

Project EAT Youth Empowerment Manual

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Introduction

Project EAT is a garden-based nutrition education program that operates out of the Alameda County Office of Education. We are funded through the Network for Healthy California (“Network”). The mission of the Network is to create innovative partnerships that empower low-income Californians to increase fruit and vegetable consumption, physical activity and food security with the goal of preventing obesity and other diet-related chronic diseases. The Network provides funding to schools with at least 50% of the students qualifying for free and reduced lunch.

At the heart of all our work at Project EAT is the mission to end health inequities and close the achievement gap in school communities. We support health and nutrition education both in the classroom and after school because we believe that fresh food and exercise are essential to creating healthy students. We also believe that in order for students to perform their best academically, they have to be at their best physically. Students who are healthy and performing well academically are in an optimal position to be leaders and role models at their schools and in their communities. Although our Youth Empowerment Programs focus on the growth and development of individual students, our end goal is to shift the behavior of entire communities to become healthier. Youth need to be the leaders of this behavioral shift because they are inspirational, creative, and heavily invested in the welfare of their community. Youth are also much more likely to take the advice of other youth instead of following directions from an adult who may not understand their challenges.

Throughout the rest of this manual we will provide different examples on what Youth Empowerment looks like at Project EAT and provide detailed instructions on the steps involved to create these programs. At Project EAT we use food as a tool to build life skills which empower youth to make healthy choices and gain leadership experience that will enable them to inspire and educate their peers and families to do the same. However you envision positive change for your community or school, we hope that you see Youth Empowerment as an essential element in creating a lasting impact.

“To me, a Profreshional is a role model who values healthy eating and demonstrated habits to their peers and community. Through research, I believe that Profreshionals are able to act upon data that they collected. By vocalizing the health concerns, we improve the awareness of healthy living to our community. I believe that by being a role model, I will inspire my peers.” Project EAT Youth Intern

Food as a Vehicle for Change

Food is something that unites us all - we all eat everyday. At the same time, food is something very personal and hinges on our individual choices and cultural heritage. The way in which we acquire food depends on many processes that create a complex system and an environment that we negotiate each day in order to nourish ourselves. Project EAT sees the intersection where our food system effects our daily choices as a powerful platform for youth empowerment.

Food and health are very relevant for students in their daily lives and touch on both personal choice and control. As such, exploring and learning about these topics provide many opportunities for students to reflect on growth and change. Project EAT recognizes that this personal change is a necessary precursor for local and systemic changes in our food system, as well as for affecting their immediate family and friends. Thus, youth are able to see themselves as change agents for themselves and their communities.

Similarly, many of the issues in our current food system (health inequities, prevalence of unhealthy food, schools lacking education on nutrition) directly affect young people and as such they have a strong stake in the outcomes of the current system. Their experiences, knowledge, and ideas are integral for addressing these issues and as such we work to hone, honor, and support these perspectives to create lasting change. In the communities that Project EAT serves, over a third of the adult population are obese (BMI >28). This leads to certain communities being disproportionately affected by nutrition related diseases like diabetes. Sadly, youth are also facing these consequences of poor nutrition -- over 50% of first graders of color in our community are projected to have diabetes by the time they are adults.

Historically, youth have always been at the forefront of social movements. The food movement is a burgeoning issue of justice and basic rights - and these basic rights are something youth are passionate about. Also, when youth see themselves as a part of something larger (e.g., their team, their school, a national network, a global movement), they have a sense of ownership and power that translates to other areas of their lives. Amplifying youth voice and power for this movement is an essential foundation to Project EAT's philosophy and practice.

Lastly, Project EAT involves hands-on learning and experiences that imparts valuable job skills which have real world applications (cooking, reading labels, growing food). As we transition to a greener economy, these skills hold even greater value for students as they enter the job market or choose to start their own businesses. Our programs focus on growing and preparing healthy food - and in the process we grow and prepare healthier individuals and communities.

Project EAT's Theories of Youth Empowerment

Project EAT's method of youth empowerment is based in two different, but complementary theories—asset building youth development theory and youth-led participatory action research (YPAR).

Youth Development

Project EAT uses an asset-building approach to youth development, also known as positive youth development. Asset-building youth development focuses on the strength and attributes of youth instead of focusing on their deficits or problems. This means that our youth empowerment programs avoid language like “at-risk”, “delinquent”, or “low-income”, to label or target youth in our programs. Instead, we search for students who might be facing obstacles in their home or academic life by offering them an opportunity to gain skills and to be recognized for what they can contribute. National Collaboration of Youth Members provides a comprehensive definition for this approach of youth development—“a process which prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically, and cognitively competent.” The strength in using a positive youth development model is allowing youth an opportunity to create connections to each other by sharing a goal and to be treated as a valued member of the community. At Project EAT we do this by offering a wide range of youth programs that collaborate with the greater community and one another. Through these positive collaborations youth are inspired to take what they are learning and make it relevant in their day-to-day lives.

Youth development is an intentional part of Project EAT through the way we recruit our youth, the structure of the internships, the opportunities for youth to be leaders, and the role of adult allies. The rest of this manual will explain our approach to youth development within specific youth programs, but here are a few links for more information about different models of youth development.

Search Institute 40 Developmental Assets
<http://www.search-institute.org/developmental-assets>

Community Network for Youth Development
<http://www.cnyd.org/framework/index.php>

Youth Participatory Action Research

Youth leaders have been successful in showing stakeholders, community leaders, teachers, parents and policy makers that youth should be a key part of the discussion and solutions to our health and nutrition concerns. Participatory action research is an inquiry process that includes critical thinking, gathering information, service learning, analysis and logical problem solving while building networks and strengthening voice for addressing nutrition education issues.

The steps taken are:

1. Identify the issue or problem
2. Define what is known about that issue or problem
3. Identify what additional information is needed to understand it
4. Determine the research methods (photovoice, videovoice, surveys, interviews, focus groups, etc.) and develop an approach for collecting information and then work together as a team to accomplish this
5. Use the information for education, understanding, strategic action, and/or community change

This framework leads to authentic and meaningful partnerships between youth and the adult ally. Our goal is to have youth leaders actively working at each site, in conjunction with an adult ally, which will lead to youth all over the state working towards a healthier California. The lessons learned by this project will demonstrate that young Californians can be active champions in their schools, communities, afterschool programs and homes -- in the promotion of healthier, more nutritious, active lifestyles! The youth teams have identified various projects and issues at the local level, tackling tough issues.

Specific Project EAT YPAR accomplishments have led to increased water and salad consumption during the school day at San Lorenzo High School and Tennyson High School. At San Lorenzo High School, the YPAR ProFRESHionals decided to apply for a Kaiser donation of 1000 water bottles to distribute throughout the campus in order to increase water consumption as a direct result of their YPAR projects. These students were also asked to lead the planning committee for a redesign of their campus cafeteria. ProFRESHionals at Tennyson High school also inspired the cafeteria to diversify their menu and provide satellite stations with healthy sandwiches and salads for the THS students as a result of their YPAR projects.

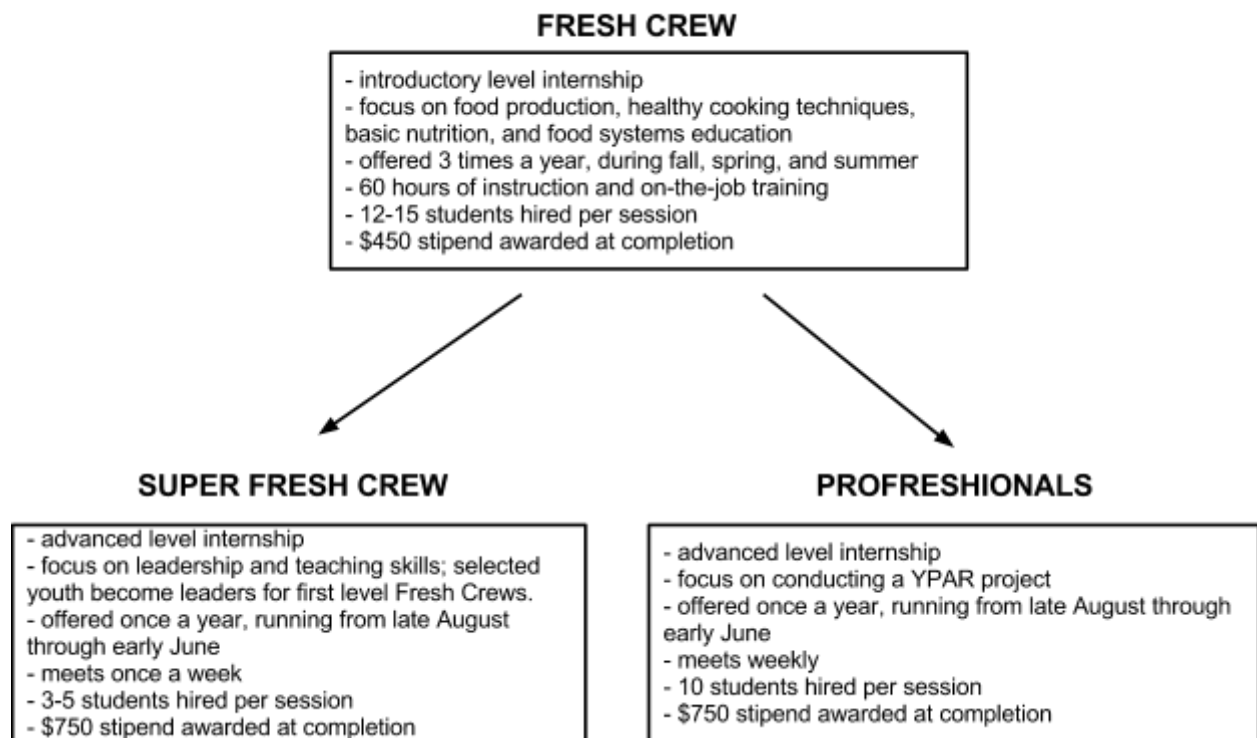
Project EAT Youth ‘Empowerment’ Programs

Project EAT offers many different opportunities within school communities for youth empowerment, ranging from integrating into school day curriculum to paid after school internships. Following are descriptions of school-based programs currently offered by Project EAT.

Internships

In the Project EAT high school farms and gardens, youth are engaged in fresh food production. After school interns explore food systems and receive training in ecologically sustainable, urban garden management. The involvement in the high schools does not stop at food production and nutrition education. Youth are given tools to be empowered to make real and lasting changes to their school and surrounding community.

Project EAT offers three internship opportunities for students at the high school level, one introductory internship (Fresh Crew) and two options for an advanced level internship (Super Fresh Crew and ProFRESHionals). The diagram below provides the overall trajectory and general information for these programs.



Fresh Crew

The Fresh Crew motto is “Try Something New!” In this introductory level internship, students are taught how to grow their own food, cook healthy food, and make healthy choices for themselves and their families. They also learn about where their food comes from, basic nutrition, and identifying issues of justice in our food system.

A list of topics and lessons included in a Fresh Crew session are as follows:

- Food Production
 - Composting
 - Harvesting
 - Garden Bed Preparation
 - Crop Rotation and Crop Planning
 - Watering Systems
 - Nutrient Cycling
- Culinary
 - Food Safety and Sanitation
 - Knife Skills
 - Basic Food Preparation Techniques and Terms
 - Meal Planning
 - Using Seasonal Produce
 - Healthy Baking
- Nutrition
 - Goal Setting
 - Physical Activity and Balancing Calories
 - Phytonutrients
 - Reading Nutrition Labels
 - Whole Grains
 - Healthy Beverage
 - Portion Distortion
- Food Justice
 - Food Systems 101
 - Farmworker Rights
 - Food Access and Food Deserts
 - Food Policy and the Farm Bill
 - Food Marketing and the Media

Super Fresh Crew

The Super Fresh Crew is a leadership opportunity for interns who want to continue working directly with food production and preparation. In this internship, students become leaders for the first level Fresh Crews as well as assistants with greater responsibilities for managing the farm and/or kitchen at their respective sites. In addition, these talented youth are ambassadors to the Project EAT program at their respective sites. They plan and facilitate regular all-school healthy tastings as well as organize tastings for special events such as Back to School Night and Open House.

Interns are required to co-teach up to two lessons per month, as well as set up and clean up for each session, and act as positive role models for their Fresh Crews. Interns take ownership over their crews each session by creating the agendas, leading the group in team building games, co-teaching lessons, and participating in the outreach and hiring for each crew.

In order to take on these responsibilities, Super Fresh Crews are trained in many of the following areas:

- Public Speaking
- Behavior/Group Management
- Giving and Receiving Constructive Feedback
- Time Management

ProFRESHionals

The ProFRESHionals internship is a leadership opportunity for interns who are interested in inspiring healthy changes within their school communities. In this internship, students conduct youth-led participatory action research projects that investigate particular areas of their school or community that they would like to see become healthier. Just like the Super Fresh Crew, The ProFRESHionals are ambassadors to the Project EAT program at their site. They organize school-wide healthy events and media campaigns, as well as participate in various state and nation-wide youth food and health conferences.

The ProFRESHionals internship covers the following topics:

- Public speaking, report writing, and grammar
- Preparing presentations
- Research methods, survey design, and data analysis
- Community mapping
- Community outreach
- Event planning
- Networking
- Team building, listening, and cooperation
- Goal setting, prioritizing and developing an action plan
- Cooking, gardening, and preparing healthy snacks
- Youth activism

Integrated School Programs

During the school day, Project EAT gardens and kitchens become living classrooms where teachers across content areas incorporate nutritional learning, food system exploration and environmental studies into their core curriculum lessons. Small-learning communities, student clubs, teacher committees, and after-school programs are utilizing the gardens as outdoor classrooms and arenas for community building. It is in these spaces that youth are able to learn through experience and example. Even though the following examples of Integrated School Programs are structured for a more traditional learning environment with less emphasis on democratic decision-making associated with a Youth Empowerment model, the goal is still to provide students with opportunities to make decisions and to educate their peers.

Health Classes

Project EAT Specialists coach Health teachers on lessons from Choice, Control, and Change curriculum from Columbia University to high school health class to provide students with the decision-making tools to take control over their own nutrition.

California Partnership Academies / Small Learning Communities / School Programs

Project EAT Specialists partner with these small academic communities by providing opportunities for project-based learning for one or more classes. Examples included partnering with students from a Puente program to organize a school assembly about food justice or collaborating with an Environmental Learning Academy to host daily activities for Earth Week.

Lunchtime Tastings/Harvest of the Month

Harvest of the Month is the most widely used program within Project EAT. Project EAT Specialists enlist leadership students to collect and distribute samples of the fruit or vegetables as well as educate their peers on the nutritional benefit of the monthly produce selection.

Integrated Curriculum

Project EAT Specialists provide cross-collaborative support for classes across many departments. Project EAT Specialists work alongside site-based teachers to develop integrated units that tie nutrition, farming, and cooking to core curriculum. Some examples of integrated curriculum include Agriculture in the Industrial Revolution: How our access to food changed with the developments of the Industrial Revolution; Food of the Enlightenment Era; The Science behind Preserving the Harvest; A Kitchen Is For...: English Language Development and the Kitchen.

Cooking Connection

Project EAT supports a wide variety of school programs by providing necessary healthy ingredients and recipe support. By providing professional development workshops, bi-monthly

healthy recipes, cooking equipment, and fresh produce, an array of school classes integrate cooking into their curriculum.

Community Outreach

Youth need opportunities outside of school to utilize their knowledge about nutrition and food justice to begin actualizing their potential. By offering learning opportunities in the community Project EAT is able to connect youth who may not have many chances to learn about other youth are doing in their area. In these Community Outreach programs youth are able to begin learning useful skills in networking and building a coalition which will be necessary if they are to become the next generation of leaders and change-makers.

High School Health Alliance

Super Fresh Crew and ProFreshionals interns from all Project EAT high schools are required to attend monthly meetings to meet interns from other, practicing networking, and learning what it takes to build a coalition to strengthen the work they are doing at their respective schools. They take on special projects or campaigns, attend outside conferences or meetings, and receive deeper training in areas such as media skills, event planning, and peer education.

Get Healthy, Stay Fresh

Project EAT partners with Alameda County Department of Social Services, and the Alameda County Food Bank to provide cooking classes for youth enrolled in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education. Here students are taught how to shop for and cook recipes containing fresh fruits and vegetables on a limited budget. Classes are held once a week for six weeks. All youth who complete the course receive a stipend and are eligible to apply to be paid peer educators for the next round of classes.

EAT Institute

Youth who have successfully completed the ProFreshional Internship are offered an opportunity to facilitate a two-day youth focused conference addressing issues of food access, gardening, and health inequities. Youth groups from all over the Bay Area are invited to attend and to lead educational workshops. The conference is organized in partnership with the youth facilitators and it is completely youth-led.

Study Trips and Networking

The importance of leaving the school campus to deepen learning experiences cannot be overstated. Study trips to partner organizations, farmers markets, farms, and other spaces allow youth to gain hands-on experience. Similarly, providing students with opportunities to meet and network with their peers who are also working on food and health issues, brings fresh energy and new ideas to the program. Sending youth to conferences is a great way to build excitement and motivation in youth about the change they want to see in their community.

Starting Your Own Youth Empowerment Program

“I think a lot of young people are concerned about being healthy but they probably don’t hear or know about programs like this, so we need to start becoming louder and louder.”—Fresh Crew Intern

The success of any Youth Empowerment Program will depend on the knowledge, personalities, and behaviors of the people involved in the group. Creating an effective Youth Empowerment Program will require that there are systems and structures set in place to allow all the individuals in the group to interact with each other so that they can get the most out of the collective knowledge and creativity. It is important all the group members are accountable for the success of the group. Members from a productive youth empowerment group should feel as committed to their fellow group members as they do to their chosen project. These interactions between the youth and their Adult Allies will become the most critical element in the cohesion of the group. For this reason both the youth and the Adult Allies must be carefully selected.

Choosing the right mix of young people is crucial in building a productive youth empowerment group since much of the education will be peer-to-peer and teamwork is a vital component to success. Balancing personality types, skill levels, and backgrounds all come in play when choosing a strong and diverse youth group. Productive programs will have a diverse youth who are heavily invested in the cohesion of the group. The purpose of any Youth Empowerment Program is to give youth autonomy and control in deciding what the group should accomplish, so youth who are comfortable sharing their opinions should definitely have a space in the group. On the other hand it will be there will be many task that require a variety of skills, so Adult Allies must make an effort to recognize and appreciate all the talents in the group. Making sure youth have an opportunity to use their talents and skills in a meaningful way will help create an inclusive environment where youth feel safe enough to share their talents. When Project EAT youth are asked why they choose to participate in our programs they often respond that they enjoy coming because they feel like they belong.

Selecting the appropriate Adult Ally for the group is just as significant as selecting the right mix of youth. Even though the group's decision-making will be youth-led, it will be up to the Adult Ally to set the tone and expectation. Developing a safe and inclusive community is the responsibility of the Adult Ally. Creating a safe environment can be done by making sure the youth have ample opportunities to engage with each other in fun, low-stress activities like ice breakers, art projects, or simply asking them how their day went. Adult Allies can establish an inclusive environment by building in systems into programs that make youth feel honored and respected for the time they commit to the group. This can be as simple as having everyone give an affirmation to someone else in the group during closing circle. Providing a consistent structure as well as clear expectations will create a safe space in which youth can create and explore. Ultimately, the goal of an Adult Ally is to hold that structure, while empowering youth to make it their own, take on increasingly larger responsibilities (i.e., from reading the agenda to creating the agenda), and actualize their potential.

Recruiting/Hiring Guidelines

Recruiting youth to participate in a group to create positive social change can be both motivating for prospective youth and challenging for Adult Allies. On one hand, inspired youth will be very excited by the opportunity to create a positive change. On the other hand, finding youth who are motivated and creative enough to make the project worthwhile can be challenging. It's important to justify the purpose and goals of the internship in the beginning and paint a picture for prospective applicants. For many youth this may be the first time they are working with a group outside of the classroom or sport team, and Adult Allies should prepare that they may be hesitant to join if they are not sure what to expect. Although the direction of any youth empowerment program will heavily depend on the involvement of youth, it will be the responsibility of the Adult Ally to provide examples of attainable goals, such as starting a garden in their community or talking to the their school districts administration to change their cafeteria menu. Additionally, it is the role of the Adult Ally to make the group look and feel professional so that interested youth will feel confident that they will be supported enough to accomplish these goals. This can be challenging for an Adult Ally because of the time and money that may be required to have professional looking forms, reserving time to conducting interviews, and organizing an incentive for youth who participate in the group.

At Project EAT, we use two different methods to recruit youth to our programs. The first method is a monetary incentive. We offer an honorarium with all our internships. The second is through word of mouth. Alumni from our internships outreach to other youth they feel might be interested or benefit from the program. All interested youth must go through an application process, which includes a teacher recommendation and going through an interview, in order to participate in any of the internships or Get Healthy, Stay Fresh Classes. This helps us insure that the group is diverse while also making sure the youth joining are there to learn and educate others, and not just receive a stipend. This process can be time consuming and exhausting, but if done intentionally, will greatly increase the productivity of your group. To help you navigate this process, here are some guidelines to use while forming your own youth empowerment program:

- Edit the application from previous year to reflect the correct dates of the current program, make many copies (at least 80), and place them in the main office (if you are on a school campus). Include a checklist on the application to assist students in turning in a complete and tidy application.
- Print out the announcement and place it in the announcement folder with the days it should be announced.
- Email an electronic version of the application with description of the internship out to teachers so that they can share it with any interested students. Additionally, ask teachers if they would like to Fresh Crew alumni to come into their classrooms to outreach for the internship - this can be a quick 5 minute announcement at the beginning or end of class.
- Set up interview schedule - lunchtime and after school work well. The interview will take about 7 minutes per student. Encourage your leadership interns to take part in the interview process. They could give you feedback about what they expect from a Fresh Crew intern.
- Select the students you will interview - you can interview some or all, depending on the number of applicants - interviewing at most, twice the number of applicants as needed. More than that is overwhelming. It is always an option to conduct group interviews, or to interview students by phone. With limited time, group interviews, which include an activity, can be a great time-saver and show you how students interact in a group setting.
- Invite students to their interview by sending a note to them during class. Be sure to include a way for them to reschedule if that time does not work. Be sure to write down the interview date and time on the top of each application- this will help you remember who is coming and when. Print out interview questions (choose a mix of questions to include general, knowledge specific, scenario, and goals) and have them ready. Staple the interview questions to the corresponding students' application.
- Hire 12-16 students, depending on your feeling of what is manageable. Choose a diverse group of students with a few clear leaders.
- Send hire/not-hire letters home. This follow-up is important so that students feel their time was respected and have a formal communication regarding their acceptance into the program.

Scheduling

Deciding which dates and times to meet with your group is another very important decision that needs to be made by an Adult Ally. Youth tend to be very busy people with a lot of family, school, and work commitments. Having a set schedule with attendance expectations in place before you begin recruiting will help ensure that all group members fully commit to the responsibilities of the internship. After you establish a firm schedule, make sure the youth are held accountable to it by outlining a clear attendance policy with expectations and consequences.

Since Project EAT interns are paid a cash stipend, keeping attendance records is very important so that we can be sure that every youth is paid in an equitable amount. Since our internships are school-based, we make an effort to be aware of the schedule of other school programs as well. However, we are firm in our attendance policy, so youth often have to prioritize other school activities and decide whether or not they can be committed to our internships. Below are more specific policies for scheduling our program and a sample of our attendance policy:

- Establish a schedule that allows for at least 60 hours of work for the program
- Ideally, start and finish dates for each internship is synced with the other Project EAT high school programs.
- In past, this schedule has worked well:

PROGRAM	DATES	SCHEDULED HOURS	ADDITIONAL HOURS
School Year Fresh Crew (Fall + Spring Semesters)	mid-September to mid-January; mid-February to end of May	2 days/week 2 hours/session 15 weeks Total: 60 hours	Field Trip over Thanksgiving and Spring Breaks
Summer Fresh Crew	mid-June to end of July	3 days/week 4 hours/session 6 weeks Total: 60 hours	Summer Institute; Santa Cruz Youth Day
Super Fresh Crew	late August to end of May	1 day/week 2 hours/session 1 Thursday/month (Health Alliance)	1-week intensive in late summer; participate once a month in a special events, meeting, or task
ProfRESHionals	late August to end of May	1 day/week 2 hours/session 1 Thursday/month (Health Alliance)	1-week intensive in late summer; participate once a month in a special events, meeting, or task
Get Healthy, Stay Fresh Class	June to August January to February April to May	1 day/week 2 hours/class 6 weeks total: 12 hours	Field trip to farmer's market.

Absence Policy

As noted above, setting clear standards for attendance is crucial to maintaining a strong and accountable program. Different standards will apply to the mix of youth and scope of the project. Project EAT uses the following policy to create a strong and accountable program:

Excused Absences

- You are expected to notify your supervisors ***at least 1 day in advance*** of any absences. Excused absences include sickness, doctor's appointments, make-up tests, and family obligations.
- You will be granted up to ***3 excused absences per semester*** without reduction in pay. You must call or contact your supervisor in advance. You will be required to make up these hours in order to receive full pay for the semester.
- For additional excused absences (***up to 2 more***), you will be docked pay at the following rates:
 - 4th excused absence = \$20 pay reduction
 - 5th excused absence = \$30 pay reduction

Unexcused Absences

Unexcused absences are not allowed.

- 1st unexcused absence = \$40 pay reduction and a written warning.
- Further unexcused absences are grounds for dismissal from the program.

Tardiness

Guidelines for being late to program will be decided each semester by the team.

Other guidelines

- "Your friend is not your messenger" It is up to you to make arrangements directly with your supervisor by calling or telling them in person that you will not be present.
- For those students playing sports, you must have a conversation with your supervisor and coach to discuss your commitment and schedule to each activity. Absences will only be excused for games, not practice.
- You must complete the program to receive your honorarium. If you are dismissed early due to attendance or behavior issues you will not be eligible to receive your honorarium.

Incentives

It is important to try to provide compensation for the youth who sacrifice their afternoons and weekends to be leaders in their community. Just thinking about it—how often do you work for free? How much money the youth will receive for their work will depend on how—or if—your program is funded. Not every youth program will have the privilege of offering money as a way to recognize and congratulate them for dedicating their time and energy to the group.

If money is not an option, the adult ally should find other ways to incentivize the program, such as community service hours or school credit.

Project EAT is fortunate enough to pay our youth stipends. The Fresh Crew and the Get Fresh, Stay Healthy youth are paid at the completion of their internship. We pay the Super Fresh and the ProFRESHional youth half way through and at the very end of the internship because they are year-long programs. These interns receive their incentive in two payments because waiting a whole school year to receive a pay check may discourage some youth from participating, especially if they are able to get a job elsewhere. Here are our guidelines.

- Have students fill out a **W9** and **Waiver**.
- Talk with your organizations accountant or to a local financial institution to arrange a payment schedule for youth interns.
- The checks can be cashed free of charge at the bank that issues them.
- Discuss the payment schedule with students early on and make it very clear that they will not be paid until after they complete the internship. In past we had the checks ready on the last day but occasionally students did not complete the program or other complications came up. Prepare for misplaced checks, late checks, misspelled names, and occasionally phone calls from upset parents.

Safety and Liability

Creating a safe environment is one of the key principles of positive youth development. Once youth are recruited and committed to being empowered leaders it's important to establish a system of safety and accountability for the work you will be doing. One important way to do this is by writing down exactly what the youth can expect from the group. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways such as collaboratively writing group agreement or asking students to individual sign behavior contracts. Also, it will be important for the adult ally to observe and be sensitive to personality types and levels of comfort for sharing within the group. Facilitating creative expression and sharing in a low-risk setting in the beginning can provide the adult ally with a base knowledge on the strengths, perspectives, and challenges within the group.

Although paperwork can seem to be cumbersome and time consuming at first, it will help protect you from potential liability (i.e. signing a waiver freeing of responsibility if someone gets injured) and help keep the group on track. Depending on the size of your group and the nature of your project, distributing, collecting and filing all this paperwork could feel like a full-time job in itself. To minimize feeling overwhelmed have a packet prepared with all the necessary paperwork ready to give to each youth by your first meeting.

Project EAT is a garden-based nutrition program, so between working outside with garden tools and cooking food in the kitchen our interns come across a lot of potentially dangerous equipment. In order to provide our youth with clear instructions about how to use these tools safely and to minimize our liability, we ask parents or guardians to sign consent form. In addition to physical safety, we also make a deliberate effort to create an emotionally and psychologically safe environment by clearly outlining behavior expectations.

- **Behavior Contract**- Return a copy to the students, keep a copy on file in the office.
- **Emergency Form** – Keep hard copies with you in the garden. Also be sure to write the emergency number on the attendance sheet.
- **W9**
- **Parent Waiver**
- **Allergy Knife Negative Consent** – This form needs revision. It is negative consent meaning if the parents do not want their child to use a knife they must fill out and return the form.
- **Internship Progress Report** – This is a great way to teach students that they must learn to balance school with work. Decided upon a schedule and give the form to the students at least 1 week before it is due back to you.
- **Media Consent Form** – It is very important to collect a consent form for all students. Once students have left the internship it will be hard to track them down for permission to use their photo in any materials or on the website. Keep a copy of the form attached to a photo of the student in your office and provide another copy (with photo) to your supervisor.
- **Behavior Warning** – Provide all interns with a copy of this form at the beginning of the internship so they understand the consequences of inappropriate behavior. Use as needed when situations occur on the farm. Keep a copy in the office and send a copy home with the intern.

Accountability and Consequence

By far the most important step to developing a youth empowerment group is establishing an inclusive and motivated community. However to establish this community as a safe space for youth to develop the confidence to try new things, everyone in the group must be held accountable to each other. Group agreements, behavior contract, or peer mediators are excellent examples on how an individual can be held accountable to the entire group for his

or her behavior. These accountability methods are also useful in empowering the youth to start using their voice to define the expectations of the group. Furthermore, these systems should be supported with tangible consequences. This level of accountability is also essential to a youth empowerment group because unlike rules and punishment enforced by adult authority, this allows another opportunity to develop their leadership skills.

At Project EAT we have adopted a method of direct and effective communication called Straight Talk used by The Food Project, an agriculture-based youth empowerment program in Massachusetts. This method establishes certain ground rules about open communication. For more information on this practice please check-out *Growing Together: A guide for building inspired, diverse, and productive youth communities.*

Below are the accountability guidelines we utilize at Project EAT:

Behavior Warnings and Program Dismissal

- Review the behavior warning process on the first day of the internship. Be sure to let the students know that a serious infraction will result in immediate dismissal and that you as the facilitator reserve the right to decide what a serious infraction is.
- If inappropriate, disrespectful or unsafe behavior occurs, follow these steps:
Step one: Spoken warning. The supervisor will talk to the person who is acting inappropriately and ask them to change their behavior.

Step two: Write-Up. If inappropriate behavior continues, the supervisor will complete a formal write-up with the intern.

Step three: Dismissal. If the behavior still does not change, intern is dismissed from the program and will not receive further payment.
- If a student is dismissed, contact your organization's accountant to discuss changes to the fired student's honorarium.

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.

Project EAT Youth Share Their Thoughts About Youth Empowerment Programs:

"Fresh Crew really made me start watching what I put in my body - now I really am eating healthier and I know what's the right and wrong this for me"

"I loved working with Fresh Crew because of the teamwork it involves and getting to be around a different mix of people than what I normally would choose"

"My favorite part of Fresh Crew was making new recipes that I never knew and using all the veggies that we grew in our garden"

"I really enjoyed working on the farm! It made me feel good to do something for our school and then have fresh food to take home to my family. We benefited a lot from that."

"I really like the vibes I got from working in the Fresh Crew and how everyone was there for the same reasons and working with everyone to create a healthier school and be a swell influence to peers."

"Fresh Crew made me think twice about food. Like instead of choosing the fatty food, I'll take a healthier option because I have the knowledge of what bad foods will do to my body."

"I was motivated to continue working with the fresh crew because I realized it can benefit me in ways to be more independent, responsible, and practical."

"The impact that Fresh Crew had on my food choices and habits was being more alert and focused on the ingredients labels of my food to see what I was putting into my body."

"My favorite memory from the Fresh Crew was being able to learn information on how to make an impact and make a difference in our food choices."

"I applied for the Super Fresh Crew Internship because I know that if people see that we care about our school and community, they will respect our school and begin to care too."

"The most important thing to me is food justice and how we all should stand up against wrong-doing to our food system."

"Being a Super Fresh Crew means greater responsibility than the fresh crew. It is learning how to bring problems to the surface, advocating for a better planet and advocating for healthier lifestyles, ect."

"I do not think that most young people are concerned with eating healthy because they are not very educated about it. "