

Involving Youth in the Community Development Process¹

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As communities face challenges and opportunities to help serve their residents, they're often faced with a lack of resources, including volunteers. However, many parents are discovering that their children may not only want to volunteer, but many teenagers are required to volunteer if they're pursuing a future in college.

Youth represent a vast and often untapped resource for immediate and long-term community development efforts. They

have energy, enthusiasm, time, and both creative and intellectual talent. As youth are brought into and connected with organizations and civic roles that they have traditionally been excluded from, they can participate in active and equal decision-making at multiple levels. Tapping youth resources benefits the community, too—community development is enhanced when local people, both young and old, work together to address local needs.

There are many ways to assist youth in becoming leaders and active participants within their community. For example, connecting with adults as mentors and guides will enable them to build the leadership skills that will help them as they become adults. In order to engage youth, adults must understand and respect youth culture, get youth involved at all levels of the organization, and respect their valuable contributions. As youth become more involved in positive relationships with adults, other youth, and community organizations, they'll learn that they are valued citizens in their communities. They'll develop their skills and confidence, all important steps in preparing for adulthood.

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