4-H cyd CENTER FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

SPECIAL REPORT

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA Fall 2009

Youth in Governance and Youth Adult Partnerships: An Examination of Promising Practices

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Introduction

Two decades since the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, there has been a global impetus to enhance young people's participation in matters that affect them (Hill et al., 2004). In addition, research on positive youth development has shown that programs that involve young people in shaping the contexts of their development have more positive outcomes than traditional programs that aim to serve young people as programming recipients (Gambone et al., 2002). Non-formal youth development programs have been recognized as an important venue for promoting youth in decision-making through intentional partnerships with adults (Zeldin, 2004). 4-H Youth Development is one such well-established youth development program that has traditionally, for over a century, been engaging young people through projects that enhance citizenship, leadership and life skills.

In 2004, the 4-H Youth Development Program at the national level adopted a youth in governance initiative to promote young people's voice, influence and decision-making in their local programs, organizations and communities (Zeldin et al., 2008). Youth in governance goes hand in hand with the concept of youth-adult partnerships where young people and adults share equal power in decisions and work together on projects for mutual benefit. In addition to the commitment at the national level, eight states across the United States worked to institutionalize youth in governance and youth-adult partnership strategies across the organization. California was one of these states. In 2006, California 4-H youth development program researchers and practitioners formed a Youth in Governance working group to examine the practice of youth in governance and youth-adult partnerships in California 4-H Youth Development programs. This report shares findings on: 1) whether, to what extent, and in what way California 4-H youth development programs exemplify youth in governance and youth-adult partnership practices; and 2) insights on promising practices and challenges encountered from the perspectives of staff, adult volunteers and youth in programs that engaged young people in governance.

What is youth in governance?

In its broadest sense, youth in governance refers to youth as fully-engaged participants, leaders and decision-makers in the programs, organizations and communities to which they belong (National 4-H Council, 2005). Beyond preparing youth for future leadership and decision-making roles, youth in governance underscores the importance of providing opportunities for youth to immediately step into those roles. That is, rather than seeing young people only as "future citizens" or "future leaders," youth are believed to be capable individuals who can contribute now. Youth in governance is not a program, per se. Rather, it is an underlying strategy for positive youth development, an overall approach or philosophy, and as such can be infused into virtually any youth development program or organizational context that serves young people. Theoretical

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underpinnings of youth in governance include concepts from positive youth development practice and resiliency (Benard, 2004) as well as theories of democracy, social inclusion (Hill et al., 2004) and social justice (Ginwright, 2005).

What does youth in governance look like? At a program level, youth in governance is happening when young people not only participate in the program but also have a role in deciding which programs will be offered and how they will be implemented and evaluated. At the organizational level, youth in governance is happening when youth give input, or "**voice**", regarding the organization's direction, policies, hiring and other major functions; when they have a real **influence** on those decisions; and most importantly, when they are also integrated into the **decision-making** process. At the community level, youth in governance is happening when youth are fully engaged, visible stakeholders in activities that shape their communities and in the decision-making processes that affect their lives; moderating community forums that address real and pressing issues; serving on a city commission and participating in a voting campaign (even if they are not able to vote themselves) are a few examples of what youth in governance looks like in the community.

The benefits of youth in governance and youth adult partnerships

Emerging research indicates that organizations employing youth in governance strategies attract diverse youth who achieve greater youth development outcomes than participants in traditional youth development programs (e.g., CIRCLE Foundation, 2004; Zeldin et al., 2005). There is a long-term benefit from youth in governance as well; research has shown that when youth are engaged in their communities and organizations in meaningful ways, they grow up to be adults who are much more likely to be civically involved and philanthropically inclined (Independent Sector, 2002).

Youth are not the only ones who benefit from a youth in governance strategy through youth adult partnership strategy. In addition, research has shown that adults in these organizations and communities benefit from young people's contributions (Zeldin et al., 2000). In a study on how partnerships with youth impacted adults, it was found that adults grew more open-minded, were energized by young peoples' enthusiasm, found their jobs more satisfying, and were able to make better decisions (Zeldin et al., 2000). When partnering with youth, adults also build skills while strengthening the organizations to which they belong. Adults who work with youth have been shown to enhance their own sense of accomplishment, increase their sense of commitment to community projects, and feel renewed by working in partnership with youth. Best of all, both groups begin letting go of negative stereotypes about the other group (Zeldin et al., 2000).

At the community level, there is evidence that youth involvement on city governing boards such as in youth councils can impact urban spaces to meet the needs of a representative group of young people (Sirriani, 2005).

Fostering youth in governance through youth-adult partnerships

Specific, intentional program strategies and a favorable organizational structure are critical to fostering youth in governance. Among these, one key strategy is youth-adult partnerships in which youth and adults work together in a positive and respectful environment, contributing their unique strengths to the project and the relationship (Fiscus, 2003). This methodology differs from typical adult-led youth development programs in which adults mentor or instruct young people, or youth-led programs in which youth are given "carte blanche" to run their own programs regardless of knowledge, skill level or adequate adult support (Norman, 2001). Many people believe that a youth-adult partnership occurs any time youth and adults are present in the same room. This is not correct. Youth-adult partnerships take place when youth and adults plan, learn and work together, with both groups sharing equally in the decision-making process (Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, 2003). Youth-adult partnerships build on the strengths of each group and the final program or activity, as well as the organization's mission, is stronger than a program or activity devised and delivered individually by either group (Zeldin et al., 2000; Norman 2001).

Promising practices and barriers to successful partnerships

Research studies indicate that successful youth-adult partnerships require a variety of elements and strategies at the program or group level. While certain elements or practices may be unique to different contexts, common themes emerge across several research studies including (Camino, 2000; Frank, 2006; Jones et al., 2008; MacNeil, 2006; Norman, 2001; Texas Network of Youth Services, 2002; Zeldin et al., 2000; Zeldin et al., 2005; Zeldin & MacNeil, 2006; Klindera et al., 2001; Ginwright, 2005):

- Organizational commitment and policies supporting youth in governance and youth-adult partnerships
- Positive attitudes and expectations of each other and an atmosphere of mutual respect
- Articulated roles for young people and adults with shared power and decision-making
- Skill building, especially on communication and team work, for both youth and adults

- Adult practices that balance power such as guiding vs. instructing
- Logistics that support youth in governance such as transport and meetings that are conducive to young peoples' schedules.

Youth-adult partnerships are sometimes slow to take root, however, as both youth and adults often have perceptions of the other group that prevents them from successfully working together (Camino, 2000). Adults may see youth as undependable or too inexperienced to contribute in a meaningful way whereas youth often see adults as too bossy or too busy. Other challenges may be related to preparedness of the group, such as skill level of the adults and youth involved, or the nature of the context that may make it harder to create an equal partnership, such as in school contexts where hierarchical relations between teachers and students are harder to overcome (Mitra, 2007). Although not always easy or initially comfortable, employing youth-adult partnership strategies to facilitate youth in governance is an effective means of strengthening existing programs.

The California 4-H Youth Development Program context for youth in governance

Every year, the California 4-H Youth Development (CA 4-HYD) Program serves an average of 125,000 young people ages 5-19. The ultimate goal is to help young people attain leadership, citizenship and life skills while advancing the field of youth development. The program offers a wide variety of enrichment activities via clubs, special interest groups, day and overnight camps, school and after-school enrichment programs, school-age child care programs and individual study. While youth development practitioners, i.e., 4-H staff supervise and manage the programs in their counties, the majority of programming support is from volunteers who work with young people on different projects of learning.

The CA 4-HYD Program has a strong emphasis on youth leadership in which young people have various opportunities, such as junior leaders (11-13 years) and teen leaders (14 – 19), to lead projects and work with adult leaders. While these traditional leadership structures have been in existence for decades, it was unclear to what extent local programs embodied true partnerships that facilitated youth in governance. At the organizational level, in concert with the 2004 National 4-H Youth in Governance Initiative, California 4-HYD made efforts to institutionalize youth in governance at the organizational level. For instance, more young people were recruited to sit on the Statewide Program Advisory Council. For the first time, 4-H Councils in several counties included young people as board members, positions traditionally held by adult volunteers. The time was ripe to understand the lay of the land, i.e., the extent to which youth in governance and youth-adult partnership strategies were in place in local 4-HYD programs and projects as well as how staff perceived these concepts. Additionally, the research team (a working group of 4-H youth development advisors, program representatives and research assistants from the 4-H Center for Youth Development) sought to add to the existing literature on youth participation and governance through identifying promising practices and common challenges that hindered the successful implementation of effective youth-adult partnerships and youth in governance programs within the CA 4-HYD context.

To this end, our research questions were:
1) What is the lay of the land with regard to youth in governance (YIG) and youth-adult partnership (YAP) strategies in the CA 4-HYD Program? Specifically:
- How do CA 4-HYD professionals perceive YIG and YAP strategies?
- To what extent do programs for adolescents include YIG and YAP strategies?
- How do nominated teen programs within CA 4-HYDP exemplify YIG and YAP practices?

2) What are the promising practices used, and challenges encountered, in implementing effective youth in governance and youth-adult partnerships in the context of programs practicing YIG and YAP?

Methods

Study design

This study was conducted in three phases. All survey instruments and focus group protocols were approved by the Institutional Review Board at the University of California Davis. Minor youth did not participate until they and their parents signed the approved consent forms.

Phase I: Lay of the land

In Phase I, the research team conducted an in-depth literature review to identify current youth in governance and youth-adult partnership practices. This was followed by a "promising practices" needs assessment of the CA 4-HYD Program. Surveys seeking to identify attitudes, supports and obstacles related to implementing youth in governance (YIG) and youth-adult partnerships (YAP) were mailed to each county and followed with a phone call to appropriate staff. We included the definitions of YIG and YAP on the survey. We also listed key elements cited in the literature. Items on the survey included both survey questions that used a Likert type-scale to solicit answers, and open-ended questions. The survey concluded by asking respondents to "nominate" examples of successful YIG and YAP programs in their counties.

Forty-four out of 54 staff responded (81%). Of these, 25 were program staff including program representatives, program coordinators and one 4-H secretary. The remaining 19 surveys were completed by 4-H Youth Development Advisors who are academic staff. Results from the survey were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software and domain analysis (for qualitative items). Open-ended responses were analyzed by a team of three researchers who coded data independently into sub themes. The team then compared their analysis and together grouped the data into themes using a grounded theory approach.

Phase II: Youth and adult surveys

In Phase II, piloted surveys were administered to youth and adult participants from the nominated programs. Survey items sought to identify youth and adult attitudes, obstacles, supports, and experiences related to YIG and YAP. Youth and adults from 14 of the 17 programs completed surveys. The total number of respondents was 172 (see Table 1 below). The results were analyzed with attention to two questions: 1) Do nominated programs exemplify youth in governance and youth-adult partnership concepts? 2) What do young people and adults emphasize as important elements for youth in governance and youth-adult partnerships, and what are the perceived challenges?

Table 1: Phase II Survey Respondent Demographics

	Youth (n=128)	Adults (n=44)
Ethnicity	White: 59% Latino/Hispanic: 18 African American: 6 Asian American: 6 Bi-Racial: 4 Native American: 3 Other: 4	White: 89% Asian American: 5 Bi-Racial: 5 African American: 2 Latino/Hispanic: 0 Native American: 0 Other: 0
Age (in years)	12 5% 13 10 14 5 15 21 16 18 17 24 18 11 19 6	18-25 9% 25-49 52 50+ 39
Gender	Female 69% Male 31	Female 75% Male 25
Education Level	In progress 100%	Some High School 0% High School Degree 2 Some College 36 College Degree 41 Postgrad Degree 20

Youth and adult responses were analyzed separately. Percentages of youth responses on the scales ranging from strongly agree – disagree, were computed with respect to five elements: voice, planning and decision-making, mutual respect, equal power and authenticity and meaningfulness of the program.

Phase III: Youth and adult interviews

Based on survey findings from Phase II, the research team selected six exemplary programs for in-depth study across geographies and program types (See Table 2). This purposeful (rather than random) sampling ensures information-rich cases (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Using the survey findings from both Phase I and II, the team developed an interview protocol that sought deeper understanding of the nature of youth-adult partnerships and youth in governance strategies. The interview format was a guided conversation and included questions such as, "Why do you think your program was nominated as a successful example of youth-adult partnerships and youth in governance?"; "What types of roles do youth and adults take on in the program?" and "What are the main challenges you have encountered?"

In-depth individual interviews were conducted with seven adults, and focus group interviews were conducted with 31 youth from six nominated programs. Each interview took approximately 60 minutes. We compensated participant groups (not individuals) with a small stipend to support their programs.

Table 2: Phase III Interviewee Demographics

County	Total County Population	4-H Program Studied	Youth #	Adult #
Los Angeles	10,294,286	Leadership Institute: a high-school based leadership academy	Interview #1 4 Interview #2 10 (4 + 10) 14	1 1
Mariposa	18,356	County Council: youth-adult executive board	4	1
San Mateo	734,453	Camp: overnight camp organized and led predominately by youth	5	1
Siskiyou	45,695	All Star: community service activities organized and implemented by youth	5	3
Tuolumne	56,910	All Star: community & club programs organized and delivered by youth	3	1
			Total 31	**Total 7**

Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using NVIVO7, a qualitative research software product. We used the grounded theory approach to analyze data (Strauss, 1987). Working in pairs, research team members analyzed both youth and adult interviews through an open coding process to generate a set of initial themes. The themes were then compiled, re-contextualized within the interview questions and analyzed further by all members of the research team to identify sub-themes. The data were summarized by grouping recurring ideas as well as highlighting ideas that were particularly innovative and unique based on the research team's collective knowledge of the literature and the field - also known as the extended case method (Buroway, 1998).

Findings

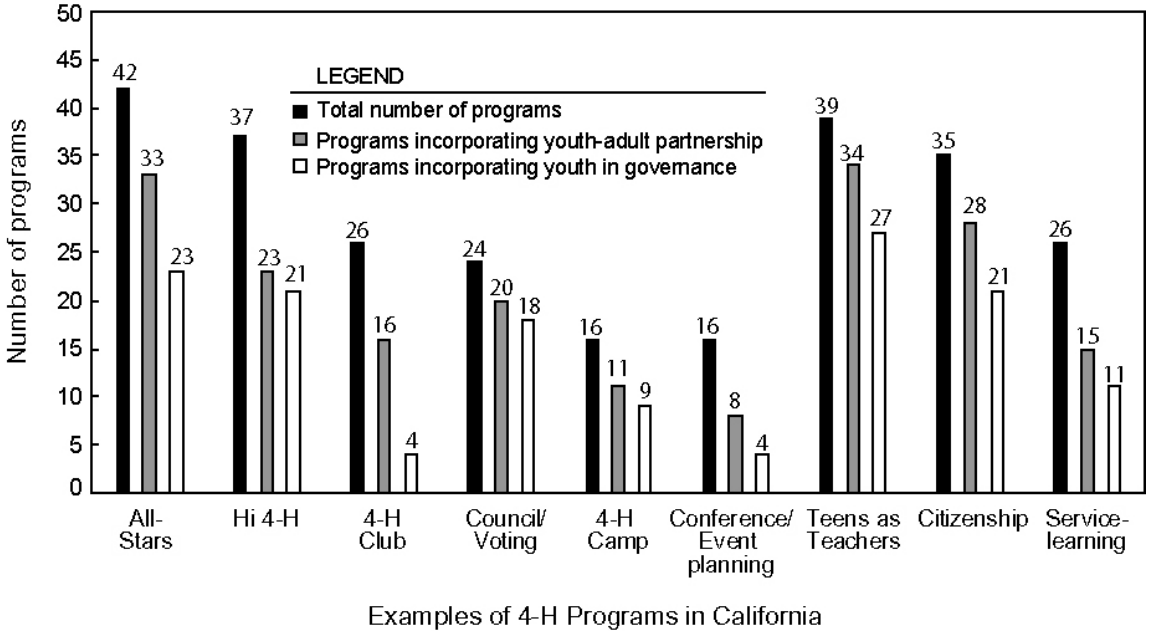
The findings are presented in three sections. In the first, we provide a snapshot of California 4-H Youth Development (CA 4-HYD) Program opportunities for adolescents, including programs thought to exemplify youth in governance (YIG) and/or youth-adult partnerships (YAP) based on staff reports followed by staff perceptions on YIG and YAP strategies. Following this we provide the results of our assessment of the nominated programs on five key elements from the perspectives of youth and adults. In the third section, we share five underlying ideas, or themes, that emerged in the nominated programs (from the survey data as well as from the in-depth interviews) as important for supporting youth in governance and youth-adult partnerships along with promising practices and challenges in sustaining these.

Prevalence of youth in governance and youth-adult partnerships in the California 4-H Youth Development Program

4-H youth development staff were asked to identify a list of programs in their counties that were available for teens. For each of these programs, staff were asked to assess whether they satisfied the criteria of youth-adult partnerships and youth in governance based on the following definitions:
Youth-Adult Partnerships: Youth (12 -19) and adults (over age 19) working together in a positive, mutually respectful environment with the recognition that each group contributes unique strengths to the relationship. Youth and adults serve as resources for each other and learn together, each providing unique contributions to attain end results that would not have been achieved without the collaboration from the two groups.
Youth in Governance: The preparation for and the practice of youth participation, voice and decision making in programmatic, organizational and community level decisions and activities.

Based on staff report, a total of 261 programs within nine topic areas were identified as being available to teens (Graph 1). Of these, 86% were reported as meeting the definition of youth-adult partnerships and 55% were perceived as meeting the definition of youth in governance.

Graph 1: Youth in Governance and Youth-Adult Partnerships in CA 4-HYD Programs



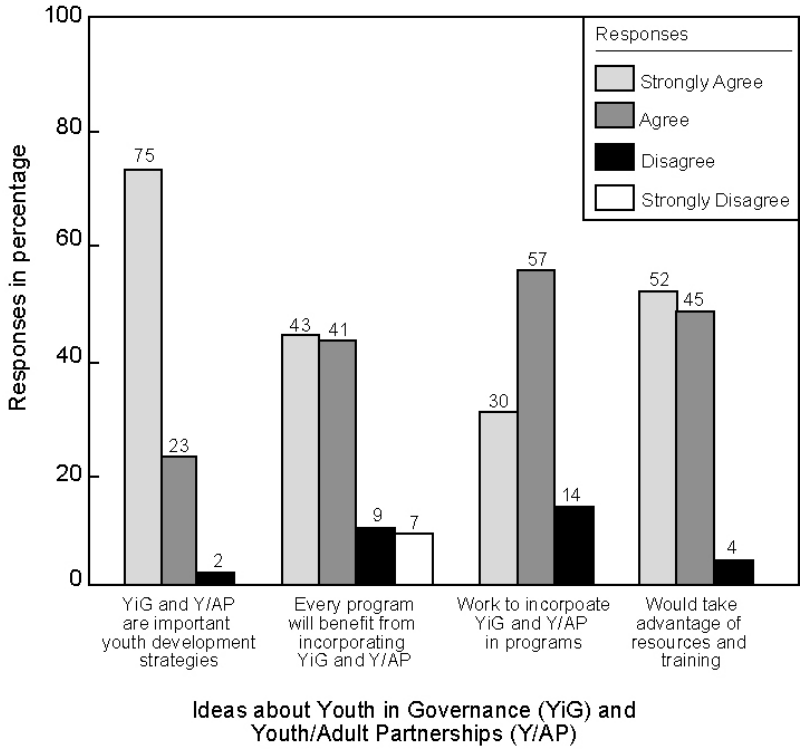
KEY FINDINGS: Prevalance of youth in governance and youth adult partnerships in CA 4-H YDP

- CA 4-HYD Program has a rich breadth of adolescent programs, a majority of which are perceived to engage teens through a youth-adult partnership strategy.
- Slightly more than half of the programs are perceived by staff to follow a youth in governance model.

4-H youth development staff perceptions about youth in governance (YIG) and youth-adult partnerships (YAP)

4-H staff were asked to rate their perceptions on the following: 1) the importance of youth in governance and youth-adult partnership strategies, 2) the degree to which they believed every program would benefit from youth in governance and youth-adult partnerships, 3) the degree to which they would work to incorporate youth in governance and youth-adult partnerships in programs, and 4) whether they would take advantage of training and resources in this area. As shown in Graph 2, more than 90% (n=44) of CA 4-HYD Program staff reported that they have positive attitudes about the importance of YIG and YAP and a high degree of willingness to incorporate these strategies into their existing programs. Although more than 85% of the staff "agreed" with all of the above statements, not all "strongly" agreed (Graph 2).

Graph 2: 4-H Staff Perceptions about Youth-Adult Partnerships and Youth in Governance



A majority (more than 50%) of staff rated the following 8 items (from a list of 15) as critical to success (they appear below in descending order of stated importance):

82%.....Adults have positive perceptions of what youth can contribute to programs.
73%.....Youth have positive perceptions of what adults can contribute to the program.
66%.....Adults have the skills to implement YIG and YAP.
64%.....Adults have knowledge about YIG and YAP.
64%.....Administration in the county supports YIG and YAP.
61%.....Adults are knowledgeable about adolescent development.
57%.....Organizational policies support YIG and YAP.
55%.....Youth have skills in implementing YIG and YAP.

The following 7 out of 15 items were considered by a majority of staff (more than 50%) as "good to have", but not critical to success:

- Youth are knowledgeable about YIG and YAP.
- Adults know about organizational policies that support YIG and YAP.
- Participants are awarded group awards or recognition for their work.
- There are high expectations of both youth and adults.
- Youth know about organizational policies that support YIG and YAP.
- Participants are awarded individual awards and recognition for their work.
- On-going, in-depth training is offered to staff, adults and youth.

None of the 15 items had a majority rating of "not important" for YIG or YAP.

KEY FINDINGS: Staff Perceptions about youth in governance and youth adult partnerships

- Overall, a majority of 4-HYD staff believe that youth-adult partnerships and youth in governance are important youth development strategies.
- While most staff believe YIG and YAP are important, the difference in opinion seems to lie in the degree to which staff think these are separate program elements versus philosophies that should be incorporated in all program practices without exception.
- Staff who strongly agreed that all programs would benefit from YIG and YAP without exception also tended to be the ones who strongly agreed that they worked to incorporate YIG and YAP strategies in their counties.
- Positive perceptions of youth and adults to what the other can contribute were ranked as the most critical to success followed by knowledge and skills of youth and adults.

Assessing nominated programs on five elements of YIG and YAP

The nominated programs that informed this study included teen leadership programs such as, overnight camp, weekend camp programs, All Stars, County Council and Ambassadors (note: programs are defined in the Appendix). Included in this study are 14 out of the 17 nominated programs.We assessed the nominated programs on the following elements to see whether they fit the criteria of exemplary youth in governance and youth-adult partnership programs as suggested in the literature;

- **Voice, planning, and decision-making**: 91% (n=128) of the youth and 86% (n=44) of the adults felt that teens asked and answered questions and made decisions and long term plans more often than adults, or that the teens and adults shared these tasks equally.

- **Influence and power**: 90% of the youth agreed that they shared influence and power with adults; 94% of adults agreed that they shared influence and power with the youth.

- **Mutual respect**: 94% of the youth and 100% of the adults reported that their programs were characterized by mutual respect between adults and teens and that youth were mutually respectful of one another.

- **Unique contribution and learning**: 91% of the youth and 100% of the adults felt youth and adults contributed unique strengths to the relationships, learned together and served as resources for one another, achieved better results working together than either would if working alone, and that youth and adult ideas received equal consideration.

- **Meaningfulness and authenticity of activities**: 87% of the youth and 98% of the adults agreed that program activities were meaningful and that youth were engaged in programmatic, organizational and community level decision-making.

KEY FINDINGS

The nominated programs within the CA 4-HYD Program exemplify key elements of youth in governance and youth-adult partnerships: decision-making, mutual respect, youth voice and influence, unique contributions, and meaningful and authentic activities.

Promising practices and perceived challenges within five main themes

Our data yielded five themes that were important for successful youth-adult partnerships and youth in governance programs. In each theme we describe strategies that supported YIG and/or YAP as promising practices and we describe the challenges or areas for improvement suggested by survey and interview respondents.

1) Organizational and Program Structure
2) Youth and Adult Roles
3) Supportive Relationships
4) Skill Building and Mutual Learning
5) Community Impact

1) Organizational and Program Structure

Fundamental program or organizational elements need to be in place to support youth in governance or youth-adult partnerships. These elements may be foundational for any quality youth development program, but are especially important for these programs to take the next step and engage young people in active decision-making roles. Participants in nominated programs in 4-H knew that organizational policies supported the active involvement of youth; had staff who supported the endeavor; had funding and logistics in place; had relevant programs that met young people's developmental, recreational and career-based needs; and were safe spaces for youth expression. Even successful programs cited challenges and areas needing improvement. For instance, out of 226 youth that were surveyed, one third were unsure about whether organizational policies supported youth in governance and youth-adult partnerships. Specific challenges to creating a program structure that facilitates YIG and YAP included limited leadership opportunities; a lack of adults willing to support youth; and time to attend training. These challenges occurred at the individual, program, and administrative levels.

Promising Practices

Promising practices identified included program policy and rules that supported youth in governance and youth-adult partnerships; staff support for young people; programming that was relevant for young people; creating a safe space for youth voice; and sustainable funding and logistics such as transport for young people and meeting times that were convenient for youth.

Organizational policy and staff support YIG and YAP

A majority (over 90%) of adults said they felt that policies in their county supported youth in governance and youth-adult partnership strategies. Two thirds of the young people surveyed agreed, while one third of the young people were unsure about the policies. Young people (above 70%) highlighted the importance of staff support.

In one leadership program, staff availability and support for leadership opportunity was especially valued by youth.

> *Well, I think we just have it really good in (county name). I know prior to (staff name) it wasn't as easy to (get into) leadership roles.* (youth)

The role of the program staff is to not only support youth in the partnership, but to also create opportunities for youth to assume leadership roles:

> *As a staff person… understanding the unique youth-adult partnership, you don't shut that person down but instead you say "Oh, you need to start a sub-committee over here." You have to be a pro at redirection. You're not turning them away. You're not telling them their opinion is not valued…and they will finally start realizing they're in charge of what they're doing and they're excited about it because it's theirs.* (4-H staff person)

Program incorporates youth interests and needs

A flexible and adaptable program that incorporated youth interests and needs was evident in nominated programs. In the words of a young participant:

> *[The program is] great because it really allows the people to grow in a way that they want as opposed to them being modeled in a way somebody wants them to be.* (youth)

These programs provided opportunities, especially leadership and community service in communities where youth have limited leadership opportunities. An adult in the program shared:

> *A lot of kids will stay in 4-H and they get leadership badges and are enjoying what it offers because*

everything is so limited here. Especially if you have to do any kind of college study there's no time to take those classes. And a lot more of them will stay here and get their leadership and their community service and it's their way of being involved. (adult)

In a large city, youth benefited from the 4-H leadership program and from the relationship with a caring adult who had high expectations:

I think with the 4-H program in our city, it's a lower income city, the 4-H program actually reached out to the teenagers and said, hey, you know what, you don't always have to be in the bottom. You can do something about it. And we also have faith in you because not a lot of people in the city do - I think it's one of the best programs. (youth)

Adults and youth from two counties specifically mentioned how their programs also provided life skills, such as resume writing and understanding the college application process. One youth said that her 4-H program representative "was the first person that made me realize, 'Hey, I can go to college.'" Another youth stated that resume writing was what attracted him to the 4-H program: "I was in the 4-H program because I learned how to do resumes, which I didn't know how to do… and it helped me get into college." These life skills provided youth with experience and knowledge that transferred to settings beyond 4-H.

COMMENTS: Relevance of Program to Youth

- Leadership
  "I mean leadership…its just helpful anywhere you go".
- Writing Skills
  "I like to write and since I'm the publicity person… it's helped me out a lot in my writing skills."
- Career Planning
  "I think the program helped me think big about the future..it helped me see that I would want a college education"
- College Admission
  "I had an interview with one of the colleges …I think that's the reason why I got in. Actually he told me that's the reason why I got in…"

Program is a safe space for youth voice and decision-making

Young people and adults felt a sense of acceptance and belonging to the group. Young people valued the importance of not feeling judged and being able to speak their minds freely:

4-H makes me feel like I don't have anybody else watching me or judging me when I am doing things. School and stuff is different. I feel like other people there are judging me but in 4-H everybody else is kind of on the same level, like we're all having the same type of feelings…It's okay to try and it's okay to fail because they know what you will do better next time. And everybody gives each other positive feedback. (youth)

Another young person shared similar thoughts: *"We all speak our minds pretty much, very openly and we don't have to worry about judgments or anything like that."* For youth, the safe space that is created by non-judgmental and supportive adults and youth peers provide necessary conditions for fostering youth-adult partnerships. Additionally, peers were mentioned as important role models and mentors who could show other youth that speaking up was the norm. Voicing a similar perspective, an adult shares:

[4-H is] about the only acceptable form of experimentation that we as families see. It's a great opportunity, now's the time to try different things in a safe environment. (adult)

Program has established funding and logistics that support YIG/YAP

A majority of nominated programs (over 90%) said they had sufficient funds to implement their projects. These programs also provided transportation for young people participating in the program.

Challenges or Areas for Improvement

Additional leadership opportunities, additional staff or adult volunteers, an increase in numbers of youth in governance structures and limited time availability for youth, adults and staff, were all considered areas for improvement or challenges in sustaining a supportive organizational and program structure.

Additional leadership program opportunities

Some young people stated that only select programs, i.e., those that already had leadership or governance themes (such as All-Stars, High 4-H and other teen leadership programs), provided youth in governance and partnership opportunities. One young person suggested that more programs across 4-HYD could offer public speaking and community service in an engaging way and would attract more youth:

> *I think counties need to be more organized and have more activities and projects where they can do more public speaking, more community service, and more fun activities and basically try to get the youth drawn into it more.* (youth)

Another young person shared the same desire for incorporating more leadership skills into a project: *"…because if you're showing swine or if you're raising rabbits and stuff you can still use public speaking."*

Additional staff or adults willing to support youth

More adult staff and volunteers available to support young people would facilitate more opportunities for youth leadership and partnership with adults. In the words of a young person:

> *As far as throughout 4-H, because you asked for suggestions to work on, making some of the adults more readily available to youth like the adult staff is for us. Because not all of them have adults that are as willing to support them in whatever they're doing. They're very accessible.* (youth)

On adult interviewee cited the lack of adult staff as the predominant issue, *"More coordinators need to be brought in. We need more than one coordinator."*

Limited representation of young people

Having greater representation of young people in group meetings is necessary to ensure comfort for youth expression. More leadership positions need to be created for youth especially when they are serving in an organizational capacity, a context traditionally dominated by adults. A young person stated:

> *I think kids are being scared out of our county because it is intimidating to show up to a meeting and you see all of the adults that are running everything and there is only five kids there. It can be intimidating. I would like to see more kids in Council.* (youth)

Limited time to invest in YIG and YAP among staff, youth and adults

The main logistical issue that emerged was finding time to meet that was convenient for both youth and adults (above 90% of youth and adults stated time availability as an issue). In addition, time availability of volunteers and staff to attend training and learn about YIG/YAP was perceived as limited.

KEY FINDINGS: Organizational/Program Structure

Promising practices

- Organizational policies and staff support YIG and YAP
- Program content incorporates youth interests and needs
- Program is a safe space for youth voice and decision-making
- Funding and transportation established

Challenges/areas for improvement

- Need more leadership program opportunities
- Need more available staff/volunteer coordinators
- Need more youth representation
- Time availability of youth, adults and staff

2) Youth and Adult Roles

As described in the previous section, nominated programs were characterized by equal youth participation in voice and decision-making. A majority of young people (above 90%) stated that youth and adults had equal power and shared voice, planning and decision-making. At least 75% of the nominated programs had written job descriptions or roles for both youth and adults, suggesting that clear articulation of roles is important. Both youth and adults noted the importance of positive attitudes about each other's roles to program success. Among the 14 nominated programs,

when youth and adults were asked, "What makes your program successful?" over 90% of young people and adults selected positive perceptions of each others' roles as being very important. In addition to having positive beliefs about young peoples' capacity, adults also had to intentionally step back or let go of power so that young people could lead.

Young people assumed a variety of roles, from providing input and ideas to full ownership of projects, to acting as peer educators or trainers. While roles were articulated, there was also a flexibility especially in the case of adult roles which needed to complement the work of young people. Adults served a range of roles including, in the words of a young person, "mentors, teacher, facilitator or friend" depending on the situation or the needs of the young people. The inability of some adults to "let go of control" is a challenge in the program. Some adults have difficulty with the notion of shared power and voice and decreased domination in programs.

Promising Practices

Promising practices include: adults having high expectations of young peoples' potential; intentional stepping back so that young people can lead; and an expectation of unique contributions.

Adults have high expectations of youth

When adults expressed high expectations for youth it fostered youth-adult partnerships that moved beyond tokenistic youth involvement into meaningful youth participation. For example, adults stated that high expectations raised youth's leadership potential, even if youth have never held a leadership role in the past.

> *The thing is… their integrity…what we expect out of them is a very high standard and what we want them to expect of themselves is a very high standard.* (adult)

> *Well, up front when we start the program is when we tell them what our expectations of this program are and we give them a good view of what's going to be going on and what people are going to be expecting. And that they're representing 4-H as a very, very high profile part of it and that we're very proud of them. And it carries on to how they act.* (adult)

> *I get a chance to work with all kinds of youth…. I get a chance to show them that they have a chance in life, that they're somebody special, that given the confidence and the knowledge, they can pretty much accomplish whatever they set their mind to.* (adult)

> *Their voices are as important as mine is. In fact, more important than mine is. And that's the thing, is that I like to give them that ability to be leaders in the county and to shine, to show that they can do this.* (adult)

Adults intentionally step back and let the youth lead

Adults consistently spoke of intentionally stepping back to let youth lead. Adults viewed their role as providing program oversight rather than leading young people.

> *And it's because our adults will sit back and give the power back to the kids so that the program can be successful…I think this is the reason it really works well because we do have adults that understand that they have to give away their power. Not to give it up, give away some in order for the kids to thrive.* (adult)

> *I am an overseer instead of a leader. A leader would be leading. They are the leaders.* (adult)

> *…I know that certain things are going to maybe fail or that they're going to have a hard time with but I let them get to a point where they realize this.* (adult)

> *…our coordinator… wasn't doing the work for us. She actually let us takeover, like this is your proposal, these are your materials.* (youth)

Youth and adults share positive perceptions of each others' unique contributions

Over 90% of youth and adults had positive perceptions about what the other group contributed. One youth described this sense of reciprocity of partnership in the following manner:

> *Well, with the 4-H process…everybody has a chance to give their input. The adults mainly have*

the knowledge from past experiences and… the kids tend to give new ideas to things. So they all seem to contribute evenly to the process. (youth)

The youth's view was shared by this adult:

…it's never about one person having domination. [It's] everybody being able to share what they're good at and I think that's what makes the…program work. (adult)

Range of Youth and Adult Roles

- Youth and adults were collaborators

  We had a chance to work with adults which is not something we really do…The adults didn't just stand by and command us to do those things, they were there with us. (youth)

- Youth had a voice in program decision-making

  It's nice to be able to influence the program that we're all participating in. (youth)

- Youth served as trainers, ambassadors, and networkers

  We're like the water under the boat, that is 4-H. (youth)

- Adults served as guides, counselors, and mentors

  I*t was really hard to say what kind of relationship it was because she was not only my coordinator but she was a supporter, friend, mentor, teacher.* (youth)

- Youth provided leadership, utilizing adults as needed

  …it's the youth who are in charge, and it's up to them to get along with the adults and organize and utilize adults and their peers in a manner that benefits everybody. (youth)

- Adults were available *"for emergencies"* and *"to drive to conferences."*

Challenges

Even successful programs had challenges with respect to consistently sharing power and voice and dealing with adult domination in some programs. Areas stated as needing improvement included more training or education available to adults on youth-adult partnerships and the nature of youth roles in successful endeavors.

Need to share power and voice

When describing the challenges of sharing power and voice with youth, this adult said:

I have one group in our county that has an adult on it that doesn't give the power back to the kids. And every year they've lost enrollment and lost attendance because the kids want to be up there in the governance part. (adult)

Adults from at least two of the programs interviewed stated that adult volunteers sometimes dominate the youth-adult interaction.

People who won't let the kids do the thinking outside the box. They quickly say, "Oh we've done that years ago and we don't want to do that." (adult)

Need for more education for adult volunteers on youth roles

The need for adults to participate in youth-adult partnership education was mentioned by an adult interviewee:

Educating adults…that the youth are a very important part of the program and that they need to be included. …youth's ideas are very good and they need to be considered…adults need to be open to listening to them. (adult)

KEY FINDINGS: Youth and Adult Roles

Promising Practices

- Adults have high expectations of youth
- Adults and youth have positive perceptions of each other's contributions
- Adults step back intentionally to let youth lead

Challenges/Areas for improvement

- Increase shared power and voice
- Reduced adult domination
- Increase adults' knowledge of appropriate youth roles

3) Supportive Relationships

Young people emphasized the relational aspect of their partnership with adults. More than 90% of youth and adults said their interactions were positive and based on mutual respect. Youth (above 85%) also indicated that relationships among their peers were positive indicating that positive relationships with both adults and peers formed a supportive group dynamic overall.

Promising Practices

Mutually supportive relationships were characterized by flexible supportive roles that adults took on based on youth needs, positive communication with adults and peer mentoring and encouragement.

Adults are flexible in their supportive roles

Young people emphasized a mutually supportive relationship with adults as a key element of successful youth and adult partnerships. Young people from an urban 4-H program described the multiple ways that adults supported them:

> *Well to me (named staff person) was more like a friend. I didn't see her as a person that would judge me if I asked her something or told her something personal.* (youth)
>
> *She basically watches out for you and she'll make sure that she's behind you, particularly make sure that everything is okay.* (youth)

Young people valued authenticity in their relationships with adults. One young person offered this tip to adults, *"Don't act like you're 16, be yourself - open and available."*

Supportive adults listened to the youth and provided personal attention, feedback, and guidance. Adults from numerous counties offered this advice:

> *Ask the youth 'what do they want?*
> *Listen more to the youth.*
> *Listen to what their problems are.*
> *We have to start listening.*

Youth and adults employ positive communication styles

A key practice identified by youth as important to the relationship was positive communication. A youth from an urban 4-H program shared this about the program's adults, *"….and they never raise their voice, never play favorites, never put us down, always very courteous."* Another said, *"We learned how to work together and not fight."*

Similarly, adults emphasized that positive communication was key to mutual respect:

> *It (mutual respect) looks like the trust they have in me and I have in them. We have that give and take, we can talk to each other… what we've all kind of learned is not to put down any ideas until we've really thought them through.* (adult)
>
> *The number one reason that I have found in making this program work is never make the kids feel guilty when they can't make something. We all have busy lives and there are going to be times when*

they can't be there. And they are more willing to come back next time if I don't make them feel this small just because they couldn't be here this time. It happens and that's life and we just need to understand. (adult)

Peers encourage and support youth

Older/more experienced youth provided encouragement and support to novices in order to help them discover their own leadership potential and to assume new roles. One young person shared:

> *That was a big help, having another member encourage you to do things and letting you know that it's okay to voice your opinion and that you're not going to be smacked down for it or anything like that.* (youth)

In a similar situation, other youth prodded shy youth to take a risk with their support:

> *Some of the youth are shy so [adults] try not to force their youth to have one (leadership role) and they need to realize nothing's gonna change if they (the youth) don't say anything.* (youth)

Challenges

Most nominated programs did not have a written process for resolving conflict. Adults mentioned it was sometimes challenging to maintain positive communication when difficulties arose in the partnership. An adult volunteer shared that a lack of reciprocal listening can become an issue: *"Every once in a while you may have a child who doesn't want to listen. But also another adult may not want to listen to the kids either."*

KEY FINDINGS: Supportive Relationships

Promising Practices

- Supportive relationships through flexible mentorship and active listening
- Peer mentoring and support
- Positive communication style based on mutual respect

Challenges/Areas for Improvement

- Absence of written conflict resolution process
- Fostering positive communication with non-cooperative youth or adults

4) Skill Building and Mutual Learning

Participant comments suggested that successfully shifting increased responsibility to youth required new skills for both youth and adults. Almost all nominated programs (over 95%) offered some form of training for youth and more than 90% offered training for adults and/or youth and adults together. Our more in-depth conversations revealed, however, that the type and quality of training greatly varied. The range included some formal training processes such as workshops to more informal types of skill transfer such as: youth observing other youth at work; role modeling by adults; word-of-mouth instructions; and so forth. Informal processes, while valuable, are inconsistent and the knowledge is often lost over time due to volunteer turnover.

Promising Practices

Programs that were included in the interview process used peer mentoring or more formal leadership training for training young people.

Peer mentoring is employed

Several programs employed peer mentoring and tutoring as a means of transferring skills. For example, All Stars in several programs prepared their peers to assume county-wide leadership positions. *"We're not only the students but we're the teachers (to other youth) at the same time."* (youth)

Leadership training is offered to youth

One youth described the leadership training that provided her with the skills needed to conduct activities:

> *When I first started I didn't know how to do events and things like that. Now I can plan and do whatever*

from start to finish and actually know what I have to do and what order I have to do it in. (youth)

One staff person trained youth to be assertive leaders as a method of overcoming adult resistance to working in partnership with youth:

> *It was really hard to get the adults here for the youth-adult partnerships and I do have a couple [adults] that I have to talk to once in awhile and say, you know we need to step back a little bit.. . but for the most part I've gone to training teens and letting them know that they have a voice and don't be afraid to use it. And that's been a better strategy because they will insert themselves into the groups and the agencies. . .* (adult staff)

Challenges

Lack of specific training and volunteer turnover were most often cited as the challenges to implementing YIG and YAP.

Training on YIG and YAP is inadequate

Although many young people took part in training and learned about YIG and YAP concepts, they stated that it would be useful to participate in more applied and concrete trainings specific to youth-adult interactions. Suggested topics include: learning how to work together; problem-solving through interactive scenarios; communication; and meeting facilitation skills.

> *There is like leadership conferences but I've never gone to a session that specifically teaches you how to interact with adults. They teach you what youth in governance is but they don't specifically teach you the people skills and the personality skills you need to actually work with adults and the adults to work with kids.* (youth)

Staff and youth mentioned that training on how to handle negative youth-adult interactions would also be useful: *"So if there's some way of teaching the adult to go to the youth with problems and teaching the youth to respect the adults' opinions."* (youth)

Volunteer turnover results in loss of knowledge

Some adults mentioned challenges associated with knowledge loss due to volunteer turnover. They also stated there is a challenge recruiting more volunteers. These adults suggested that the addition of more trained volunteers would help sustain knowledge.

KEY FINDINGS: Skill building and Mutual Learning

Promising Practices

- Skill transfer through peer mentoring
- Intentional leadership training for youth
- Life skills training

Challenges/Areas for Improvement

- Inadequate concrete and applied training on YIG and YAP
- Loss of knowledge due to volunteer turnover

5) Community or Program Impact

One consistent theme that emerged in exemplary programs was that young people were motivated by their goals to contribute towards something beyond themselves. The overall goal for most youth was to "make a difference" in the community. Adults for the most part stated that they were interested in supporting young people in leadership. Young people and adults felt their programs could be improved by having a greater community profile and collaborating with others in the community.

Promising Practice

For youth in governance, a promising practice is to engage young people in community based projects.

Engage youth in community-based projects

Youth stated that a desirable program strategy is to intentionally focus their efforts in community-based projects. This strategy connects youth with their community and/or organization while developing their leadership skills. Working in partnership with adults, youth's primary stated objective was to help others and the community as a whole.

> *In our program, it's not just the youth again completing the project; it's the youth reaching out to the community completing the project.* (youth)
>
> *…as you work together, you accomplish something that will help others.* (youth)
>
> *We had a good impact in the community… and we found a way to get the attention of the community and everyone around us.* (youth)

For one young person, community work resulted in an immediate, direct benefit for her and the community.

> *I also would like for the program to continue because it got me involved in school work and it got me to contribute back to my community. And I would also like to come back sometime in the future and help liked they helped me.* (youth)

Challenges

Only 25% of the nominated programs were delivered in collaboration with community groups conducting similar projects. The rest of the programs did not achieve community level awareness which appeared to affect volunteer recruitment and program sustainability. Some volunteers and staff felt that their programs could be improved by partnering with schools and other agencies or by networking with other groups conducting similar community-based projects.

KEY FINDINGS: Community Impact

Promising Practice

- Fostering youth engagement through community-based projects

Challenges/Areas for Improvement

- Programs not networked with other groups, agencies
- Projects need higher community profile

In summary, youth and adults emphasized the importance of organizational structure, clear role expectations, mutually positive relationships, skill acquisition, and the opportunity to make a difference in the community as important aspects of YIG and YAP. Through in-depth discussions, the varying perspectives and the challenges associated with cultivating and maintaining youth-adult partnerships was brought to light. Both youth and adults reflected on their current partnerships and their 4-HYD program experiences as they relate to YIG and YAP. Youth's understanding of the necessary conditions for youth-adult partnerships was similar to adults. However, youth placed greater emphasis on the nature of the relationship with adults; on peer processes such as peer mentoring; and on the importance of giving back to their communities. Both youth and adults offered strategies that they would like used to strengthen their programs.

The following chart summarizes the similarities and differences between youth and adults' perspectives.

Table 3: Similarities and Differences between Youth and Adult Perspectives

Conditions for YIG/YAP	Youth Emphasize	Adults Emphasize
Program/Organizational Structure facilitates YIG/YAP	• Numbers matter for feeling comfortable in leadership positions. • Judgment free atmosphere where youth can speak freely. • More leadership opportunities for young people.	• Increasing opportunities for youth on governing boards.
Role expectations support YIG/YAP	• Active encouragement to share voice and take on leadership positions. • Having clear roles. • Ownership of project.	• Increased project control by youth; knowing when to step back. • Clear roles and expectations. • High expectations of youth. • Ensure young people feel ownership of project.
Mutual Relationships	• Emphasize mutual personal relationships with adults. The "right" adult to work with is supportive, available, responsive, understanding to youth personal issues and someone they can trust. • Mutual respect and positive attitudes and expectations toward one another is important. • Positive communication is key. Adult communication needs to be encouraging and not put youth down. • Positive relationships with peers create a supportive group dynamic.	• Emphasize working relationships such as mutual respect and positive attitudes of adults to youth. • Communication strategies that worked – never be discouraging about youth ideas.
Mutual Learning/ Transfer of Skills	• Training in youth-adult interactions is an area for mutual learning. • Peer mentoring and role modeling of young people sharing power and decision-making roles with adults.	• Training on how to work with youth is an area for mutual learning.
Community Impact	• Contributing to the community and making an impact to something beyond themselves.	• Need higher level of program awareness in community.

Discussion

We sought to first understand how youth development practitioners within California's 4-H Youth Development programs perceived ideas about youth-adult partnerships and youth in governance. Following this, we used surveys with nominated programs for an overview of whether and how these programs met the criteria of youth-adult partnerships and youth in governance from the perspective of youth and adults. We found that the nominated programs did indeed exemplify key elements of voice, mutual respect, power and decision-making. We then conducted a more in-depth study on promising practices and challenges faced by five programs.

Our data revealed five themes under which we describe the factors that support or hinder the implementation of effective youth-adult partnerships and youth in governance. In the following discussion, we review the overall implications of our findings for 4-H as well as other youth development programs. We compare our findings with existing theory as well as new or unique insights gained. In addition, we discuss additional nuances of our findings such as the level of intentionality of programming; the similarities and differences among youth and adult perspectives; and the levels of youth and adult participation. All of these are emergent themes from our research that were not an original purpose of our study but are important ideas that can be researched further. Finally, we

address the gaps in our research and conclude with practical recommendations for 4-H and other youth development programs to foster youth participation and governance through youth-adult partnership strategies.

The 4-H context of YIG and YAP: Overall implications

Our study revealed that a majority (80%) of staff reported teen programs in 2007 in the California 4-H YDP met the criteria of youth-adult partnerships. Approximately half (50%) employed youth in governance strategies. Taking into account that this estimate was based on staff assessments of their programs in each county, we feel this is a promising basis from which to strengthen YIG and YAP practices statewide. We also found that 4-H YD staff viewed YIG and YAP strategies favorably and were interested in further training in these areas. However, staff were not in equal agreement with regard to incorporating YIG and YAP strategies in all programs. This may indicate that some youth development professionals see YIG and YAP as discrete programs rather than a philosophy that can be applied to all 4-H programming.

Nominated programs identified by staff fit the criteria of being exemplary examples of youth in governance and youth-adult partnerships, and proved to be suitable cases for identifying promising practices in YIG and YAP. The themes that emerged included: supportive organizational/program structures; articulated roles with positive expectations on the part of youth and adults; supportive relationships; skill building and training; and positive community impact. We discuss the implications of the strengths and areas for improvement that we found in each of these themes.

Organizational/program structure facilitates YIG and YAP

Overall, the 4-H organizational structure was perceived to support YIG and YAP strategies with regard to policy and staff support. Additionally, programs responded to youths' interests and provided safe spaces for youth and adults to engage in shared decision-making. These findings were consistent throughout nominated programs. They reflect the movement within the CA 4-HYD Program to embrace YIG and YAP philosophies and align policies and staff resources that allow these strategies to be infused into every program.

The CA 4-H YD Program takes pride in promoting leadership in youth. However, we found less evidence that leadership opportunities were plentiful or even sufficient at the local organizational and program level. Youth spoke of the need for additional leadership opportunities in all aspects of the program, not just in targeted "leadership development" programs. Youth leadership development results in the acquisition of personal skills including writing, public speaking, critical thinking, and planning to become engaged citizens, through multiple pathways throughout an organization. (Mohamed & Wheeler (2001; Libby et al, 2005). As an organization, we need to find ways to offer more leadership opportunities to more youth in more areas.

Role expectations

Successful 4-H programs included positive attitudes of youth and adults and articulated job descriptions but also a flexibility in a range of roles. The notion of adults taking on different roles, such as mentor, friend, teacher, facilitator, overseer, guide, etc,. is a relatively consistent finding across program contexts (Jones, in press). Even in more formal settings such as school based projects, the adult role as guide rather than an instructor has been cited as facilitating youth-adult partnerships (Mitra, 2007). Adults need to be prepared to support the group or the individual on a situational basis based on the age, experience or skill level of the young people and adults in question. This calls for an awareness as well as a preparedness on the part of the adult to shift roles based on the situation, taking on more responsibility when young people need it as well as knowing when to step back. Training in this area could significantly strengthen youth-adult partnerships in the CA 4-HYD Program as well as in other youth development programs.

The literature on youth participation does not emphasize the peer-to-peer or older-youth to younger-youth role. In our review of the literature, we found only one study that suggested that peer-peer processes were important in supporting young people's participation (Denner, 2005). However, we found in the 4-H context that the role of older and experienced youth in mentoring and encouraging younger or more inexperienced youth to express their views, to be important to younger youth participation.

Supportive relationships

In the context of 4-H programs we found ample opportunities for young people and adults to build positive relationships with one another. In some of the programs, these relationships developed over months and even years. The role of relationships for young people has been discussed extensively in the positive youth development

and resiliency literature with respect to the importance of having a caring and supportive adult (Benard, 2004). In addition, there is evidence that different types of relationships, from affective to more instrumental, may be beneficial depending on the young person or situation.

However, in the context of youth-adult partnerships, the role of relationships has not been extensively studied with the exception of a few studies such as Jones & Perkins (2006) and Jones (in press). Nevertheless, the literature that exists points to mixed effects. For instance, Camino (2005) notes how familiarity between youth and adults may inhibit processes of leadership since adults have preconceived notions of young people's capacities. However, Zeldin (2000) provides an example of how once young people felt that their opinions mattered they would not mind tabling power for relationships. The importance of peer relationships and processes as described in our introduction is also relatively understated in the youth participation literature. Young people often mention that building relationships and getting to know other youth are key motivators for engaging in the program, sometimes even more so than the program goal or activity (Denner, 2005) It is possible that the role of relationships is more important for young people's participation than for adults because adolescence is a time when relationships are a central developmental concern.

What are the promising practices that promote relationship building? In our study, participants cited positive communication as a major strategy to establish respectful relationships between youth and adults. Most groups also cited some form of on-going team-building as important. This included group orientation, training, ice-breakers and projects that took between six months and a year or more to complete thereby offering the groups opportunities to get to know each other.

Intentional skill building and training

Nominated programs in California 4-HYD incorporated some form of training for both youth and adults. The importance of skill building for youth and adults is a consistent theme across programs and organizations attempting to promote youth-adult partnerships and youth participation in decision-making (e.g., Camino, 2000; Zeldin, 2004; Mohamed & Wheeler, 2001; Mitra, 2007). Camino states that one of the three dimensions of youth-adult partnerships includes a set of skills and practices, suggesting that skill building is a necessary prerequisite.

From our interviews, however, we found that specific transfer of skills relevant to youth-adult partnerships or youth in governance from adult to adult, adult to youth, youth to adult, and from youth to youth, most often occurred via an informal process. The challenge in this approach is that information and expertise is lost once the youth and/or adult leave the program. An additional challenge is that the quality of the information that is shared may not necessarily be evidence-based. Nevertheless, creating a repository for this floating knowledge would enhance the effectiveness of CA 4-HYD programs and other youth-serving organizations. For example, a way to capture institutional knowledge could be to utilize blogs, listservs, and written and distributed policies posted on the web. Another strategy would be to make use of curriculum that explicitly incorporates youth-adult partnership principles and practices.

Community impact

Young people indicated a strong desire to positively impact their programs and/or the community or to "make a difference". These sentiments, along with the work of Mohamed and Wheeler (2001), suggest that for young people, especially marginalized young people, to acquire leadership skills, they need to be involved in projects or programs that impact the community. We found this sentiment expressed more among the young people. Most adults indicated that their motivation in being involved was to support young people in their endeavors. Camino (2005) asserts that the basis of strong YAPs is when youth and adults work toward a common good, such as community. She states that strong YAPs are less likely to emerge from programs in which mentoring youth or promoting youth development among individuals is the program focus.

Perhaps in the context of volunteer driven youth development programs there may be a range of adult motivations, from positive youth development, to positive adult development, to community impact. Adults may gain other benefits that are not directly related to the goal of the common activity such as impacts on the community.

Youth and adults indicated that current 4-HYD programs should strengthen their community level impact. When discussing the context of the 4-HYD leadership programs (e.g., 4-H camps, All-Stars) both youth and adults expressed the need to increase networking with other local organizations. It may be that if they had stronger community assessment and organizing skills they would be more likely to engage in a community project as opposed to projects that benefit themselves or their local unit.

Levels of intentionality in YIG/YAP programming

We found variations in the degree of intentionality regarding the incorporation of youth in governance or youth-adult partnership strategies into programs. While the word "intentional" connotes an implied action based upon one's recognition and knowledge of particular concepts at play, Roger (1983) states that intentionality can often occur indirectly:

> *The predispositions of individuals influence their behavior toward communication messages and the effects that such messages are likely to have. Individuals generally tend to expose themselves to ideas that are in accordance with their interests, needs, or existing attitudes. We consciously or unconsciously avoid messages that are in conflict with our predispositions.*
>
> *Change agents could perhaps play their most distinctive and important role in the innovation-decision process if they concentrated on how-to knowledge… (p.168).*

In YIG and YAP, intentionality can be gauged through stated goals and underlying philosophies, as well as mobilization of strategies such as on-going training and availability of resources. In other words, intentional programming provides a coherent framework for practice or "how-to knowledge" (Roger, 1983). We believe that intentionality in programming is valuable for at least two reasons: 1) it could increase the probability that all young people will benefit from programming; 2) it could increase program sustainability since a program's stated goals and structure can withstand volunteer turnover.

While we did not specifically study intentionality our interview data suggested that even programs nominated for their use of promising practices did not uniformly incorporate intentional strategies for YIG and YAP. In some nominated programs, program structure and principles were aligned with youth-adult partnership principles through tradition. For example, the program structure of resident 4-H camp programs historically allowed young people, with adult support, to take the lead in programming. However, in other programs, intentional re-structuring was needed to bring the program into alignment. Perhaps this gap is due to ambiguities in program intentionality which can be addressed by providing volunteers and young people with a coherent framework and "how-to knowledge" (Roger, 1983).

Similarities and differences between youth and adult responses

While we presented a cumulative view of what young people and adults stated, we also paid special attention to the differences in their views. This is important to capture as young people's perspectives may reveal unique needs that inform promising practices. We found that overall young people placed a higher value on relationships than did adults. Relative to this, young people cited the roles that older or more experienced peers play in encouraging the participation of younger or more inexperienced youth. Young people also noted the importance of having multiple leadership opportunities at younger ages, more positions for youth in decision-making roles and active encouragement of their participation by both peers and adults. Youth also emphasized the importance of community impact and making a difference.

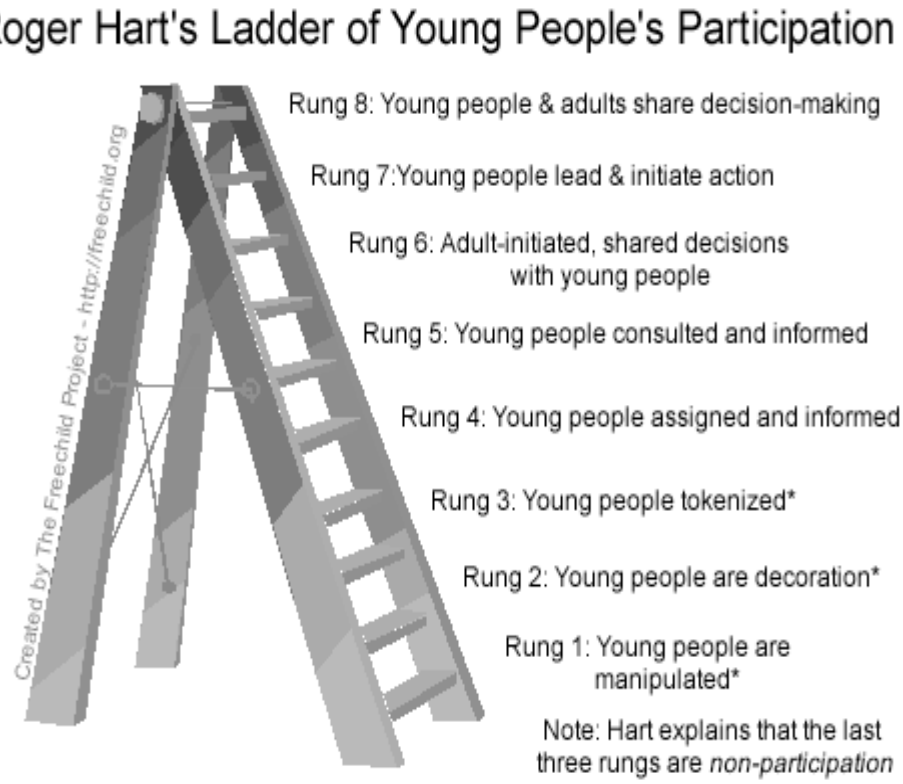
Similarities between youth and adults were in the areas of suggestions for training on communication skills; the importance of respect for both youth and adults; and their positive attitudes of one another.

Cumulatively, young peoples' perspectives affirm that youth participation in decision-making is achieved through youth infusion at various levels of a program and organization (Libby, 2005; Wheeler, 2002). This infusion represents not only structural shifts such as increased numbers of youth in decision-making roles, but cultural shifts that embrace youth development-friendly practices of relationship building, peer mentoring and active engagement in community change.

Levels of youth and adult decision-making in partnerships

In the 12 nominated programs there were variations in the levels of youth decision-making. Based on youth survey responses, a majority of programs fell under the category of equal youth and adult decision-making. Few, however, fell under the category of youth making most decisions and one of the programs was characterized as mostly adults making the decisions. It is evident that programs are at various stages in their level of youth infusion in decision-making. One way in which these varying levels of participation has been conceptualized is through Hart's ladder of participation (Figure A). From this perspective ideal levels of youth participation are at the higher rungs where young people share adult decision-making; initiate and lead projects with or without adult support; or significantly influence adult decision-making. Using this conceptualization a majority of the programs incorporated youth participation at Rung 8 while a minority of programs were at Rung 6 or 7.

Figure A: Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation



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

Our findings suggest that while true youth-adult partnerships are about shared youth and adult decision-making, the level of participation of youth and adults is a dynamic dance that can constantly shift based on variables such as the practices of adults, experiences of young people, and transitions in the group dynamic. While Hart's Ladder provides a useful guide to assess the level at which young people participate, our findings suggest the need for a second model that represents a range of both youth and adult roles that define both group's participation. This new model should include the range of roles that adults and youth assume. Additionally, it should be fluid as the group may be at various stages at any given time. Like other recent studies, our findings on promising practices suggest that youth participation may not always be a linear progression as Hart's ladder suggests.

Another theoretical debate that is important to address is the question of youth-led versus youth and adults contributing equally. Responses from staff, youth, and adults in this study suggested that youth-initiated involvement was the most meaningful form of participation, as it liberated youth to make and execute decisions through their own power, yet offered the benefit of adult support, if and when it was needed. This is consistent with another study in the 4-H context where young people and adults spoke more positively about programs that were youth driven (Jones, in press). However, some other studies have shown that both youth and adult driven models may be beneficial in youth development programs, if adults balance power with strategies noted in this study and with others such as guiding versus instructing (Larson, 2005). Researchers on youth participation note that it is important for young people to set the agenda with regard to the level of decision-making they wish to assume (Hill et al, 2008). Some youth may be interested in voicing their opinions but do not necessarily want to take on full leadership roles, especially if they have competing responsibilities at home or in school (Larson, 2005). Hart (1992) contends that while youth-adult partnerships yields the highest form of meaningful youth participation, each group needs to determine which form of decision-making best fits with the group's needs.

Gaps in our study and areas for further research

Our study focused on successful YIG/YAP nominated programs and we observed practices that both support and hinder the implementation of YIG and YAP. While we identified some challenges in these programs, they may not be representative in scope of issues that programs struggling to adopt YIG and YAP experience.

While our study findings are categorized and analyzed with respect to variations in youth versus adults' perspectives, neither youth nor adults should be considered homogenous categories. Young people between the ages of 12 and 18 from across different socio-cultural and economic geographies informed the perspectives in this study. Understanding variations among these different contexts are beyond the scope of our particular sample and analysis. Similarly, among adults there may be important differences in the motivations and capacities of older versus younger adult volunteers and staff or across ethnic contexts. This is an area for further study.

Due to our inherent connection to the California 4-H Youth Development Program as either academics or program staff, we hold our own perspectives of what constitutes "effective" and "ineffective" youth-adult partnerships and youth in governance, which has the potential to influence the data analysis. Methodologically, capturing the voices of volunteers, staff, youth, and adults, proved to be both a strength and limitation of this study. Although the majority of youth projects/activities in our sample are led by adult volunteers, the first survey was completed by staff. Similarly, it was our intention to partner with youth in all aspects of this research in an effort to both strengthen the study and to model effective youth-adult partnership research. However, we were only able to include youth in the last phase of this project due to the relatively short timeline for data collection. Despite this limitation, the young people's perspectives summarized and highlighted in this report are very important, often over-looked, and serve as a contribution to the field.

We invite researchers to consider youth voice and to study more examples of successful youth in governance and youth-adult partnership programs to better discern the most appropriate level of youth participation and to further inform the field of youth development.

Program recommendations

In agreement with published research, our study suggests that youth programs need to incorporate the following five elements in order for youth in governance and youth-adult partnerships to take place:

1) Organizational and program structure that facilitate YIG and YAP
2) Articulated positive and supportive role expectations
3) Positive and supportive relationships among and between youth and adults
4) Skill building, training, and mutual learning
5) YIG/YAP promotes community improvement

These five themes, viewed sequentially, comprise our recommended strategy for creating authentic and successful youth-adult partnerships in the CA 4-HYD Program. Various programs and organizations may implement YIG or YAP with some elements already in place. In addition, organizational practice is dynamic and context specific. Some elements will be realized before others. Thus, some organizations may want to approach these elements as an evolving process as opposed to sequential steps depending upon their organizatinal context. The strategies require involvement from staff, adults, youth, and youth-adult teams at the program and organizational level in order for youth-adult partnerships and youth in governance to successfully take place.

SUMMARY OF PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS:
Following the 5-Elements Strategy

1) Organizational and program structure that facilitates YIG and YAP

Before organizations and staff can incorporate youth-adult partnerships into a program, intention needs to be placed on program structure. Providing an intentional program structure lays the foundation for effective YAP practices.

- Develop a flexible and adaptable program structure that incorporates youth interests and needs.
- Develop job descriptions that support the collaborative process.
- Designate staff as a resource to youth and adults.
- Acquire adequate resources for the youth program.
- Create a fun learning environment that motivates youth and adults to continue the partnership.
- Ensure that adults do not outnumber youth.
- Create more positions available for youth voice, influence and decision-making in all levels of programming and at the organizational level.
- Develop formal leadership trainings for youth, or hold a younger member orientation so more youth step into leadership roles.

2) Articulated positive and supportive role expectations

Often, attitudes about youth roles can limit the potential for meaningful youth participation. Getting organizations, staff, and youth-adult teams to identify their beliefs about youth and adult roles is an essential preliminary step toward implementing authentic youth-adult partnerships.

- Assess beliefs about youth and adult roles.
- Clarify scope of youth and adult roles.
- View young people as resources; have high expectations.
- View adults as partners, but be ready to be guides, counselors, mentors if that is needed by young people.
- Encourage young people to take on leadership roles or to share their opinions.
- Build in systems for peer support and for peers to model leadership and decision-making.
- Adults need to step back intentionally or sometimes give up power to let youth lead.

3) Positive and supportive relationships among and between youth and adults

Once attitudes are assessed and roles are determined, youth and adults who are entering into partnership together begin to build relationships through the strategies listed below.

- Cultivate a safe emotional space, where both youth and adults feel a sense of acceptance and belonging.
- Build in time for getting to know each other – make use of small group settings.
- Make use of respectful communication strategies – e.g., ask questions rather than passing judgment.
- Practice active listening to foster a respectful connection between the speaker and the listener.
- Establish a protocol for addressing conflict.

4) Skill building, training, and mutual learning

Before youth (and adults) can be expected to implement a project or task, they must first receive intentional training on the necessary skills that their project or task requires as well as related skills such as how to facilitate meetings. Organizations and staff are responsible for supporting and providing appropriate skill building opportunities as well as opportunities for the group to learn from each other.

- Provide adults and with training on YAPs.
- Provide adults and youth leadership training.
- Provide adults and youth with life skills workshops including public speaking, meeting facilitation and other relevant skills.
- Engage older youth as peer educators and role models for youth.
- Engage older youth as trainers for youth-adult partnership training.

5) YIG/YAP promotes program or community improvement

While building youth leadership skills is an important part of youth-adult partnerships and youth in governance, it is not the goal but rather a strategy. Connecting youth leadership to program or community improvement is the ultimate goal of youth-adult partnerships and youth in governance.

- Establish connections with community partners to increase the profile of the youth program.
- Engage young people and adults in community needs assessments.
- Provide an avenue for young people to grow beyond the program – such as being able to contribute or give back to the program even after they leave.

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Appendix

Glossary of 4-H terms

Active Listening: The practice of concentrated, focused listening, while also observing tone of voice and physical gestures to recognize the overall emotion of the speaker. Active listening is used as a communication tool for fostering a respectful connection between the speaker and listener.

All Star: An honor attainable at the county level. It refers to the fact that the members have already received the bronze, silver and gold stars according to the guidelines set forth at the state.
Camp Youth Staff: High school-aged youth who are trained and selected to serve as camp directors, deans, activity counselors, and leaders at overnight camp.

Citizenship: Opportunities for youth to learn more about government at the local, state, national and/or international level through conferences at the local, regional, state and national level.

County Council: Organization of all enrolled, approved adult volunteers and youth representatives. The Council plans, implements and evaluates countywide events. It has a constitution and by-laws approved the University of California.

Hi 4-H: A program for youth in middle through high school. In addition to planning and enjoying social and recreation activities, members assist with events and outreach as needed.

Service-learning: A teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities.

Teens as Teachers (Cross-age teaching): A process in which teens teach a group of younger children a general concept or subject matter for enrichment (as opposed to remediation or review). Teens are responsible for all teaching, not just assisting an adult leader.

Youth-Adult Partnerships: Youth and adults working together in a positive, mutually respectful environment with the recognition that each group contributes unique strengths to the relationship.

Youth in Governance: The authentic and meaningful engagement of young people in programs, organizations and communities, where they have or share voice, influence and decision-making authority.

Acknowledgements

This research was supported by two University of California Division of Agriculture and Natural Resources (UCANR) Core Issue Grants. We would like to thank former UCANR Adolescent Workgroup members, Marianne Bird, Ann Brosnahan, Steve Dasher, and Carole MacNeil, who along with the authors, designed the research and collected and analyzed data. We would also like to thank Aura DeMare for interviewing participants and Joyce Guervara for transcribing the audio tapes. We are indebted to the many youth and adult staff and volunteers who participated in this study. We also wish to acknowledge and thank Ramona Carlos and Carrie Matthews, 4-H Center for Youth Development staff, for their editing and formatting contributions.

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