

Evaluating Your Program

After putting so much effort in creating an inclusive and motivated community it is important to document whether or not you have accomplished your goals. In addition to highlighting areas of improvement, it may also be necessary to be able to demonstrate the positive impact your program has on youth to secure funding. Youth Empowerment programs need to prioritize youth input in this process. Adult allies need to constantly incorporate feedback from the youth into the planning and structure of their program. Common methods used to gather and implement youth input are to plan regularly scheduled survey, usually at the end of project or a school year. The goal is to measure skill and social development in the youth and document why the youth feel connected, or not, to the rest of the group. An adult ally should then use this information to guide his or her planning for the next youth empowerment group. Another, more informal, method of collecting youth feedback for your program is through daily debriefs. A debrief can be as simple as having everyone share a high and low of their time together, or as complex as facilitating an intentional group conversation about how a single activity may fit into their larger goal.

Project EAT internships utilize the Food Project's "Straight Talk" guideline to help youth give feedback to the program and to each other.

What can you expect when you engage youth by empowering them?

When you engage youth through empowerment programs you can expect to gain a deeper respect for the community you work in and for the talents and skills that each person brings to the group. Young people are often expected to be quiet, recipients of information that someone else decided is important for them to know. These youth are not often appreciated for the skills and knowledge they already have and use successfully every day. Programs that empower youth to make decision and educate each other gives them a sense of purpose that encourages them to take a greater investment in their own future and that of their community.

Taking ownership over creating a positive change in the community is an invigorating experience. Both adults and youth involved will go through a positive transformation--adults will begin to respect youth as collaborators instead of just observers and youth will have a chance to be recognized as agents of change in their community. These personal transformations will be at the base of any lasting positive social change.