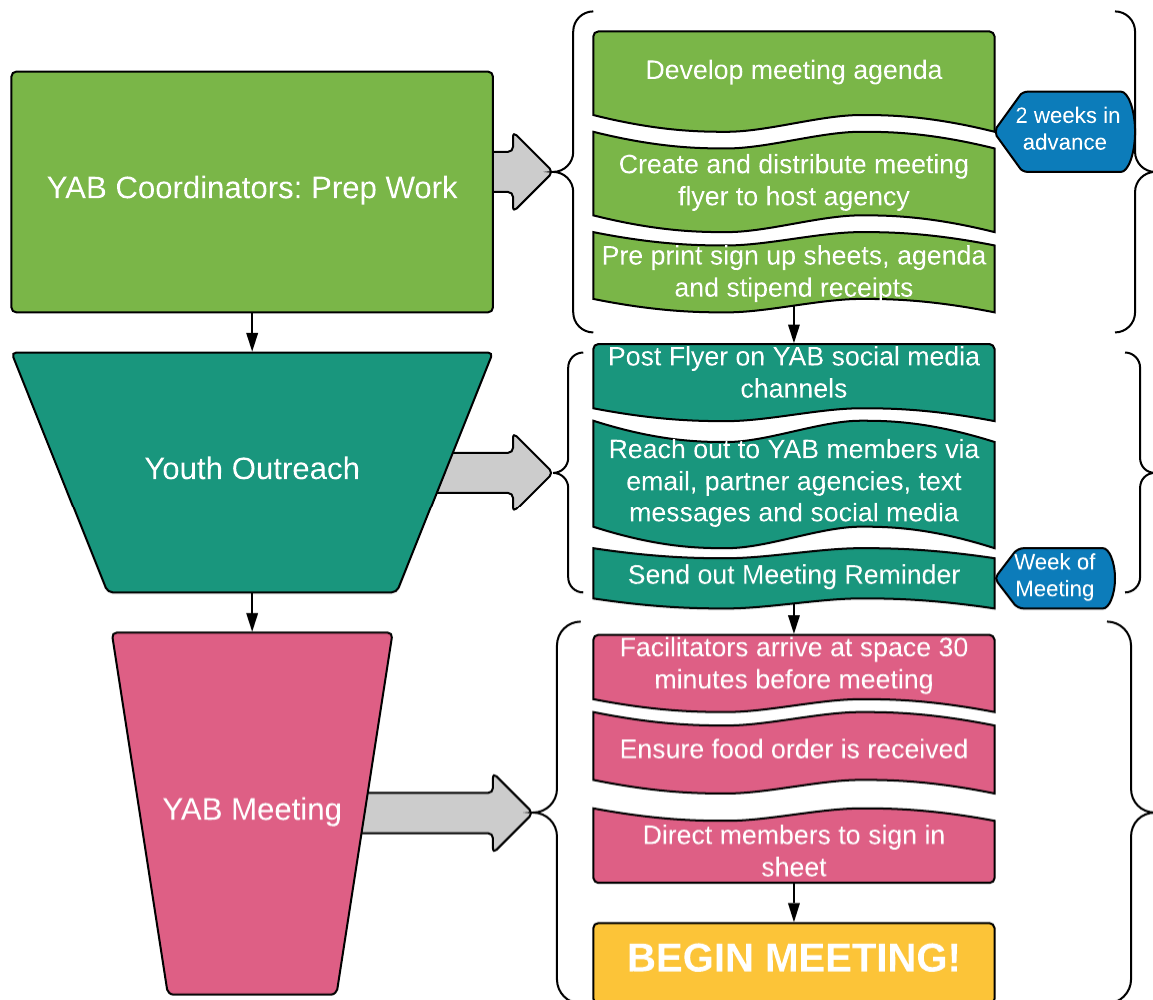
## YOUTH ACTION BOARD STRUCTURE

---



## Meeting Preparation

The YAB facilitators are responsible for the development of the meeting agendas, providing the meeting materials, conducting member outreach to existing and potential new members, and facilitating the YAB meetings. Some frameworks and tools to support YAB meetings are below. The YAB Facilitator suggestions for meeting preparation are as follows:



## SUGGESTED INITIAL MEETING TOPICS

Goals for the initial YAB meetings are to explain the purpose of the YAB, to get YYA engaged and excited about the work, and to develop the group norms and ethos. The first meetings can follow the general outline below; sample agendas can be found in Appendix B.

Each agenda should follow a similar structure, and include:

- 1) Welcome and reminder of the purpose of the YAB
- 2) Ground-rules/ group agreements
- 3) Introductions
- 4) Discussion topic/ action for the day
- 5) Closing and Evaluation

*“The calm presence that’s almost always in the atmosphere is what I like plus the rules help regulate and maintain order around what needs to happen.”*

*- JS, 22, Boston*

### Meeting 1:

- ★ What is a YAB? Who are we?, Why now? Why does this matter?
- ★ Funding, Budget and Process Transparency: Who is supporting this work? How are we managing this?
- ★ Identify Barriers and
- ★ Outreach strategies for other YYAs

*“People starting YABs should think about what they want the youth to get out of the experience. But also make sure to ask the youth what they want to get out of [the experience].”*

*- MN, 23, Boston*

### Meeting 2:

- ★ Alphabet game: What skills do YYA have?
- ★ What do most people not understand about YYA experiencing Homelessness?



**Meeting 3:**

- ★ Developing Truths and Values
- ★ What do YYA have to offer that the community needs?
- ★ Where do YYA want to lend their expertise?
- ★ Who do we identify as community partners that the YAB can engage and educate?

**Meeting 4:**

- ★ What projects does the YAB want to take on (must be in conjunction with goals from the funding organization).

**MANAGEMENT, CHALLENGES, AND GROUP DYNAMICS****A) Stipends for YAB members**

Just as professional staff are compensated for their time at meetings, it is imperative that YAB members are also compensated for their time. In addition to communicating respect for their time and expertise, it helps with recruitment and retention. The amount and form of their compensation should be clearly communicated before any activity. When asked, most young adults prefer to receive cash payments. If cash stipends are not an option for an organization, here are some additional suggestions:

- ★ Gift Cards, Transit Passes, vouchers equal to the hourly time spent at each meeting
- ★ Material goods like socks, supplies, gym trials or movie passes
- ★ Resources leveraged from other agencies like clothing closets, winter gear, cell phone chargers or specific items members may need
- ★ Ask your members what they would prefer

**B) Relationship to Host Agency**

One of the most important relationships needed to create a sustainable YAB is between the YAB, the facilitators, and the host agency. Often times, the host agency provides space, resources, and even the young adults themselves. Sometimes YAB facilitators are external consultants and do not work directly for the host agency. It is essential to ensure a productive, positive and symbiotic working relationship so that all parties feel valued. There are opportunities to show support to or return value to the host agency. This can look like:

- Offering to hold focus groups for agency around different programs
- Offering YAB trainings, workshops and speaking opportunities in partnership with the host agency
- Partnering with host agency on different initiatives, like the statewide youth count
- Setting up and cleaning up after each meeting
- Consistent check ins between host agency and facilitators on YAB progress and updates

### C) Managing Challenging Discussions

Engaging young people, especially around what is often a difficult lived experience, may mean passionate, emotional, difficult, heated, and /or challenging discussions. Handling these situations compassionately and skillfully is an essential component to building and sustaining a resilient, collaborative, and functional YAB. The development of consistent and clear ground rules that open each meeting are an important way to contain and maintain control in a meeting, and if conflict arises, participants can be directed back to the ground rules. Effective ground rules include:

- No judgment: Everyone's experience and the ways they have survived are different and valid. We want to create a space where everyone is accepted without judgment, and we can respectfully engage with each other.
- Respect: This means different things to different people, but fundamentally, in these meetings we respect each other by listening, not interrupting, not judging, and being kind to each other.
- Speak from the "I": Make sure you aren't generalizing or speaking to any experience beyond your own. Similar experiences look and feel differently to different people. We all come from different backgrounds and we have to hold respect for one another.
- Assume best intentions: We are all here because we care about ending youth homelessness. If someone says something that lands wrong, try to assume that they mean well.
- "Oops" and "Ouch" protocol: We may say things that inadvertently hurt or touch a soft spot for one of our peers. If something is hurtful, say "ouch", and the person who offended you can say "oops" and rephrase their statement.
- Step Up, Step Back: Ensure that everyone's voice has space to be heard. If you're sharing a lot, step back and leaving space for others to speak. If you are not saying much, step up and share your insights
- Support each other and yourself: Talking about our experiences and how to change the system can be overwhelming. Please be kind to each other and take care of yourself. If you need to take a break or go to the bathroom – please do.

### D) Inconsistent Participation

YYA often have busy lives that don't allow them to attend each meeting. You may also experience newcomers who have yet to attend but are excited to participate. The design of each agenda is an opportunity to ensure that every person interested in attending will be able to fully participate regardless of previous involvement. One should structure agendas in such a way that each meeting is stand alone and self-contained so that potential members can enter in at any point of the process and still be able to engage and interact with the meeting content and objectives.

## E) Need for multiple facilitators

From agenda development to meeting preparation and facilitation, having multiple facilitators is helpful. Many YAB meetings involve small group breakout sessions, outside activities, managing large group conversations, and sometimes individual interactions or conversations. Ensuring you have capacity to manage a group, activities, and any conflicts that may arise helps keep YAB meetings productive and running smoothly. It is recommended to have 2-3 designated and consistent facilitators responsible for the operation of the YAB to avoid burnout and to keep meetings, activities, and potential conflicts organized, managed, and contained.

*“The YAB changed my life. I never saw myself getting involved in something like this but if I had the chance to go back and change anything I wouldn't. While it's tough being homeless, it felt amazing to be part of a strong community consisting of other people who are in my situation. It made me feel empowered that people were actually listening and are finally beginning to realize that youth homelessness is a severe issue. I'm proud and amazed at how far we've come and I hope that we continue to shoot for the stars.”*

*- DP, 23, Boston*

## APPENDIX A: GUIDING PRINCIPLES

*Adapted from the MA State Plan to End Youth Homelessness<sup>3</sup>*

**Trauma-informed Care and Positive Youth Development:** Broadly speaking, trauma-informed care emphasizes creating individualized and tailored responses in settings and relationships in which a person can heal, and positive youth development emphasizes settings and relationships that support a young person's ability to thrive.<sup>4</sup>

Most unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness have experienced significant trauma that may include exposure to multiple types of abuse, neglect and violence. Additionally, the experience of homelessness in and of itself is often traumatic. SAMHSA defines programs and systems as "trauma-informed" when they meet the following criteria: "1. *Realizes* the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery; 2. *Recognizes* the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system; 3. *Responds* by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices; and 4. *Seeks to actively resist re-traumatization*".<sup>5</sup> Trauma-informed approaches are fundamentally built on safety, connection, transparency, collaboration, choice, and empowerment.<sup>6</sup> It is critical that all programs and strategies are trauma-informed in all aspects of how they approach and support young people to move towards improved stability, health and wellbeing.

Positive youth development (PYD) builds on the healing promoted through trauma-informed care by ensuring that YYA have opportunities to develop skills and talents through positive interactions with others and by contributing to programs and projects. PYD recognizes, utilizes and builds upon youths' strengths, and intentionally creates opportunities for mentoring, growth and development. Many practitioners discuss the "5C's" of PYD as creating "competence, connection, character, confidence, and caring."<sup>7,8</sup> These best practices should be

---

<sup>3</sup> MA State Plan to End Youth Homelessness, *Core Best Practices and Guiding Principles*. p. 44- 51; Available online: <https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2018/05/01/Massachusetts%20State%20Plan%20to%20End%20Youth%20Homelessness%20-%202018.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> "Ending Youth Homelessness: Using the Preliminary Intervention Model in Your Community's Response." USICH.gov. March 18, 2014. Accessed March 26, 2018. [https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset\\_library/PYIM\\_1.pdf](https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/PYIM_1.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> "Trauma-Informed Approach and Trauma-Specific Interventions." SAMHSA.gov. August 14, 2015. Accessed March 26, 2018. <https://www.samhsa.gov/nctic/trauma-interventions>.

<sup>6</sup> Kinniburgh, K. & Blaustein, M. "ARC: Attachment, Self-Regulation, and Competency: A comprehensive framework for intervention with complexly traumatized youth." Psych EXTRA Dataset. doi:10.1037/e732542011-001.

<sup>7</sup> Pittman, K., Irby, M., Tolman, J., Yohalem, N., & Ferber, T. (2003). Preventing Problems, Promoting Development, Encouraging Engagement: Competing Priorities or Inseparable Goals? Based upon Pittman, K. & Irby, M. (1996). Preventing Problems or Promoting Development? Washington, DC: The Forum for Youth Investment, Impact Strategies, Inc. Available online at [www.forumfyi.org](http://www.forumfyi.org). Accessed March 26, 2018.

integrated into all programs, systems and policies designed to support YYA achieve better core outcomes (housing, education, employment, social and emotional well-being, etc.). Within the context of a trauma-informed space, YABs provide an opportunity for Positive Youth Development to take place.

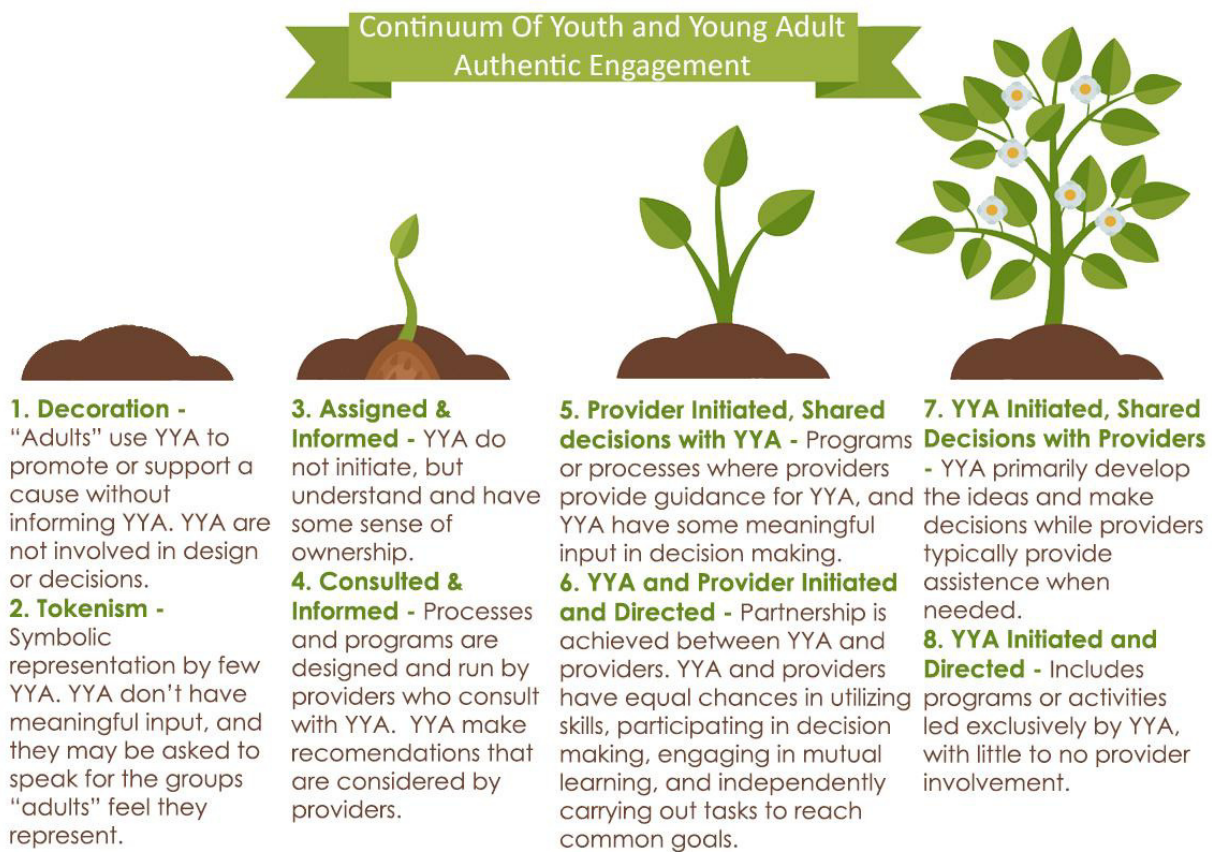
**Authentic Youth and Young Adult Engagement:** This work is grounded in the belief that the ideas and insights of YYA with lived experience should be at the front and center of any movement to end youth homelessness. Beyond simply sharing their experiences, YYA with lived experiences should be involved in information gathering, idea testing, and decision making at local and state levels. The True Colors Foundation states that “authentic youth collaboration is about more than inviting a young person to share the stories of their past; it is also about providing the space for them to share their visions for the future.”<sup>9</sup> Creating welcoming and accommodating spaces is not easy; the work of authentically involving YYA with lived experiences includes building trust, creating opportunities for meaningful engagement, investing in leadership development, addressing “adultism,” and the commitment to work through conflicts, and must be central to the work of ending youth homelessness. YABs provide opportunities to authentically engage young adults in shaping the systems that are supposed to serve them and their peers, and should be done thoughtfully and intentionally.

---

<sup>8</sup> "The 5 C's of Positive Youth Development." Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. Accessed March 26, 2018.

<sup>9</sup> "Youth Collaboration Toolkit." 40 to None Network. Accessed March 27, 2018.  
<https://network.truecolorsfund.org/youth-collaboration-toolkit/>.

A continuum of Youth Engagement can be graphically represented in the following way:



© 2017 Lauren Leonardis. All Rights Reserved. Document may be reproduced with credit to the author.  
Adapted from Citation: The Mockingbird Society; Mockingbird Youth Programs Continuum of Youth Participation 2015

## APPENDIX B: SAMPLE MEETING AGENDAS

### YAB MEETING #1: 1.5 hours

#### Goals:

- Outline concept/goals for YAB
- Get YYA excited about process
- Identify how to get more YYA involved

#### Facilitators will bring:

- Paper
- Pens
- Easel paper
- Markers
- Name tags
- Sign in sheet
- Stipends & Stipend receipts

#### Agenda:

- I. Introductions (10 minutes)
  - a. Name, preferred pronoun, question of the day: *what was your first job?*
  - b. Ground-rules (Respect, Non-judgmental space, Assume good intentions, Step-up/ step-back, Speak from the “I”, Common purpose) (*see pg. 8 “Managing Challenging Conversations” for additional details on ground rules*)
- II. Overview (10 min)
  - a. Why is our community creating a YAB? Why now?
  - b. Funding and Budget Transparency
    - Who funds us? What are the challenges? The advantages?
- III. Goals for YAB (5 min)
  - a. Understand barriers for YYA
  - b. Support the service system to better meet the needs of YYA
- IV. Activity (30 min): Identifying Challenges

*ASK: What are the challenges facing young adults who are experiencing housing instability in our community??*

  - a. Individuals write down 2 challenges (5 min)
  - b. Turn to neighbor – together come up with 6 challenges (your two, their two, plus two more) (5 min)
  - c. Groups of 4 – come up with a total of 10 challenges (10 min)
  - d. Large group – create large list (10 min)

#### V. Next Steps (15 min)

- What will be done with this information? Who will it be given to? How will it be used? (*Facilitators should know this before the meeting – is this something that will be given to the COC and used for planning purposes? Will the group continue to refine this list? Etc*)

a. Meeting schedule - When is the next meeting?

b. How can we get more YYA involved and excited?

c. Evaluation (around the room: one thing you liked, one thing you would change for next time)

---

#### YAB MEETING #2: 1.5 hours

##### Goals:

- Identify what young people bring to the process of ending youth homelessness
- Get YYA excited about process of creating a YAB
- Identify how to get more YYA involved

##### Facilitators will bring:

- Paper
- Pens
- Easel paper
- Markers
- Name tags
- Sign in sheet
- Candy for game winners
- Stipends & Stipend receipts

##### Agenda:

- I. Welcome and purpose of YAB
- II. Introductions (10 minutes)
  - a. Name, preferred pronoun, question of the day: *What is your favorite place in our city?*
  - b. Ground-rules (Respect, Non-judgmental space, Assume good intentions, Step-up/ step-back, Speak from the “I”, Common purpose) (*see pg. 8 “Managing Challenging Conversations” for additional details on ground rules*)
- III. Announcements



#### IV. Alphabet Game

- Split Into Three Teams
- Spell out “Youth Engagement” on Large post it paper. Teams must come up with a word for each letter that answers the question - *What does skills do young people with lived experience have to offer?*
- Teams will have 6 minutes to fill in as many words as they can before sharing back responses. The team with the most UNIQUE, non-duplicate words wins. Each duplicated word gets 0 points.

Y		E	
O		N	
U		G	
T		A	
H		G	
		E	
		M	
		E	
		N	
		T	

- Go around the room sharing for each letter and explaining why they wrote the word. Tally Points
- Discussion Questions-
  - So we know YYA have all these skills to offer to communities that want to prevent and end youth homelessness. Now What?
    - What do the YYA need from adults to have a YAB with authentic youth engagement?
    - What do YYA need to feel valued, heard and respected?
    - What do YAB members need in order to be open to sharing their skills?

*\*These identified needs should be written down and shared with/ presented to the adults involved in the planning process*

#### V. Next steps, next meeting

#### VI. Evaluation

- a. Plus/ Delta: What worked well today, what should we change for next time?

## APPENDIX C: CREATING TRUTHS & VALUES

### What are Truths and Values?

A Truths and Values document(s) make explicit the norms and guiding beliefs of a Youth Action Board (YAB). They outline the things that the group holds to be true about themselves and their peers, upholds as their core beliefs, and details the way that they expect to be seen and treated when working alongside other experts in professional capacities.

### What is in this appendix?

- The steps for a YAB to develop their own “Truths and Values.”
- Two sample agendas to use
- A completed example: The Boston Youth Action Board’s Truths and Values

### Below are the steps a YAB can take to come up with its own “Truths and Values”:

1. **Discuss**: Hold a meeting to discuss what the YAB’s “truths” and “values” are as a group. (See Sample Agenda 1)
2. **Edit**: Youth and young adult (YYA) leaders/facilitators take back the notes from the meeting to formulate a first draft.
3. **Review**: Take first draft back to the whole group to review/edit at the next meeting. (See Sample Agenda 2)
4. **Edit**: YYA leaders/facilitators make edits to the document according to the last meeting.
5. **Repeat**: Repeat the review and editing process as necessary before the document can be finalized.
6. **Finalize**: Ask that all current and future members agree to uphold these Truths and Values when representing the YAB.
7. **Use**: Don’t let these documents be decorative! Share them with every new member or organization that comes into contact with your YAB. These are your YAB’s guidelines in having meaningful and respectful relationships with all partners.

## Creating Truths & Values: Sample Agenda 1

1hr 30min

### I. Welcome and purpose of meeting (5 min ) (0:00- 0:05)

*"Today we are going to create our own Truths and Values documents. These are the things that we know to be true, uphold as our core beliefs, and explain the way that we expect to be treated by others. This is important because we deserve to be seen, heard, and respected in our communities as equals."*

### II. Ground rules (6 min ) (0:05- 0:11)

*"What do you need from the people in this room today to have a safe and productive conversation?"*

(Leave room for participants to share their own ground rules before giving some of your own. The following are some suggested ground rules.)

1. No judgment (*we all have different experiences and viewpoints and they are all valid.*)
2. Be respectful (*no interrupting, don't talk over each other, be kind to each other*)
3. Step up - Step back (*To speak more if you have been quiet, and to make space for others if you have said a lot*)
4. Speak from the "I" (*Our experiences are all unique – no generalizations or speaking for others*)
5. Be present (*Important phone calls should be taken out of the room, otherwise please be present and not on phones/listening to music*)
6. We are here for the same reason - to end homelessness for young people
7. "Oops/Ouch" (*If someone says something hurtful, you can say "ouch" - the person that said it can say "oops" to acknowledge their mistake.*)

### III. Introductions and question of the day (9 min) (0:11-0:20) : Name, preferred pronouns, QOD

### IV. Video: Sometimes You're a Caterpillar (25 min) (0:20 – 0:55)

- *"We all have things that we carry around, physically, mentally, or otherwise that make certain aspects of our lives more difficult than other peoples. One big example of that is being a young adult experiencing homelessness. We are going to watch a short video about how the things we carry affect the way we navigate the world differently than our friends with less of a load. This video can sometimes bring up feelings when you realize what you carry that is different from other people around you. We will take a moment to silently process our thoughts after the video so no one feels taken off-guard during the discussion."*
- Watch "Sometimes You're a Caterpillar" by youtuber Chescaleigh: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hRiWgx4sHGg>

- Discussion:
  - Initial thoughts/reactions to this video?
  - What is your “snail shell?” (you can have more than one)
  - What do you need other people to understand about your “snail shell”?
  - What are some ways that people treat you differently because of your “snail shell,” and how should they treat you instead?
  - What are some things you know you deserve access to, despite having a “snail shell?”

V. What are our Truths? (25 min) (0:55 - 1:20)

- What are some of the things that people assume about young adults experiencing homelessness?
- What do you wish people knew about the reality of homelessness for young people?
  - You can probe about: disabilities, who “deserves” housing, what people do to cope with the stress of being homeless or unstably housed, what service providers assume, etc...

VI. Next steps, next meeting (5 min) (1:20 – 1:25)

- We will take all the information we got today back with us and put it into our own document. Our next meeting will be on [DATE], we will review and make suggestions for edits at that meeting.

VII. Evaluation – (5 min) (1:25 – 1:30)

- One thing that worked well in this meeting, one thing you would change for next time. *(The purpose for this is to close out the meeting by asking for feedback on how it went to improve your next meeting. Go around the room, each person including facilitators shares a quick plus and delta.)*

## Creating Truths & Values: Sample Agenda 2

1hr 30min

- Welcome and purpose of meeting (0:00 – 0:05)

*“Today we are going to review the first draft of our Truths and Values documents. These are the things that we know to be true, uphold as our core beliefs, and explain the way that we expect to be treated by others. This is important because we deserve to be seen, heard, and respected in our communities as equals.”*

- Ground rules (0:05 – 0:011)

*“What do you need from the people in this room today to have a safe and productive conversation?”*

(Leave room for participants to share their own ground rules before giving some of your own. The following are some suggested ground rules.)

1. No judgment (*we all have different experiences and viewpoints and they are all valid.*)
  2. Be respectful (*no interrupting, don't talk over each other, be kind to each other*)
  3. Step up - Step back (*To speak more if you have been quiet, and to make space for others if you have said a lot*)
  4. Speak from the “I” (*Our experiences are all unique – no generalizations or speaking for others*)
  5. Be present (*Important phone calls should be taken out of the room, otherwise please be present and not on phones/listening to music*)
  6. We are here for the same reason - to end homelessness for young people
  7. “Oops/Ouch” (*If someone says something hurtful, you can say “ouch” - the person that said it can say “oops” to acknowledge their mistake.*)
- Introductions and question of the day (0:011-0:20)
    - Name, Preferred pronoun, Icebreaker Question
  - Review: Our Truths and Values First Draft (0:20 – 1:00)
    - *“We took the notes from our last meeting and organized them into a document that we hope reflects your Truths and Values accurately. Now we can review them and edit or add anything we missed.”* Pass out printed copy of the first draft.
    - Go around the room, each person read one piece.
    - Discussion:
      - Initial thoughts/reactions to these documents?
      - Are these things all true?
      - Did we get anything wrong?
      - Are we missing anything?

Example Document: Boston YAB's Truths and Values (1:00 – 1:23)

- *"The Boston Youth Action Board has created something similar to what we have started together. We are different people and have different needs than their group, but some of these things may ring true for us, too."* Pass out printed copy of Boston's Truths and Values documents.
- Go around the room, each person read one piece.
- Discussion:
  - Initial thoughts/reactions to these documents?
  - What part of these feels true for us?
  - Does anything feel like it wouldn't be true for us?
  - Is there anything we want to add to our Truths and Values from Boston's?

Next steps, next meeting (1:23 – 1:25)

- We will take your edits and suggestions back and edit this document. Our next meeting will be on [DATE], we will review at that meeting and decide if it needs further editing.

Evaluation – (1:25 – 1:30)

- One thing that worked well in this meeting, one thing you would change for next time. *(The purpose for this is to close out the meeting by asking for feedback on how it went to improve your next meeting. Go around the room, each person including facilitators shares a quick plus and delta.)*



# Boston Youth Action Board's Truths

The Boston Youth Action Board (BYAB) is a group of young adults who have experienced or are currently experiencing homelessness. The project is funded by the City of Boston to engage young adults (YAs) experiencing homelessness in providing feedback and education to improve the services and systems designed to support them.

As a part of our mission to educate about the realities of experiencing homelessness, we put together a list of some things we know to be true.

1. **Everyone Deserves a Home** - It does not matter how we entered homelessness, what we did to survive while experiencing homelessness, or where we came from. Above all else, everyone deserves a home. The "Housing First" model is a model that puts people directly into housing, without other pre-conditions or expectations (such as sobriety or mental health stability). . We believe that It is the best model to ending homelessness and making it as brief as possible.
2. **Homelessness is a Symptom of Oppression** - Oppression is defined as treating people unfairly, especially with overuse of government power. It is not a coincidence that the system favors some people over others. Minority groups make up a disproportionately large percentage of people experiencing homelessness compared to the rest of the population. This is in direct relation to the oppression experienced by these communities and is especially significant for LGBTQ+, Black/POC, and Native Americans.
3. **Invisible Disabilities are Real** - There is no way to look at a person and determine their abilities. Able-bodiedness does not equate to ability to work.
4. **All Survival Tactics are Legitimate and Valid** - We do not judge someone based on what they do to get by, whether for income or for maintaining sanity. This includes coping strategies such as substance use or self-harm that may have negative long-term consequences, but serve a purpose in the moment. We recognize that all behaviors are an attempt to cope with the situation, even if we don't agree or wish the person wouldn't do it.
5. **We Deserve Pleasure** - There is a dignity in pleasure, and we deserve to have fun and enjoy ourselves. Homelessness is stressful enough without being denied pleasure. Self-care is extremely important when experiencing homelessness, and things that may seem frivolous or "a waste of money" are sometimes the things that get us through.

6. **We Are Entitled to Privacy and Boundaries** - No one is required to explain themselves or explain their choices to someone else. Accessing a service doesn't mean that people are entitled to our story. "No" is a good and valid answer, as is sometimes not being truthful about things. No one is entitled to our truth and we can enforce that boundary however we need to.
7. **Respect and Trust must be earned** - Simply because someone is in a position of authority does not mean that they deserve our respect and trust. This must be earned and needs to be reciprocated.

## Boston Youth Action Board Values

*The Boston Youth Action Board (YAB) is a group of young adults who have experienced or are currently experiencing homelessness. The project is funded by the City of Boston to engage young adults (YAs) experiencing homelessness in providing feedback and education to improve the services and systems designed to support them.*



As more organizations come to the YAB for feedback and focus groups, we wanted to create a document to concretely communicate the group's values, norms, and expectations.

Below are the pillars that every organization must comply with in order to partner with the Boston Youth Action Board. These standards are incredibly important in being able to authentically engage with our group.

- **A Safe and Affirming Environment**

- While you are here we ask that you participate in our routines and standard operating procedures alongside us as peers. Our members come from a lot of different backgrounds and have expertise in their lived experiences. You are entering as a guest in their space, and it is important to recognize that working with the YAB is a privilege. Being a part of our culture or participating in our group is not something everyone gets invited to do.

- **Respectful Language**

- The members of the YAB have gone to great lengths to advocate for themselves in terms of how they would like to be referred to. Language is a vital part of showing respect and validating someone's lived experience and an important part of professionalism. Please keep in mind that we may use some words that are not appropriate for you to use.

Here are some Do's and Don'ts for language use in the YAB;

- Do say "Substance use, Problematic substance use."  
Don't say "Substance Abuse, Substance Misuse, User, Junkie, Addict"



- Do refer to us as “People, Folks, Youth and Young Adults, Students”  
Don’t call us “kids” or “children”
- Do ask “What are your pronouns?”  
Don’t assume or guess
- Do say “People experiencing homelessness”  
Don’t say “Homeless People, homeless youth”

- **Authentic and Transparent Process**

- Our members are invested in working with you. That means we need to know the purpose of the work we are doing, and where the information that we give you is going. It is also vital for us to fully understand why you have come to us for this particular project, what sorts of information you are looking to gain, and what we are going to be compensated. We ask that you will keep us informed of what has been done with the information and feedback we give you. In addition, our confidentiality must be respected.

- **Working with us is not charity**

- We have professionally valuable insight to share, and are here to help you improve your programs and services. We expect to be valued for our insight, resilience, and resourcefulness, not pitied for the situations we are in.

- **We do not have to bleed for you**

- In the YAB’s line of work we are often sought in a way that feels tokenizing, decorative, or purely for our “sad stories.” We have real advice and experience in homelessness that does NOT require us to re-traumatize ourselves for your benefit. Please do not ask us for specific details of our difficult experiences.

*Thank you in advance for your commitment to including and understanding the perspectives of young adults who have experienced homelessness. We look forward to working with you.*