

Youth Participatory Evaluation

Practice guide

Prepared by Wilder Research in partnership
with the Youth Leadership Initiative



What is Youth Participatory Evaluation (YPE)?

Youth participatory evaluation (YPE) is an approach that engages young people in evaluating the programs, organizations, and systems designed to serve them.

Through YPE, young people conduct research on issues and experiences that affect their lives, developing knowledge about their community that can be shared and put to use. There are different models of YPE. Some are completely driven by youth, while others are conducted in partnership with adults (definition from ACT for Youth Center of Excellence).

What is a YPE practice guide?

This YPE practice guide is an overview of how to do YPE.

Its intended audience is youth programs that want to begin their YPE practice. The practice guide describes a general approach to doing YPE, based on what others have written about YPE and what we learned about how the Wilder Foundation's Youth Leadership Initiative (YLI) does YPE. By going through this practice guide, YPE teams can create a YPE practice that "works" for them, meaning that their YPE practice is aligned with their values, tailored to their programming, and scaled to fit their capacity.

This practice guide walks through the major steps of doing YPE: 1) Determining your YPE values, 2) Outlining your YPE story, 3) Making program improvements, and 4) Reflecting on your YPE story. Throughout the practice guide, there are examples from YLI's YPE practice to illustrate what we mean by concepts like "YPE values" and "YPE story." There are also suggested questions for YPE teams to discuss together that are helpful for beginning to practice YPE. When using this practice guide for the first time, it may be beneficial to walk through it with someone who has done YPE before.

Why does YPE matter?

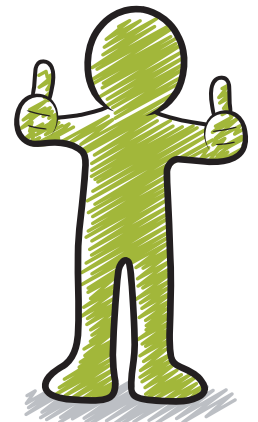
YPE results in program improvements and individual growth, and is often a more meaningful evaluation approach.

YLI has been practicing YPE for a number of years because there are important benefits that come with YPE. For programs, YPE improves programming, increases youth voice in program decision-making, and transforms program culture. For individuals, YPE develops evaluation skills and social-emotional competencies. In terms of evaluation, YPE improves data collection, deepens understanding of evaluation findings, and democratizes knowledge (from ACT for Youth Center for Excellence).

How did we make this practice guide?

This practice guide is a synthesis of the theory of YPE and the practice of YPE.

First, we learned about YPE by reading what others have written about YPE, mainly drawing from Kim Sabo Flores's book *Youth Participatory Evaluation: Strategies for Engaging Young People*. Next, we attended a number of YLI's YPE meetings to get a sense of how their YPE team worked, as well as to introduce the idea of a YPE practice guide to everyone on the team. Then, we facilitated a conversation with YLI's YPE team to answer the question: "What are the values, practices, and outcomes of YLI's YPE work?" After we gathered this information, we created this practice guide as a synthesis of what has been written about YPE and how YLI does YPE.



What is the Youth Leadership Initiative (YLI)?

Throughout this practice guide, we make a lot of references to the Wilder Foundation's Youth Leadership Initiative (YLI), so we thought it would be helpful for you to know a little bit about YLI.

YLI is a multicultural program designed to help youth develop strong, effective leadership skills to work in diverse community settings. The program assists youth in learning about themselves, working with others, and engaging in meaningful action. The six building blocks of YLI are learning, community, action, culture, character, and leadership.

At YLI, youth in grades 9-12 participate in a year-long commitment, participating in learning retreats, cultural exploration sessions, action teams, and school support activities:

- » **Learning Retreats:** Youth attend three multicultural learning retreats where they explore concepts of leadership, strengthen cross-cultural relationships, and participate in experiential learning activities that focus on working effectively with others.
- » **Cultural Exploration Sessions:** Youth meet in culturally specific cohorts which are chosen and identified by them. Aided by a Cultural Coach, youth explore their culture and heritage and its impact on their leadership style and personal development.
- » **Action Teams:** Youth participate in weekly multicultural teams that focus on providing service to the community.
- » **School Support:** Youth discuss the importance of education, set school improvement goals, learn about higher education, and are provided with structured support based on individual needs.



The Youth Leadership Initiative (YLI) is grounded in the belief that
**youth have tremendous skills and talents, invaluable and
unique perspectives and passion and commitment**
– all of which have the potential to benefit our community.

Stemming from this core belief that young people are not problems but part of the solution, YLI provides young people with support and leadership opportunities that are comprehensive, positive, participatory and encourages youth involvement in the community. YLI's strengths-based approach involves youth in decision making at all levels of the program and ensures success by building strong, respectful and committed relationships with youth.

Before continuing, read this about starting your own YPE practice:

This practice guide assumes that youth programs have the capacity and support to practice YPE. Without this capacity and support, it is unlikely that a program's YPE practice will produce meaningful change for the program. When we say "capacity and support," we are talking about some specific things. Here is a list of capacity and support examples that arose as we went through the process of creating this YPE practice guide:

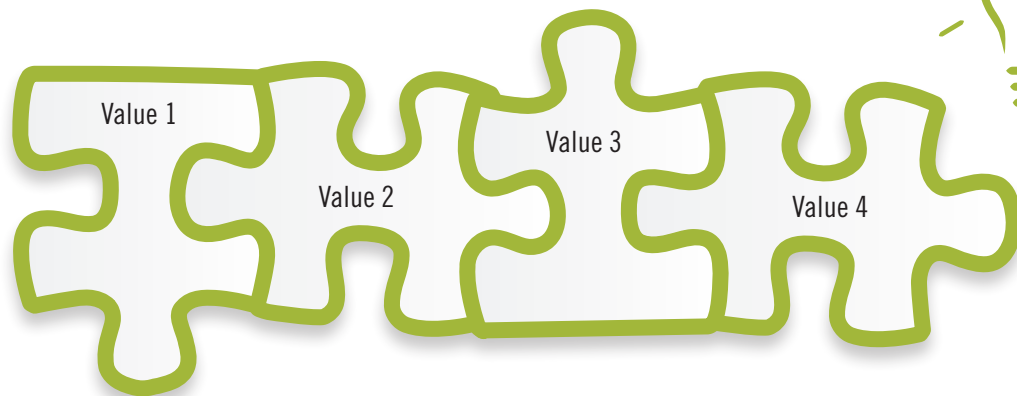
- » **YPE must be the designated responsibility of a program staff person.** For a successful YPE practice, it is recommended that YPE is an explicit part of a program staff person's job. We also recommend that this staff person have experience in doing YPE or receive training on how to do YPE.
- » **Youth must want to do YPE.** This is a central tenant of YPE. When YLI builds their YPE team, they tell youth that by doing YPE, they will learn about YLI and youth development, build evaluation and critical thinking skills, and make improvements to YLI based on their YPE work. However, if youth do not want to take part in YPE, then YPE should not be pursued.
- » **Regular time and attention is necessary for YPE.** YLI's YPE practice meets weekly for 1.5 hours. During this time, the program staff who are tasked with YPE are not participating in regular programming; they are doing YPE. The other YPE team members – youth and volunteers – are also not participating in regular programming; they too are doing YPE. A successful YPE practice needs regular time for the YPE team to meet and work together.
- » **Program and organizational leadership must commit to make changes based on YPE findings.** Similar to any evaluation process, the end result of YPE is recommendations about how to improve the youth program. These recommendations are then used to create a program improvement plan. It is critical that program and organizational leadership welcomes these recommendations and changes to the program.



We hope that this YPE practice guide is useful for youth programs that want to start their YPE practice; however, if these foundational aspects of doing YPE are not present, this guide will probably not be useful. We recommend that youth programs lay the groundwork for doing YPE by ensuring that they have this kind of capacity and support before beginning their YPE practice.

An overview for doing YPE

1. Determine your YPE values with your YPE team.



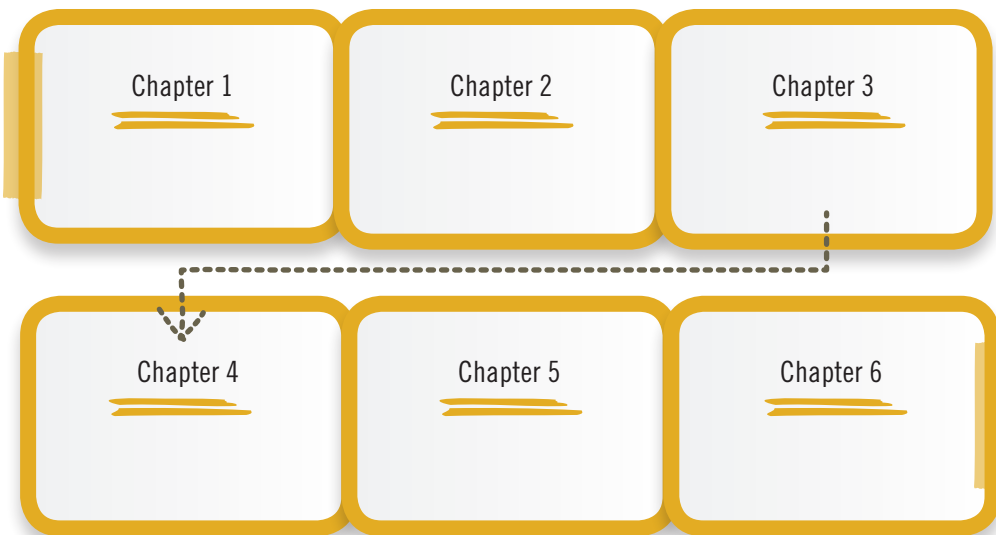
3. Make a plan for program improvement



Based on your YPE findings, what recommendations do you have for improving your program?

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2. Outline your YPE story, then



4. Reflect on your YPE story

How could the YPE process be improved for next time? How did the members of the YPE team grow or change throughout your YPE journey?



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This concludes the preview of the Youth Participatory Evaluation practice guide. To access the full 15-page guide, please contact Nou Yang at nou.yang@wilder.org.