

DRAFT – 8/27/19

Alliance Youth/Young Adult Engagement Proposal **Guiding objectives, model, principles and strategy**

Introduction

Youth engagement is an integral value driving the Oregon Suicide Prevention Alliance (Alliance). We recognize that to achieve the Alliance’s mission of reducing youth suicides across Oregon we must develop policy and services in partnership with young people and actively seek out youth/young adult voice. The goal of this document is to give the Alliance members and young people both the strategic and operational approach to youth engagement with the Alliance.

Framework of Youth Engagement Strategy

Objectives

The Alliance youth engagement strategy has three core objectives:

1. Elevate and integrate authentic, relevant youth voice across all Alliance projects and priorities
2. Promote the mental health and well-being of those participating by using suicide safer messaging and honoring lived-experience
3. Youth engaged with the Alliance feel supported by adult allies to be effective advocates

Model

There are many models that can be used when engaging youth. The model proposed to the Alliance is Roger Hart’s Ladder of Participation.

Hart’s Ladder of Youth Participation



A model where activities are defined by how youth are utilized in a program or by an organization. The model identifies seven levels of youth participation on a ladder. The highest levels of engagement at the top rung of the ladder are activities that are “youth initiated and directed” to the bottom rungs of the ladder that are seen as non-participation or the lowest

engagement (e.g. tokenism, decoration, and manipulation) (Hart, 1992).

The Alliance will apply this model by being proactive in attempts to engage youth in the higher levels of participation by providing youth with **real opportunities** to be involved in activities that will influence Alliance outcomes, and affect statewide community change. The Alliance will utilize tools to identify what rung youth involvement activities are at in order to progress up to the higher rungs of Hart's ladder, as well as get rid of non-participation practices when necessary. The Alliance's goal is to ensure that youth-adult partnerships fall above rung three on Hart's ladder, we will use evaluation and program planning to ensure that young people are not tokenized, decoration or manipulated (Hart, 1992).

Guiding Principles

The following principles also contribute to create the framework for the Alliance's youth engagement model. The guiding principles of youth engagement are an important reference and instruction for how we work with young people in order to reach our core objectives. The below ten guiding principles were identified by Alliance members in the Youth Engagement Planning Meeting on August 27, 2019, as well as from Pereira (2007), as essential elements of youth engagement:

- 1) **Meaningful engagement:** work has a purpose.
- 2) **Beyond meeting participation:** youth involved at all stages of planning, if possible.
- 3) **Provide resources:** youth have access to staff and funding to ensure they feel confident, supported and organized with their efforts.
- 4) **Organizational Commitment:** alliance members are expected to actively involve and engage youth. The executive team will develop and implement processes and structures that support youth and young adult participation.
- 5) **Inclusiveness:** Acceptance and embracing of diversity including opinion, religion, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, ability, geography and mental health.
- 6) **Valuing youth/young adults:** seeing youth and young adults as assets and subject matter experts.
- 7) **Youth-adult partnerships:** adult support and training is needed to help youth/young adults to build skills and also provide opportunities to influence.
- 8) **Communicate openly and often:** Clearly defined roles and expectations outlined for adults and for youth/young adults. Transparent, relevant and frequent communication through a key contact.

9) **Realistic expectations:** important to take youth development into consideration; balance between current strengths of youth/young adults and helping them to build new skills.

10) **Flexible and responsive:** participation opportunities should take into consideration the youth's lifestyles, comfort level, schedules and geographic location. Provide a range of options to get involved for different youth needs.

(Personal communications with Youth Engagement Team on August 27, 2019, and Pereira 2007)

Existing Framework/Infrastructure:

Youth and Young Adult Engagement Advisory (YYEA)

YYEA is a group of passionate young people with lived experience who meet monthly and are dedicated to amplifying youth & young adult voices in decision-making across all local and Oregon state agencies involved in behavioral health. YYEA's role is to advise the Alliance, Children's System Advisory Council, the Healthy Transitions Steering Committee, and other system partners on important behavioural health issues that matter to youth. Currently, the YYEA is staffed at 10 hrs/week.

Brainstorm/Goals for increasing capacity:

Goals to enhance youth engagement with the Alliance:

As noted above, YYEA is a resource to the Alliance and we can help to enhance their capacity and engage them in new ways if we are committed to doing so. At the September Alliance Quarterly Meeting YYEA members created four SMART goals.

SMART Goals Youth Created:

1. By December 2019 quarterly meeting YYEA will have at least one youth participating in two committees
2. Have a process in place for youth to become a voting member and at least two appointed within six months (March 2020)
3. To have two youth on the executive Alliance team by January 2020
4. Ask the Alliance to help YYEA with recruitment of youth with lived experience within 6 months (March 2020)

On August 27, 2019, some Alliance members met to discuss a vision for youth engagement for the Alliance. The following ideas were generated as goals for review and input.

- **Clarify youth roles and responsibilities on the Alliance**
 - > Establish specific meeting roles and all associated expectations for youth. Provide coaching for meeting participation before and after from one key person for each youth/young adult.

- **Recruit diverse youth with lived experience for YYEA**
 - > Devise a recruitment plan in collaboration with Alliance members. Possible partners could include: Youth ERA, Lines for Life, School Based Health Centers, Oregon Association of Student Council (OASC) and Sources of Strength Peer Leaders
- **Provide skills, leadership development and self-care training to youth**
 - > Devise an Alliance specific training program for YYEA members who will be active on the Alliance. Lines for Life and Youth ERA could collaborate on this.
- **Work on education and buy-in among Alliance members**
 - > Share Hart's ladder and other youth engagement best practice resources, and consider providing training at a quarterly meeting
- **Have more youth members on the Alliance**
 - > Recruit and retain 1-3 youth to be regular Alliance members. It is in statute that there be 1 regular youth on Alliance (currently not happening). Consider recruiting 1 more youth executive member also.
- **Alliance members mentor YYEA members who are active on the Alliance**
 - > Create a mentoring program and assign adult staff to support youth
- **Provide more resources for logistical support for YYEA and youth attendance at meetings.**
 - > Consider youth needs such as transport, stipends, preparation and debrief needs and who is responsible for this
- **Modify meeting practices so they are youth friendly**
 - > Consider current meeting practices and processes that may need adjustment in response to youth/young adult involvement. For example: meetings may need to run slower, be at different times, have breaks, share power by giving youth facilitation roles or space to contribute
- **Consider creative ways to include youth voice**
 - > In addition to attending Alliance meetings, think of other strategies to include youth/young adult voice. For example: youth panels on specific topics, focus groups, adults attending YYEA meetings with specific questions, projects/assignments offered to YYEA
- **Building youth/young adult capacity**
 - Consider forming an Alliance specific Youth Advisory Group or Permanent Youth Subcommittee. One or two youth/young adult representatives from this group could connect with YYEA to provide updates/ collect input.
- **Consider new youth incentives**
 - Give youth stipends for going above and beyond meeting requirements. Consider establishing relationships with schools for school credit.

Consider Alliance staffing needs to support this growth.

References

Hart, R. (1992). Children's Participation: from Tokenism to Leadership. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.

Pereira, Nancy. (2007). Ready... Set... Engage! Building Effective Youth/Adult Partnerships for a Stronger Child and Youth Mental Health System. Children's Mental Health Ontario & Ottawa: The Provincial Centre of Excellence for Child and Youth mental health at CHEO.