



## Tips for developing a youth orientation manual

An orientation manual is a great resource for youth who will be engaged within your organization or project in some capacity. Not only can an orientation manual introduce youth to any policies or procedures they need to be aware of, but it can also help lay the foundation for a truly meaningful partnership. This tip sheet is intended to guide organizations in the creation of an orientation manual designed just for youth.

### **Think about the big picture.**

Why are you developing a youth orientation manual in the first place? What's your goal? What are you trying to orient youth to? For example, your orientation manual may need to look a little different if you're orienting youth to a paid position or a youth advisory committee as opposed to an ad-hoc committee or a focus group.

### **Reflect on where you're at.**

How are youth currently engaged in your organization? And what is your organization's level of understanding of the principles, benefits and rationale behind youth engagement? An awareness of where you're at will help you identify ways to create more space for youth at the table. You can set the stage from the get-go with your orientation manual.

### **Set the stage for a meaningful partnership.**

If you already work with young people, think about *how* you do so in an authentic and meaningful way. What values and [guiding principles](#) inform how you work with young people? If working with youth is new to you, take the time to think about what you want your partnerships with youth to look and feel like.

### **Build buy-in.**

Put yourself in the shoes of the young person you're trying to orient. They might be wondering 'Why am I here?' and 'What's in it for me?' Help youth understand what their role is, how they fit into the big picture and how their experience of being engaged will benefit *them*. Youth engagement is a two-way street.

**Break it down and think about the Q&As.**

What might young people's biggest questions be? Can you answer any of them in your orientation manual? Consider tapping into adult allies within the organization. Which questions are they asked most often? For example, if youth often have questions about transportation, consider including a map and information about transit routes.

**Clarify expectations.**

Chances are good that there will be some minimum expectations of what you need and expect from youth. In turn, youth need to know what they can expect from the work, the people and the organization. Use your orientation manual to clearly outline what those expectations are. It's best to not assume anything – when in doubt, include it!

**Ask youth!**

This one's a no-brainer. How can you involve youth in the process of creating your orientation manual? Perhaps you can ask youth who have been engaged in the past: what worked, what didn't and what are their recommendations for orienting other youth? If you can, engage youth in the development of whatever you create, right from the beginning.

**Mind your tone.**

Make it youth-friendly! Avoid jargon and technical language that may not be accessible to young people. Use inviting, clear, inclusive language and consider engaging youth to review your orientation manual to identify areas that are confusing or could be worded differently.

**Think about format.**

Reflect on your goals or reasons for developing an orientation manual. What kind of format will work best to help you achieve those goals? And how can you best reach the young people you're trying to orient? Sometimes a document will work just fine. In other cases, it may be more logical (and engaging!) to develop a short video, blog post or website.

**Be prepared to move beyond the manual.**

An orientation manual is one of many great tools you can use to set the stage for meaningful engagement of youth in a variety of roles. But it will only do so much! Make sure you leave time and space to help orient youth to your organization or project *in person*. Carve out lots of time for questions and be sure youth have a key contact they can reach out to throughout the transition.