

10-1-2005

Program Assessment and Improvement Through Youth-Adult Partnership: The YALPE Resource Kit

Cailin O'Connor

University of Wisconsin- Madison, caitlin.oconnor@gmail.com

Shepherd Zeldin

University of Wisconsin, rszeldin@wisc.edu



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

Recommended Citation

O'Connor, C., & Zeldin, S. (2005). Program Assessment and Improvement Through Youth-Adult Partnership: The YALPE Resource Kit. *The Journal of Extension*, 43(5), Article 26.
<https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol43/iss5/26>

This Tools of the Trade is brought to you for free and open access by the Conferences at TigerPrints. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Extension by an authorized editor of TigerPrints. For more information, please contact kokeefe@clemson.edu.



Program Assessment and Improvement Through Youth-Adult Partnership: The YALPE Resource Kit

Abstract

Youth and Adult Leaders for Program Excellence (YALPE) is a resource kit for youth programs seeking to engage youth in generating assessment data for action planning, communicating to stakeholders, and training volunteers and community partners. The research-based, user-friendly resource kit outlines a structured process of planning, assessment, and improvement to be carried out by a team of youth and adults. The kit includes a guide to the assessment process; four assessment tools to choose from; templates for data entry, analysis, and reporting; and four research briefs that detail the empirical basis for the YALPE tools and the processes.

Cailin O'Connor

Outreach Specialist
University of Wisconsin-Madison, School of Human Ecology
cailin.oconnor@gmail.com

Shepherd Zeldin

Associate Professor/Youth and Community Development Specialist
University of Wisconsin-Extension
rszeldin@wisc.edu

Madison, Wisconsin

Youth development scholarship and outreach highlight the importance of youth engagement in experiential and service learning (Hairston, 2004) and in contributing to program improvement (Mincemoyer & Perkins, 2001). When youth and adults work together, as partners, to engage in evaluation and action planning, both youth and the program show positive outcomes (Kirshner, O'Donoghue, & McLaughlin, 2005; Sabo, 2003; Zeldin, O'Connor, & Camino, 2005).

There are design and implementation challenges, however, to having youth, staff, and adult volunteers work collaboratively to strengthen their programs. The *Youth and Adult Leaders for Program Excellence: A Practical Guide to Program Assessment and Action Planning (YALPE)* resource kit (Camino, Zeldin, Mook, & O'Connor, 2004) was designed to help 4-H professionals meet these challenges. Most concisely, YALPE is a set of assessment instruments and processes that can be used to:

- Support action planning and program improvement through the analysis of, reflection on, and discussion of objective program assessment data,
- Communicate our unique niche and positive outcomes to county boards and other community stakeholders, and/or
- Orient new adult leaders to promising practices of youth development, youth-adult partnership, and youth engagement.

The YALPE resource kit was developed over 4 years of pilot tests with Extension professionals and their community partners. For example, the resource kit has been used to strengthen the governance and programming of community clubs. It has been used to help community coalitions develop a common language and training approach.

The YALPE Resource Kit

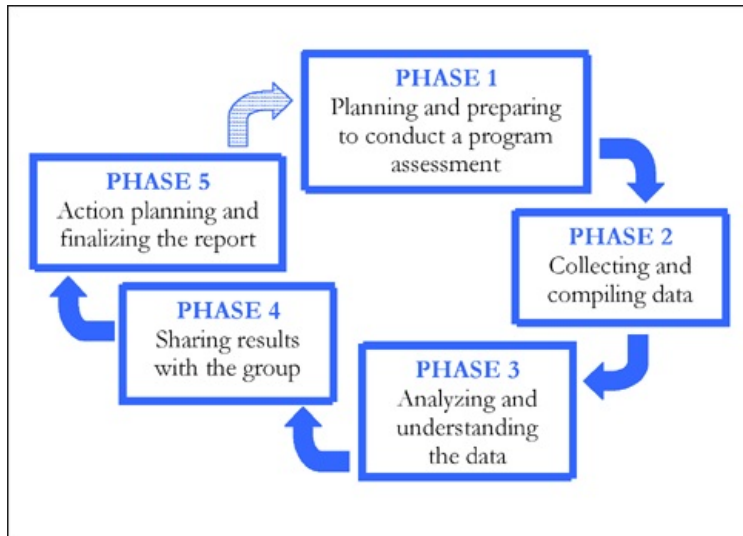
The *YALPE* resource kit is designed to be user friendly for both youth and adults working in partnership. To facilitate use, the resource kit includes:

- A detailed guide to the process;
- Four assessment tools to choose from;
- Excel-based data entry templates;
- A Word-based template for reporting on results;
- A User's Guide to allow professionals to adapt the process to their specific needs; and
- Four research briefs that detail the empirical basis for the *YALPE* tools and the processes.

Guide to the Program Assessment and Action-Planning Process

The *YALPE* resource kit provides an easy-to-use structure for organizations to conduct a rigorous assessment of their youth programs and use the results for program planning and improvement. An Assessment Leadership Team of youth and adults engages in five phases of a continuous inquiry and learning process, illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1.
Phases of the *YALPE* Process



Each phase comprises two or three concrete steps--some to be carried out in assessment team meetings and some in meetings with all program participants. The entire process is estimated to take about 24 hours to complete over the course of 1 to 4 months, depending on the needs and structure of the program. However, the process is flexible, allowing for programs and organizations to implement what they need.

The guides for action planning based on assessment results, included in Phase 5 of the process, make the link between the assessment process and program improvement, and feed into a continuous inquiry cycle.

Assessment Tools

There are four assessment tools in the *YALPE* resource kit. The tools are designed to be completed by youth (ages 12 to 18) and by adults. Programs can choose to use one or more of these tools depending on their specific assessment needs. Also, programs can add questions to the assessment instruments if they wish. The *YALPE* tools are grounded in the research on youth development and organizational change, as identified in the research briefs.

YET, the "Youth Engagement Tool," assesses the degree to which youth have legitimate chances to be heard, respected, and taken seriously. It also examines the outcomes that youth derive from their participation.

ORG-YET, the "Organizational Support for Youth Engagement Tool," assesses the extent to which youth are involved in decision-making forums and the degree to which the organization creates structures to support youth engagement over the long term. It also examines the outcomes that the program derives from youth engagement.

PAAT, the "Program and Activity Assessment Tool," assesses the developmental experiences--opportunities and supports--that are provided to youth in the program.

kidPAAT, the "Program and Activity Assessment Tool for Younger Participants," assesses similar opportunities and supports as PAAT, but in a more simplified format for younger children (ages 8 to 12).

Data Entry, Analysis, and Interpretation

A distinctive feature of *YALPE* is that it provides templates for data entry and analysis. Using the templates ensures professional-quality analysis and also helps assessment team members to develop computer skills by using common applications in a real-world setting. These templates are included on a CD in the resource kit.

For each of the four assessment tools, a spreadsheet template is provided for data entry. Excel automatically calculates averages and graphs the results. Instructions are also included for how to use the templates without a computer.

Report Writing, Group Facilitation, and Action Planning

A word processing report template is also included on the CD in the *YALPE* resource kit. This template guides the assessment team through the process of writing a final report on their assessment. The template is designed to produce reports that are data based, yet user friendly.

Once the report is completed, additional guidance is provided to help the assessment team communicate findings to their stakeholders, be it other youth and volunteers in their program or other county and community stakeholders. Special attention is given to supporting the assessment team to facilitate action planning meetings and reach consensus on priority recommendations.

Closing

Extension professionals work in an environment where assessment data are necessary for action planning, communicating to external stakeholders, and training volunteers and community partners. Our hope is that professionals will find *YALPE* valuable in addressing these needs. More information on the *YALPE* resource kit, including the User's Guide and four research briefs, is available on-line at <<http://www.actforyouth.net/>>.

References

Camino, L., Zeldin, S., Mook, C., & O'Connor, C. (2004). *Youth and adult leaders for program excellence: A practical guide for program assessment and action planning*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin-Extension.

Hairston, J. E. (2004). Identifying what 4-H'ers learn from community service learning projects. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 42(1), Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2004february/rb2004.shtm>

Kirshner, B., O'Donoghue, J., & McLaughlin, M. (2005). Youth-adult research collaborations: Bringing youth voice to the research process. In J. L. Mahoney & R. W. Larson (Eds.), *Organized activities as contexts of development: Extracurricular activities, after-school and community programs*. (pp. 131-156): Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Mincemoyer, C., & Perkins, D. (2001). Building your youth development toolkit: A community youth development orientation for Pennsylvania 4-H/Youth Programs. *Journal of Extension* [On-line], 39(4), Available at: <http://www.joe.org/joe/2001august/a2007.html>

Sabo, K. (Ed.). (2003). *Youth participatory evaluation: A field in the making. New Directions for Evaluation* (Vol. 98). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Zeldin, S., O'Connor, C., & Camino, L. (2005). *Youth participation in research and evaluation*. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Copyright © by Extension Journal, Inc. ISSN 1077-5315. Articles appearing in the Journal become the property of the Journal. Single copies of articles may be reproduced in electronic or print form for use in educational or training activities. Inclusion of articles in other publications, electronic sources, or systematic large-scale distribution may be done only with prior electronic or written permission of the *Journal Editorial Office*, joe-ed@joe.org.

If you have difficulties viewing or printing this page, please contact [JOE Technical Support](#)