Leveraging Best Practices to Design Your Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) Project

Insights from a review of the YPAR & developmental science literature

Acknowledgements

This resource was informed by the results of a systematic review led by Emily Ozer and Amia Nash. It was developed by Ahna Ballonoff Suleiman, Amia Nash, Heather Kennedy, Michelle Abraczinskas, & Emily Ozer with input, guidance, and support from Brian Villa. Thank you to the expert reviewers: Gabrielle Cooper, Lindsay Till Hoyt, Parissa Ballard, Elizabeth Hubbard, and Bethany Boland. This product was funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The information presented in it are those of the authors alone, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Foundation or the reviewers.

We gratefully acknowledge additional support from the UC-Berkeley Possibility Lab and the Life Course Intervention Research Network (supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under award UA6MC32492) for Dr. Amia Nash. We also gratefully acknowledge additional support from the WT Grant Foundation, Doris Duke Foundation, and Adolescent Young Adult Health Research Network (supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) under award UA6MC27378) for support of Brian Villa, MSW-MPH. The information, content and/or conclusions are those of the author and should not be construed as the official position or policy of, nor should any endorsements be inferred by HRSA, HHS or the U.S. Government.The information presented in it are those of the authors alone, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Foundation or the reviewers.

Suggested citation:
Ballonoff Suleiman, A., Nash., A., Kennedy, H., Abraczinskas, M., Ozer, E. (2024). Leveraging Best Practices to Design Your Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) Project.Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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01 Why should I read this guide?

Who we are and why we wrote this guide

We are a team of Youth-led Participatory Action Research (YPAR) scholars and practitioners. We recently completed a review of the growing body of scholarly literature on YPAR in an attempt to summarize the existing evidence we have about YPAR – what it looks like, where it is being done, and the impact it has on young people. We are preparing these findings for academic audiences and also summarize them here with the goal of making it useful for YPAR facilitators who may want to translate what we have learned into their work with young people.

What does this guide include?

1. A summary of what we learned from this review and how insights from the science of adolescence can help us adapt YPAR for young people of different ages.
2. A checklist to design a YPAR project that best meets the needs of youth and adult partners.
3. Examples of opportunities and challenges we have encountered in YPAR projects.
4. YPAR resources to support your work.

To clarify, this document is *not a curriculum* for conducting a YPAR project or a guide to train adults to engage youth in research. There are already many excellent resources available (see our suggestions in the final section of this guide).

Who did we write this guide for?

We wrote this guide primarily for adults including educators, youth program coordinators, social workers, or public health professionals who are are planning YPAR projects. Ideally, this planning process would happen in partnership with young people *and* we realize that, for many reasons, that does not always happen. If you are a young person who is interested in doing YPAR, you may find it helpful to share this guide with your adult partners.

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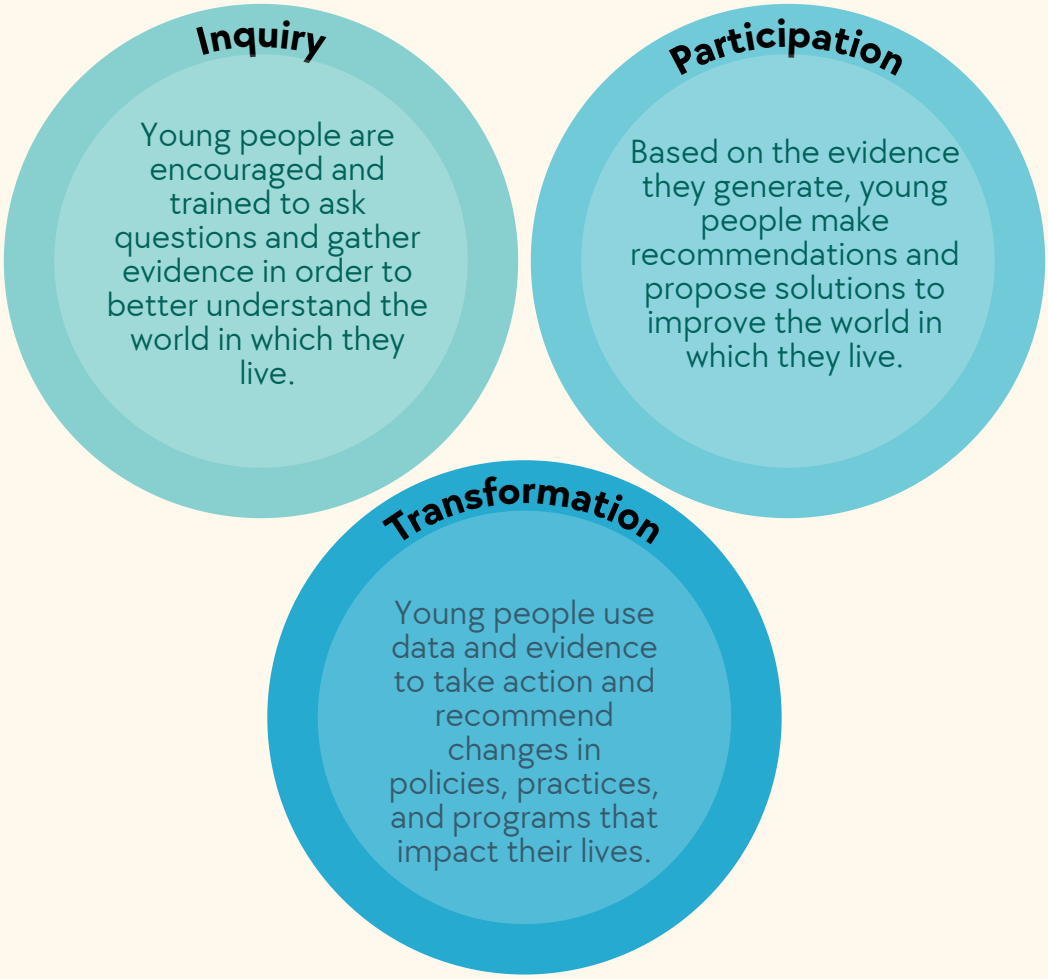
YPAR overview: Insights from the evidence

What is Youth-led Participatory Action Research (YPAR)?

YPAR is a participatory research **approach.** It is not a prescribed set of research methods. In YPAR, adults typically partner with young people to identify questions to study, provide them with training in research methods, support them in conducting research, and facilitate them using their knowledge, experience, and research findings to inform positive change on issues relevant to their lives. Authentic power-sharing between adult facilitators and youth researchers is a cornerstone of YPAR. This represents a major shift in how adults and youth typically interact. YPAR also offers opportunities for youth to use their research findings and lived experiences to provide input on their schools and communities.

Some key principles of YPAR are..[1]



(1) Rodríguez, L. F., & Brown, T. M. (2009). From voice to agency: Guiding principles for participatory action research with youth. New Directions for Youth Development, 2009(123), 19–11. https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.312

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YPAR is an approach to multi-level change

YPAR has gained traction as a strategy for authentic youth engagement and system change. At the same time that young people are gaining skills and experiences that support their positive development, YPAR also helps to shift existing power structures and work towards more equitable and just societies. It is one form of youth participation among many. If you are interested in learning about the differences between YPAR and other types of youth engagement, there are many excellent resources available.[(2)]

Design of a YPAR project is important

Intentional design of a YPAR project helps to ensure that both youth and adult partners maximize the benefit of engaging in this work and that the action from YPAR projects create meaningful change in the world. It also helps to ensure that we continue to build the body of knowledge and evidence about YPAR. As we are more intentional about the design of YPAR projects, we can better capture the impact and outcomes of this important work.

What have we learned from research on YPAR?

The majority of research examining the impact of YPAR has been qualitative—looking at themes found in interviews, observations, or artifacts such as documents or photos. Much of what we know about the impact of YPAR articles are from case studies that describe what happened in the project. Some research has been done using quantitative methods such as surveys. Often researchers investigating the impact of YPAR use multiple forms of data to understand the impact. There have been some efforts to understand the impact of YPAR through experimental research designs. Below we describe the key insights we have learned from the body of literature on YPAR.

(2) Ozer EJ, Abraczinskas M, Duarte C, Mathur R, Ballard PJ, Gibbs L, Olivas ET, Bewa MJ, Afifi R. Youth Participatory Approaches and Health Equity: Conceptualization and Integrative Review. Am J Community Psychol. 2020 Dec;66(3-4):267-278. doi: 10.1002/ajcp.12451. Epub 2020 Sep 24. PMID: 32969506; YPARhub.

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Phases of YPAR

a. Recruiting a team of youth and building a strong partnership between the youth and adults.
b. Defining the problem
c. Selecting the research design and methods
d. Developing the tools and collecting the data
e. Analyzing and interpreting data
f. Developing proposed action steps
g. Disseminating findings and proposed actions to stakeholders
h. Taking action!

What does YPAR look like in practice?

In our review of the YPAR literature, the role and power that youth have in projects that are described as YPAR varies a great deal in practice. These are some overarching themes:

- As suggested by the name, **youth must be involved in all stages of the research** and there has to be a clear action plan for the research findings to be used to advocate for social change.
- YPAR approaches are not "one size fits all" and are often adapted based on the goals and capacities of the youth and the adult facilitators, it is essential that those considering engaging in YPAR (and other forms of youth participation) be **transparent and intentional** about decision-making roles and power across the phases of the project.
- Youth engaged in YPAR utilize a **range of research methods** for data collection including arts-based methods, focus groups, interviews, mapping, observations, Photovoice, and surveys.
- The **hallmark action phase** of any YPAR project moves from research results into action. During this phase, the YPAR team reviews their results and identifies which insights can lead to real world impact. They then share the project results with diverse audiences to help build coalitions and partnerships. This often leads to community organizing to gain allies and resources that can help support and/or engage in the action(s).

What topics do youth research?

The topics youth research are as diverse as the youth involved and settings in which they conduct their research. Recent topics include: bullying; safe school climate; inequitable school policies and practices; healthy food access; dating violence; mental health; substance use; and environmental health and safety.

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Where is YPAR happening and for how long?

Most YPAR projects happen at K-12 public or charter schools or community-based organizations, last between six and twelve months, and meet at least once a week. Projects that meet longer are more likely to report changes in policies, practices, and systems.

What does the action phase of YPAR look like?

Our review of the literature highlights that the action phase of YPAR projects can take different forms**.** Many projects distill their findings into presentations, reports, or exhibits to educate social networks, community members, or organizational partners. Other YPAR actions include meeting with school, organization or political decision makers; creating or modifying an intervention or program design based on YPAR findings; or coalition building or partnering with organizations or individuals to build community momentum around a specific problem/solution.

What is the impact of YPAR?

Research has been done in many fields–such as public health, education, environmental studies and community psychology–looking at the impact of YPAR. A growing body of literature demonstrates that YPAR benefits young people and the systems they live, learn, and play in. [(3)]

- **Impact on youth:** The most commonly reported outcomes for youth participants are increases in agency and leadership, academic achievement, career preparation, sense of belonging, civic engagement, empowerment, and wellbeing. Additional outcomes include self-efficacy, resilience, self-esteem, social connection, and social skills. YPAR also helps strengthen their peer networks.

- **Impact on adults:** YPAR studies have also demonstrated impact on changing adults' attitudes and beliefs related to sharing power and partnering with youth.

- **Impact on programs, policies and research:** As a result of YPAR, research has documented positive changes in programs and policies so that they are more youth friendly. It has also demonstrated more created representation of research findings which helps to expand the audience of who hears and takes action on the outcomes.

(3) For summaries of the evidence on YPAR, see: Anyon, Y., Bender, K., Kennedy, H., & Dechants, J. (2018). A systematic review of youth participatory action research (YPAR) in the United States: Methodologies, youth outcomes, and future directions. Health Education & Behavior, 45(6), 865-878.; Shamrova, D. P., & Cummings, C. E. (2017). Participatory action research (PAR) with children and youth: An integrative review of methodology and PAR outcomes for participants, organizations, and communities. Children and Youth Services Review, 81, 400-412.; Ozer et al (in progress).

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Example from the field - The arc of a YPAR project

Forming the group: The Maternal, Child, Adolescent Health (MCAH) division of a county health department is conducting a community needs assessment. As part of this work, the MCAH director asks one of their staff members to conduct a YPAR project at a local high school to identify priority health issues and action steps for youth in the community. A team of ten youth are selected from a pool of applicants. After two team building sessions with the designated staff member, the MCAH director meets with the team and provides an overview of the needs assessment process and how the YPAR project will fit into it.

Youth-adult partnerships maximize the impact of YPAR projects

Setting expectations: The MCAH director explains that the findings of the YPAR project will be used to inform the five-year strategic plan for the county's MCAH division. She also explains that depending on the topics that the youth chose to research, they will have the opportunity to make recommendations and present them to the school board, county office of education, county supervisors, health department and/or other decision makers. In that meeting, the youth begin to brainstorm a list of potential issues they want to research in their community.

Clear expectations improve the outcomes of YPAR projects

This community has a long history of disproportionate incarceration of black and brown youth for marijuana possession and one of the topics the youth are very excited about is decriminalization. The MCAH director and the facilitator affirm the youths' enthusiasm and also remind them that this is a county level plan and that decriminalization is not decided at the county level so would not be appropriate for this project.

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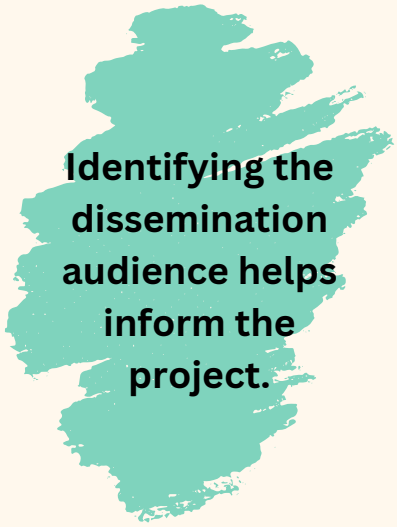
Deciding on issue and conducting research: After two more meetings, the youth decide they want to conduct research on drug-related disciplinary actions at their high school. After learning about the different types of data collection methods and engaging in conversation with the facilitator about who makes decisions around discipline and what type of evidence they may find compelling, they decide to analyzing existing data of all of the drug-related disciplinary actions at high schools in the county and a photovoice (taking photos and developing critical narratives about their meaning) project. They work with the county office of education to secure the existing data and conduct the photovoice project at their school over the course of a school year.



Interpreting data and preparing to share findings: Once the youth have completed their data collection and analysis, they conclude that black and brown youth experience disproportionate drug related disciplinary actions at both their high school and the majority of schools across the county. They have clear disciplinary data and compelling photos and narratives that capture the impact of disciplinary actions on black and brown youth and their school community at large. With support from the facilitator and the MCAH director, they arrange to meet with the principal at their school, a school board member from their district, a representative from the county office of education, and their local county supervisor.

Sharing findings and taking action: The youth share their findings, make recommendations for more restorative practices, and ask for advice about how they could influence change at their school and across the county. The county supervisor invites the youth to present the findings at the next county supervisor meeting and there she makes a proclamation that the county will adopt more restorative practices. With the support of the school board member, the principal, and a dean at their school, the youth also develop an action team to share the findings with the student body, parents, and the full school board. This initiates a new YPAR cycle on effective restorative disciplinary practices that the youth embark on with support from the adult facilitator.

The action step is the hallmark of a YPAR project.

03 YPAR and the science of adolescence

The highly diverse period between the ages of 10 to 25 is often referred to as adolescence. Important distinctions exist between the rights (what we are allowed to do); capacities (what we are able to do); and responsibilities (what we have to do) of young people . We often use age and grade in school as a way to estimate development, but even within age groups and grades, there is significant variation in the pace and timing of development influenced by biology (what is going on in our bodies), context (what is going on in our world), and experience (our interactions with the world around us and how we think and feel about them). Understanding and considering diverse pathways of development can help ensure that we partner effectively in YPAR.

The skills associated with identifying problems in one's life and community; collecting and analyzing data to understand the problems; and taking a leadership role in advocating for changes based on the evidence – match well with the developmental tasks of adolescence. YPAR can also be a valuable approach for youth facing marginalization by providing opportunities to engage with peers and adults to improve systems they experience as inequitable; advocate for fair opportunities and access to resources to support healthy development for all; and experience a sense of agency, empowerment, and impact.

> ***"Engaging in YPAR can provide youth with skills and opportunities that align with their unique developmental needs."***

> ***"Engagement is most meaningful when it maximizes the benefits for youth and draws on their experiences and expertise."***

In the YPAR literature, we often discuss strategies to make participation more meaningful. One of the goals of YPAR is to center the voices, experiences, and knowledge of young people themselves, including the youth who are often ignored in the development of programs and policies. Aligning the methods and strategies of YPAR with the developmental stage of participants helps to maximize the benefits to the research process, social action, and to the youth researchers. Further, paying attention to the timing and pace of adolescent development when designing YPAR projects can protect against tokenism (i.e. "surface" but not meaningful roles and input) and exploitation of youth, and promote appropriate allocation of time and resources.

Given the wide diversity in the pace and timing of adolescent development, there is a frequent mismatch between the learning opportunities young people experience and their own personal developmental stage. As a result, there is often declining interest in school over the course of adolescence. Integrating developmental considerations into YPAR project design can reignite passion for and commitment to learning and mastering new skills in and out of school.

> ***"YPAR serves as a strategy to increase young people's learning, interest and engagement in shaping the world around them."***

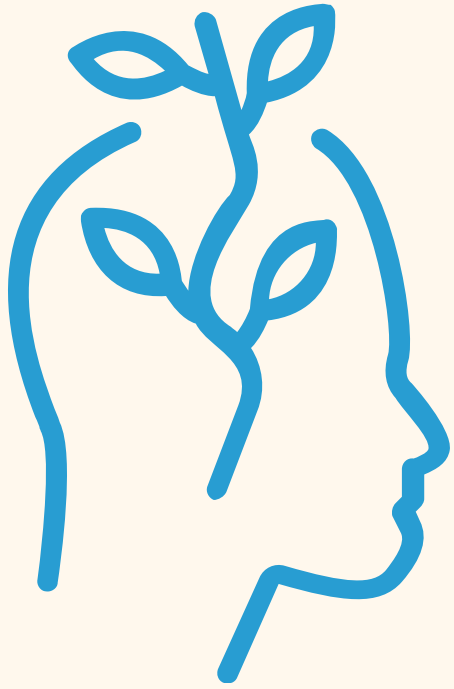
04 Developmental considerations

Including youth at different developmental stages in YPAR

In this next section, we review the key developmental concepts of adolescence and explain how they can inform the development of a YPAR project. This information can inform which young people you want to include in a project based on the outcomes you hope they will experience. We also provide examples, based on our experiences in the field, about how understanding development has improved the timing or approach when designing a YPAR project.

We recognize YPAR as a strategy to generate knowledge and motivate social change. Often the goal of YPAR is to improve the quality of research. While impacting youth wellbeing or creating a novel learning experience may not be the primary focus of your YPAR project, because youth are the primary participants of YPAR, we believe it is important to consider how their developmental stage may influence their experience.

Below we break down development by age, recognizing that age is not an exact marker of development and that different young people have different learning needs. We all develop at different rates and we acknowledge that exposure to trauma and individual differences impact development in important ways. Getting to know each young person, their history, and learning needs is the best way to authentically and meaningfully integrate them into projects.



Developmental tasks of adolescence & YPAR

There are 6 key developmental tasks of adolescence:[4]

1. Risk taking & exploration
2. Decision making & emotion regulation
3. Meaning & purpose
4. Respect & social status
5. Developing values, goals & identity
6. Support from caring adults

On the following pages, we describe how YPAR may relate to these tasks across three developmental periods: younger adolescents (ages 10-14), middle adolescents (ages 15-19), and older adolescents (20-24)

(4) UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent. (2024) *Key Concepts.* https://developingadolescent.semel.ucla.edu/Core-Science-of-Adolescence/key-concepts

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Risk taking & exploration

Taking risks and trying new things helps young people build new skills, discover who they are, and make sense of the world we live in.

Young adolescents (10 to 14-year-olds)	**Middle adolescents** (15 to 19-year-olds)	**Older adolescents/ Young Adults** (20 to 24-year-olds)
• Increased social and emotional neural sensitivity makes this a sensitive window for learning about new things. YPAR offers an opportunity to learn and apply new skills and knowledge. • Early adolescents are facing a lot of transitions in their lives and trying out many new things. In YPAR, pacing exposure to new concepts, ideas an opportunities offers early adolescents time for integration.	• Middle adolescents experience increased cognitive flexibility that they selectively apply based on the social context. YPAR can offer opportunities for them to apply this new capacity. Include activities that encourage young people to dream up new ideas that challenge the status quo. • Many young people experience decreased motivation in school and learning during this time. YPAR can offer alternative, experiential learning opportunities such as conducting interviews or advocating at a school board meeting that can reignite enthusiasm for learning.	• Older adolescents are often exploring multiple social and role transitions which may impact their ability to commit to a sustained YPAR project. Therefore, design shorter projects and emphasize opportunities for job-related skill development. • Given that older adolescents have often been more socialized in adult settings, they may be less inclined to explore and challenge ideas and assumptions of adults and may adopt or concede to socialized adult norms. YPAR projects can remind them of the value of challenging adult norms.

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Decision making & emotion regulation

Throughout adolescence young people learn to better control their emotional response, consider the feelings of others, and navigate making complex decisions.

Young adolescents (10 to 14-year-olds)	**Middle adolescents** (15 to 19-year-olds)	**Older adolescents/ Young Adults** (20 to 24-year-olds)
• Attention to tasks is often shorter. Plan shorter sessions. Use a variety of activities (e.g., small groups, large groups, games) in each YPAR session, and between sessions to maintain engagement. • Physical movement, if able, helps young adolescents to regulate their bodies - include physical movement whenever possible. • Provide support and scaffolding, especially early in the project to support effective decision making and build skills to support emotion regulation in the project. This can be tapered as young people build capacity in this area. • Very young adolescents like and want exciting, dynamic learning experiences. YPAR is a safe and fun way to take risks and explore the world.	• Middle adolescents process information very similarly to adults in emotionally calm contexts. When emotional intensity increases, they can become more impulsive. When emotional intensity in a project rises, create space to process those emotions and pauses so that the group can come back to decision making when things are less emotionally intense.	• Older adolescents make decisions and regulate their emotions like adults in most settings. This can make it easy for them to learn and adapt skills related to YPAR quickly. At the same time, their continued neural flexibility can support creative problem solving. • Because of the adult-like capacity of older adolescents, methods from community-based participatory action research (CBPR) can be integrated into YPAR with little tailoring or adaptation. In addition, there is often easier integration between youth researchers and adult facilitators. • Older adolescents can legally make decisions for themselves reducing the need to engage parents/guardians.

04

Meaning & purpose

Adolescents increase their capacity to positively contribute to the people around them and their communities. As they contribute they feel an increased sense of meaning and purpose.

Young adolescents (10 to 14-year-olds)	**Middle adolescents** (15 to 19-year-olds)	**Older adolescents/ Young Adults** (20 to 24-year-olds)
• Enhanced awareness of self-identity positions very young adolescents to be critical analyzers of themselves and how they interact with the world around them. Encourage them to reflect on the work they do alone as well as in teams. • Very young adolescents' increased motivation for heartfelt goals (things that feel really important) may lead them to fall in love with their role as a researcher, community organizer or change maker. It is important to offer both the experience of taking on these roles *and* encourage reflection about them so that young people can recognize and celebrate the new knowledge, skills, and roles they have gained.	• Middle adolescents have a stronger sense of self-identity and develop passions for specific causes. This can strengthen their capacity to identify YPAR topics that are relevant and important to them and motivation to take action steps that will positively impact their lives. On the flip side, they may be less open to exploring new ideas that do not align with their interests and may need support to explore new ideas.	• Older adolescents undergo significant identity development in many domains - such as politics, religion, gender and sexual orientation - that are ripe for YPAR projects. Recognize and honor the expertise they bring to the table.

04

Respect & social status

Adolescents experience changes in their sense of belonging among their peers and community. They are very sensitive to feelings of respect and inclusion.

Young adolescents (10 to 14-year-olds)	**Middle adolescents** (15 to 19-year-olds)	**Older adolescents/ Young Adults** (20 to 24-year-olds)
• Early adolescents are highly sensitive to evaluation and feedback from their peers and adults. They are also learning to navigate many new social situations. YPAR projects can encourage social connection through check ins. • Early adolescents seek autonomy while also being very sensitive to the influence of others. YPAR offers many opportunities to meet very young adolescents an opportunity to act and think independently.	• Increased independence, autonomy, mobility in middle adolescence can make it easier for young people to conduct research and attend sessions. They may also be able to more willingly express views that contrast those of their peers. • Middle adolescents may be highly sensitive to whether engaging in YPAR is considered a cool thing to do. It is important to design experiences and position the project in a way that helps to enhance social status.	• Older adolescents often have more responsibilities to generate income. Time spent on YPAR is often time that cannot be spent on other paid work and therefore equitable payment is important.

04

Developing values, goals & identity

Adolescents form a sense of who they are, what they value, and who they want to be in the world.

Young adolescents (10 to 14-year-olds)	**Middle adolescents** (15 to 19-year-olds)	**Older adolescents/ Young Adults** (20 to 24-year-olds)
• Very young adolescents are building their understanding of how their experience differs from others. Providing opportunities for the group to discuss and examine how their experiences and beliefs align with or differ from those of other young people can support their development.	• Gender roles are more amplified during middle adolescence which may influence team dynamics and change the way young people experience comfort and safety in different settings. As the group builds trust through YPAR, this can be an opportunity to identify and examine the impact of gender roles within the group. • Middle adolescents can leverage insights from their experiences as early adolescents as well as provide insights about their current experiences. This can position them to be excellent YPAR participants for topics impacting earlier adolescents.	• Older adolescents often broaden their social worlds and they know people with differing beliefs in many domains - such as politics, religion, gender and sexual orientation. Create group agreements about how to facilitate effective dialogue between people with differing ideas. Encourage conversation about current events relevant to the YPAR topic - even when they challenge the assumptions informing the project. • Older adolescents can leverage insights from their experiences as early and middle adolescents, as well as provide insights about their current experiences.

04

Support from caring adults

Although adolescents become less dependent on adult care givers, they still need secure and supportive relationships with adults in their lives.

Young adolescents (10 to 14-year-olds)	**Middle adolescents** (15 to 19-year-olds)	**Older adolescents/ Young Adults** (20 to 24-year-olds)
• Power sharing with very young adolescents can be challenging for some adults. Adult views of young adolescents can be protective or dismissive. Therefore, it is important to openly discuss power dynamics, train facilitators to attend to them, and arrange the room and activities in ways that share power. • Diversity in developmental trajectories during early adolescence adds texture to projects and requires skilled and adaptive facilitators who know how to adapt activities and meet the diversity of the group. • Adults are often highly impressed and influenced by very young adolescents who are informed and well organized. Young people can leverage this to advocate for meaningful change.	• Increasing self-regulation skills may require less scaffolding from adults or may allow adults to provide youth with more autonomy and leadership earlier in the project. • As middle adolescents begin to look more adult-like, this can complicate power-sharing between youth and adults. It is critical to attend to power dynamics within YPAR projects by overtly and explicitly discussing dimensions of power and calling out when people experience imbalances.	• Because older adolescents appear adult-like, their public advocacy efforts through YPAR can be less novel for adults. Older adolescents may not identify as youth or be perceived as youth by adults. • Because older adolescents are more independent, fewer resources are needed to support adult facilitators.

05 Designing your YPAR project

How to use this planning guide

We've designed this series of questions to help you in thoughtfully planning for, engaging in, and creating change with youth.

This planning guide is designed to help your team think through the design of your YPAR project. ***The earlier in the process you can think through these questions - the better.***

If you use this guide to design your project **before you secure funding** or recruit participants, you will optimize the benefits for everyone and maximize the impact of your work.

Intentional design will make the project smoother and more transparent. ***Ideally, get a head start on youth participation and have a team of youth and adults complete this planning guide together.***

Depending on the size and scope of your YPAR project, this guide may take a few hours complete. Consider having a retreat or splitting up pieces of the planning across a few days. It is fine if you don't have all of the answers to these questions right away - it is often helpful to know where gaps exist.

It *is very likely that you will answer some of these questions one way now and then change your answers as the YPAR project evolves* - that is great! Revisit this guide regularly during your project to compare your plan with the reality.

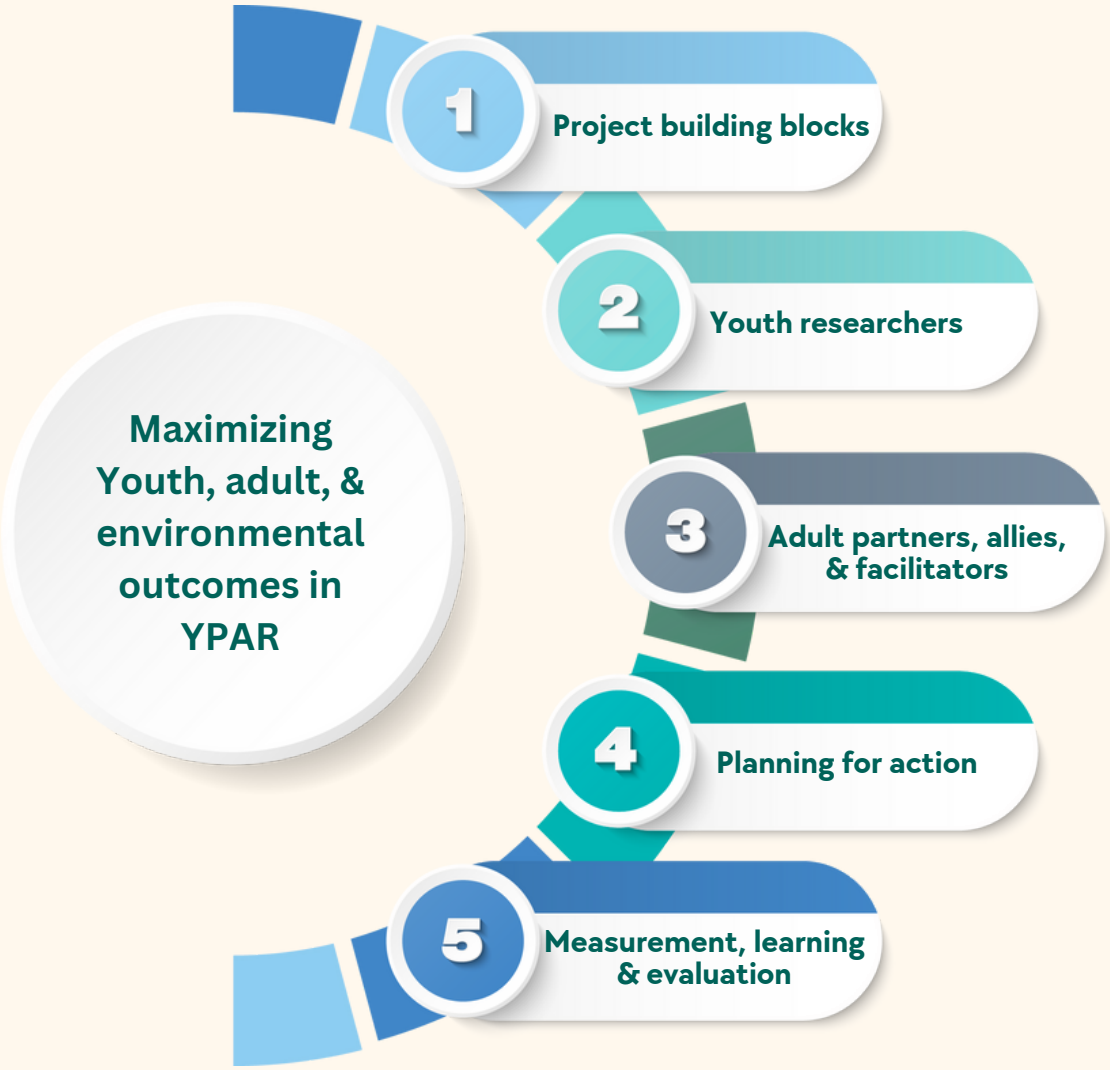
Tracking the changes you make to this plan can be an important part of understanding what you planned, justifying it, and explaining to others what really happened. ***It helps us optimize future YPAR projects!***

05

Steps in this planning process

Intentionally designed, well thought out projects, with adequate time, support, adult preparation, and structure will maximize the developmental benefit of YPAR while advancing youth-driven change in your community. The following section includes a variety of questions that will help you consider elements that we've identified, through examining the literature, that contribute to successful YPAR efforts.

Parts of the planning guide



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Project title:

Host organization:

Project partners:

Project building blocks

What is motivating this YPAR project?

What resources do you have to support this project?
How well do the resources match with what we hope to achieve? What additional resources do we need? Where will they come from?

Time: How much time are we asking youth to commit to this project? What is the frequency of when they will meet? How much time are youth asked to commit outside of group meetings?

Funding: What funds exist to pay adult staff? What funds exist to pay youth researchers? What funds can support the project work (e.g. data collection, incentives for research participants, refreshments and supplies for meetings)?

Staff: How much staff time will be allocated to support this work? How long is that sustained?

Setting: Where will young people meet? How comfortable do youth feel in this space? How accessible is the location for youth?

Scope: What is the duration of the project? What are the phases of the project we have mapped out?

05

Project building blocks (continued)

What are the practical constraints associated with these resources that we need to be mindful of?

Consider: permission needed for youth participation and/or transportation; communication platforms; Human Subjects review requirements; etc.

What are the constraints around the topic, focus, or scope of youth decision-making in this project that we need to be mindful of?

Many YPAR projects are housed in specific organizations (e.g. schools) or supported by categorical funding (e.g. tobacco prevention funds) that can constrain decision making in the project.

How are people in your community already working on this topic?

What are existing resources, policies and procedures related to this topic that impact the lives of young people? Where are places that are ripe for evidence-informed change?

When young people develop knowledge, it can disrupt existing power structures. What type of disruption could this YPAR project create?

How well skilled and comfortable are staff and leadership at working in this space? How receptive is the community to this type of work? What additional support may this project need?

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Project building blocks (continued)

What phases of the project will youth be engaged in (check all that apply)?

- [ ] defining the problem
- [ ] selecting the research design and methods
- [ ] developing the tools and collecting the data
- [ ] analyzing and interpreting data
- [ ] developing proposed action steps
- [ ] disseminating findings to stakeholders
- [ ] taking action!

If they are not engaged in all phases, what is the rationale for excluding them?

Sometimes the work in YPAR projects extends beyond the designated funding or project period.

If this happens, what is your plan for continuing to support this work?

Youth researchers

Who are the youth researchers you want to include in this project?

Consider organizational affiliation, developmental stage, identity, demographics, life experience, expertise, ability level, learning needs, and any other factors that may be important for the youth to bring to the table. Youth currently living an experience or with recent experience .

What is the rationale for including this group of youth?

Consider how well the desired demographics of the youth researchers align with the available resources to support the project.

05

Youth researchers (continued)

How will you recruit youth?

Will you recruit from an existing organization, or from within a specific population? How will youth find out about this effort?

How will you adapt program activities to meet the different abilities in the group?

Will all youth be physically able to move around the space? Do all youth speak a shared language? What are the different learning needs of the youth and how will you adapt the activities so all can participate equitably?

How long will youth be engaged?

What is your plan for onboarding and retaining youth? What is the succession plan if youth drop out or age/develop out of the target range for this project?

What experiences, skills, or other outcomes do you want youth to gain as a result of engaging in this project?

What is the next step for youth who have participated in this project?

What links can you make or pathways you can create for them to continue using and building their YPAR skills?

05

Adult allies/partners/facilitators working on the YPAR project

Who are the adults the youth will be working with?

What is their role in the YPAR project?

What experiences or expertise do they have in engaging young people?

What experiences do they have sharing power with young people? What experiences or expertise do they have with YPAR? What experiences do they have with community organizing and/or social change work? What experience do they have adapting program materials to meet the learning needs of different groups?

What type of capacity building, including training, will be done with adult allies?

How will you frame this capacity building so it is relevant and useful to the adults? How will adults be prepared to respond to emerging needs (e.g., mental health) of the young people?

What is the role or position of the adults in their organization and/or the broader system the YPAR project is aiming to impact?

What relationships or positions may adults need to leverage or political risks might they need to navigate to support the YPAR change efforts? What kinds of support might they need if their job is not secure and they are seen as a trouble-maker?

05

Planning for Action

Some projects begin planning for action at the very beginning. This is particularly true if there are mandates from a funder, the YPAR project is taking place in a specific context like a school, or the YPAR project is part of a cycle of YPAR. For other projects, the action can only be determined once the data is collected and analyzed. It is sometimes helpful to think in advance about action or you may want to revisit this later in the project.

Who do the youth want to share their recommendations with at the end of this project?

When do you want to engage this audience in the process? What do you need to do to translate the findings into something meaningful for them? How will you disseminate the findings?

What is the target policy or practice change this project aims to achieve?

What change are the youth seeking as result of the work they are doing? How will they help create this change?

05

Measurement, learning & evaluation

- Who is defining success in this project?
- What will success look and feel like for youth?
- What will success look and feel like for the host organization?
- What will success look and feel like for the community or environment in the action phase of this project?
- Where does the project hope to have the greatest impact (e.g. youth researchers, broader youth community, the research process, and policy or program output)?

05

Measurement, learning & evaluation (continued)

What metrics will we use to measure the impact of this project?

Other YPAR projects have looked at agency, leadership, academic achievement, career preparation, sense of belonging, civic engagement, empowerment, and wellbeing, self-efficacy, resilience, self-esteem, social connection, and social skills. What are you interested in measuring? What scales/tools exist and what do you need to create?

Metrics of success	Scales & tools

What evidence do you need to sustain support for your program and for your YPAR efforts?

What story do you want to be able to share about your YPAR project with others? How well does this match with the data you plan to collect?

What is the plan for taking the lessons we learn from this project and using it to inform our future work?

06 YPAR tools & resources

Once you have committed to engage in YPAR, there are many resources out there to support you. Depending on the youth you want to engage and the goals of your project, you can find YPAR toolkits and curricula to match your needs. You may also need additional technical assistance or support to help you. In the guide we have directed you to relevant resources depending on the type of youth engagement you are doing. Here we highlight a some additional resources to get you started:

YPAR Resources

Members of our team have helped to develop and maintain these free, comprehensive curricula on youth participatory action research (YPAR). They include lesson plans and trainings for many skills that are essential for evaluation such as developing research tools, collecting and analyzing data, and using data to inform learning and action. These are all excellent resources. In order to best match the unique needs and interests of the youth you are working with, the context you are working in, and the skills of your facilitators, we highly encourage you to blend and adapt these tools to best serve your project.

YPAR Hub
(UC-Berkeley and SF Peer Resources)
https://yparhub.berkeley.edu/

Community Futures Community Lore Stepping Stones Curriculum
(UC Davis)
https://ypar.cfcl.ucdavis.edu/OurApproach.html

Hub for Justice Centered Youth Engagement
(University of Colorado Center for Public Health Practice)
https://coloradosph.cuanschutz.edu/research-and-practice/centers-programs/cphp/practice-units/hub-for-justice-centered-youth-engagement

Please contact any of us if you are seeking support with designing or running your YPAR project!

06 YPAR tools & resources

Youth Engagement Technical Assistance and Training

Finding technical assistance to meaningfully engage young people can sometimes be challenging. You may know of organizations in your networks that do this really well. We encourage you to reach out to them and see if local partnerships can help you build your capacity. If not, here are some additional resources that may be helpful.

Hub for Justice-Centered Youth Engagement offers training, coaching, and technical assistance on YPAR and youth engagement practices. https://coloradosph.cuanschutz.edu/research-and-practice/centers-programs/cphp/practice-units/hub-for-justice-centered-youth-engagement

Search institute offers resources and technical assistance on positive youth development and youth engagement. https://searchinstitute.org/

Youth Era offers training and technical assistance for youth-serving groups, organizations, and agencies interested in integrating youth voice into building, improving, and running youth/young adult programs and services. http://www.youthprogrambuilder.com/about

UC Davis Center for Regional Change offers technical assistance and consultation on YPAR projects. https://regionalchange.ucdavis.edu/

The Science of Adolescent Development

If you are interested in learning more about the core science of adolescent development, the **UCLA Center for the Developing Adolescent** has available free resources. https://developingadolescent.semel.ucla.edu/core-science-of-adolescence

Good luck with your YPAR project!

Produced in 2024