



A Guide to Engaging Youth Experiencing Houselessness

*Prepared for the Office of the Child and
Youth Advocate Alberta*

March 31, 2025



Policy Wise
for Children & Families

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	2
Introduction	4
Three Principles.....	4
1. Respect Youths’ Autonomy	4
2. Maximize Benefits while Minimizing Harms.....	5
3. Create Equitable Opportunities.....	5
Applying the Three Principles to the Engagement Process	5
Engagement Design and Planning	5
Recruitment.....	6
Set-up.....	6
Physical Space	6
Timing.....	7
Incentives	7
Safety	8
Physical Safety.....	8
Psychological Safety	8
Aggression	9
Disclosures.....	9
Ways of Being and Doing.....	10
Informed Consent.....	11
Can Youth Consent to Participate?	11
Factors Impacting Youths’ Ability to Consent	11
Accessible Consent Process.....	12
Facilitation	14
Engagement Structure	14
Building Relationships	15
Trauma-informed Approach.....	16
Debrief.....	17
After the Engagement	17
Data Management	17

Knowledge Sharing.....	17
Conclusion.....	18
References	19
Appendix A: Scenarios	22

Introduction

When adults make decisions impacting youth, we must include youths' perspectives. Young people experience systems differently than adults. By hearing from young people directly, we can understand how their identities and experiences interact to create strengths and barriers. Engaging youth on issues impacting them creates better systems and empowers youth as citizens and rights-holders.

Engagement is especially important when our decisions impact the lives of vulnerable or marginalized youth. Youth experiencing houselessness have unique strengths emerging from their complex experiences. They make decisions independently in challenging and often dangerous situations. Daily, youth experiencing houselessness manage poverty, stigma, and discrimination towards unhoused people. They may also experience justice system and Children and Family Services (CFS) involvement, mental health and substance use challenges, and discrimination due to their race, disability, gender identity, and other factors. Through these difficult experiences, youth experiencing houselessness develop a strong sense of autonomy that we have a duty to respect.¹

With thoughtfulness, creativity, and flexibility, we can collaborate with youth to address issues that impact them. This guide provides practical recommendations to ethically engage youth. It focuses on youth experiencing houselessness, but can apply to engaging any group of young people.

In this guide, we first explore three principles to guide our engagement. We then apply these principles to the engagement process, highlighting actions facilitators can take to prevent and address risks.

Three Principles

Three overarching ethical principles help create opportunities for diverse youth to participate in decision-making as safely as possible.

1. Respect Youths' Autonomy

When we engage youth, we show them we respect the wisdom they've gained through their lived experience.² We **respect youths' autonomy** by honouring their right to express their views on issues that affect them.³ Engagement empowers youth to shape the systems they interact with. With the knowledge we gain through engagement, we can ensure our decisions reflect youths' perspectives, priorities, and needs.

Another way we respect youths' autonomy is by empowering them to make decisions about their participation. By creating flexible processes where youth have choice, we engage them on their terms.⁴ In respectful engagements, youth have an opportunity to express and hold boundaries, sharing as much or as little as they choose. Having this input encourages youth to become more invested and is especially important when we're engaging youth about experiences that felt out of their control, such as when they started experiencing houselessness.

2. Maximize Benefits while Minimizing Harms

We have a duty to ensure our work results in positive impacts and prevents negative consequences to the people we're engaging.^{1,2} When we're working with youth, we must be aware of the ways they may be especially vulnerable and build in structures that **maximize benefits while minimizing harms**.³

Although engagement may result in societal benefits through greater awareness of youths' needs and improved decision-making, we need to provide tangible benefits to the individual youth who participate. We also need to consider the potential harms youth can experience through participating. Harms can be social, for example if sensitive information about a youth is disclosed to their peers. Youth can experience physical harm, for example if they are subjected to violence in an engagement. Harms can also be societal, for example if our engagement's final products contribute to stigma. When planning engagements, we need to have specific plans in place to address any foreseeable harms.

Another way we can frame risk versus benefit is protection versus empowerment.⁵ Knowing that youth generally are more vulnerable than adults, it's important that we protect them, but we can't overcorrect to the point of excluding them. For example, if we automatically exclude youth with cognitive disabilities, mental health conditions, or those who use substances to protect them, we also limit their access to the benefits of participating, including contributing to our understanding of youth like them. We must balance protecting youth from harm with empowering them to make informed decisions about how they share their experiences.

3. Create Equitable Opportunities

We must give everyone a chance to share the labour and benefits of participating in an engagement.^{1,2} We can **create equitable opportunities** for diverse youth to participate by acknowledging and accommodating their individual needs.

Youth who experience discrimination, such as racism, transphobia, and ableism, are more likely to experience homelessness.⁶ It's important that we don't recreate these harms when we're engaging youth. Each young person has unique needs and experiences, comes from a different background, and is growing and changing.^{4,7} We can accommodate differences between youth and within youth over time by creating flexible engagements. We can develop awareness of the identities of the people we're engaging, consult with knowledge holders, and be open to learning. We need to meet youth where they're at, rather than trying to force them into a rigid engagement plan.

Applying the Three Principles to the Engagement Process

You can apply these three principles throughout the engagement process, from design, to facilitation, to sharing back what you learn.

Engagement Design and Planning

Right from the start, you can involve youth in the design of your engagements, considering the ways you can support different youth to participate.

Respect youths' autonomy. Facilitators can work with youth to develop engagement strategies that align with their needs.^{3,7} Having youth consult on an engagement's design can reveal barriers you haven't considered. Youth can create fun engagement activities, develop interview questions in line with their priorities, and support cultural sensitivity in the engagement process. They can identify meaningful incentives for participating and highlight needs you can address. Helping to design an engagement can help youth feel empowered by teaching them new skills.

Maximize benefits while minimizing harms. For ethics support, facilitators can connect with organizations such as the [Alberta Research Ethics Community Consensus Initiative](#) (ARECCI) or the [Community Research Ethics Office](#). Unlike academic research ethics boards, these organizations don't approve or reject projects. They assess a project's risk and provide strategies for managing it. The review process can take a few weeks and may come with a fee but is a helpful way to identify potential harms you may have not considered.

Recruitment

Building trust with youth begins at recruitment. Having someone familiar to the youth help with recruitment can impact youths' trust with the project. Make sure recruiters encourage youth to participate without pressuring them. When recruiting youth, it's important to share:

- *Who is doing the project?*
- *What is the purpose of the project?*
- *Who is being recruited?*
- *What will participants be asked to do?*
- *What are the benefits and risks of participating?*
- *How long will participating take?*

Provide recruiters with example questions to help youth understand what the engagement is about.⁴ Youth who have already participated can also help with recruitment but be mindful of the influence of peer pressure.⁷ You don't want youth to participate just because their friend told them to.

Create equitable opportunities. Although recruiting through partner organizations can leverage trust youth already have, this strategy can exclude young people who have had bad experiences with organizations.⁷ Generally, these youth are more marginalized and less supported, so it's important to include their perspectives. To include these youth, recruit through a variety of partner organizations and connect with youth who are not accessing services regularly.

Set-up

By setting up an environment where youth feel safe, respected, and empowered, you can support them to share their experiences in ways that feel good for them.

Physical Space

When picking a location for the engagement, choose somewhere familiar that is accessible by transit. The space should offer privacy without making youth feel trapped. For group engagements, provide a separate, quiet area where youth can retreat if they feel overwhelmed. If there is a risk youth might be violent, keep the space tidy and use sturdy, immovable furniture.⁸

Create equitable opportunities. For gender-diverse youth, choose a space with gender-neutral bathrooms or add gender-neutral signs to gendered bathrooms. For Indigenous youth, make sure smudging is allowed indoors. Ensure the space is accessible for youth with disabilities, with features like elevators, wheelchair ramps, and accessible bathrooms. Movement-friendly seating, such as swivel or rocking chairs, and fidget toys can accommodate youth with pain, anxiety, or attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.

Timing

Youth may have limited time and unpredictable schedules.⁴ They might be working, attending programs, going to school, or finding essential resources.

Maximize benefits while minimizing harms. Youth experiencing houselessness may miss out on opportunities to connect with supports because they're participating in engagements.³ To reduce this risk, partner with youth-serving organizations to provide connections to services. You can have service providers present at the engagement or develop a list of trusted providers who are prepared for you to call with referrals. Have different options for youth to choose from. Here are some needs to consider:

- *Housing*
- *Food*
- *Income*
- *Mental health and substance use*
- *Sexual assault supports*
- *Healthcare, including sexual health*
- *Children's Services*
- *Hygiene*
- *Day programming*
- *Education*
- *Employment*
- *Pet care*
- *Settlement supports*
- *Indigenous and Newcomer cultural supports*
- *Translation and interpretation*
- *ID services*
- *2SLGBTQIA+ supports*

Offer youth a range of time slots for the engagement, including evenings and weekends. Choose a length for the engagement that gives plenty of time but isn't so long it's overwhelming. There are youth who rely on government benefits for their income,⁹ so be mindful of when these benefits pay out. Before they receive benefits, youth may be stressed and vulnerable, but immediately after they are paid, they may be busy getting their needs met. If youth miss engagements, reschedule without judgement. Follow up to show you care and that the opportunity to participate is still open.

Incentives

Maximize benefits while minimizing harms. When youth share their experiences, facilitators need to offer them something in return.³ Paying youth shows them you value their time and helps cover any income they may have lost by participating. The amount of money you offer should be at least minimum wage, but it's important not to pay too much to avoid having youth participate just for the financial benefits. Cash is the most flexible option; provide \$20 bills or smaller. If using gift cards, offer a range of options for basic needs and fun treats. In addition to payment, you can offer prepaid transit cards, transportation to and from the engagement, clothing, hygiene products, and other necessities.⁴

Safety

Preparing for a variety of situations can help protect youth from harm. This section covers essential supplies, trainings, and strategies for addressing safety concerns when engaging youth.

Physical Safety

Maximize benefits while minimizing harms. Youth experiencing houselessness may avoid healthcare due to experiences of stigma and discrimination.¹⁰ They may arrive at engagements with unaddressed health concerns. You can prepare by having connections to compassionate healthcare providers, first aid training, and access to supplies, such as:

- *A well-stocked first aid kit*
- *Snacks and juice for blood sugar crises*
- *Soft food options for youth with tooth sensitivity¹¹*
- *Gear for cold weather, such as blankets, hot pads, mittens, boots, and socks*
- *Gear for hot weather, such as cold water, ice packs, sunscreen, hats, and bug spray*

Respect youths' autonomy. Let youth make decisions about their medical care. Get consent before touching youth and support them to take care of their injuries if they don't consent to being touched.

Maximize benefits while minimizing harms. Youth may use substances before, during, or after an engagement. Facilitators need to recognize the signs of drug poisoning to respond in emergencies.¹² Make sure facilitators have received naloxone training and have naloxone kits. Check in with facility staff to make sure you can get into locked bathrooms from the outside in case youth are unresponsive. Check on youth who have been in a bathroom for more than ten minutes. If you're going to enter a bathroom, give plenty of loud warnings. If a young person doesn't come back after going outside for a break, check around the outside of the building.

Psychological Safety

Maintaining psychological safety is crucial for creating a supportive and respectful engagement. When working with youth from diverse populations, you can take steps to prepare for and reduce the risk of psychologically unsafe situations.

Create equitable opportunities. As the facilitator, it's your job to monitor group dynamics and maintain a respectful environment. This includes addressing harassment or discrimination between participants.⁴ Take time to reflect on your own identities and how they may create bias or unseen areas. Approaching youth with the intention to learn from them is a great way to shift power dynamics. This humility means that if youth feel you have discriminated against them, you can take in that feedback as learning, apologize, and try to rebuild trust.

For group engagements, consider offering discussions based on youths' identities, such as for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, Indigenous youth, Newcomer youth, or youth with disabilities.⁴ Youth may feel more comfortable speaking with peers with similar experiences.

Maximize benefits while minimizing harms. To support youth who become emotional or triggered during the engagement, facilitators can set up on-site mental health supports. You can have a partner

organization provide these supports or hire a mental health worker to be present at the engagements. Facilitators can learn youth-appropriate regulation strategies, such as having the youth put something cold on their face, slow their breathing, or do strenuous exercise such as push-ups.¹³

Aggression

Youth who have experienced trauma may use aggression to protect themselves.⁸ By paying close attention to the emotional state of the youth you're engaging, you can prevent a dangerous situation.

In case of violence, work in pairs and avoid wearing long earrings, necklaces, or lanyards that youth could grab. Access non-violent crisis intervention training to learn de-escalation strategies. If youth may be in gangs, request that they don't wear symbols of gang membership, such as bandanas or black and white or red clothing,¹⁴ to group engagements. At the beginning of the engagement, remind youth that they can ask for a break at any time, especially if they're feeling intense emotions.

If you notice signs of agitation, such as increased fidgeting, saying things to cause a reaction in others, or erratic behaviour, call a break and closely monitor the youth.⁸ Intervening early can help prevent further escalation, injuries, or having to seek emergency support.

Youth may become aggressive after feeling angry, ashamed, frustrated, or guilty.⁸ They may use aggression to express a need, such as to ask for space or to stop talking about something. If youth become aggressive, express concern and support in a non-judgemental and non-threatening way. Remove other youth from the surroundings. If two or more youth are being aggressive to each other, identify the youth who is more regulated or less committed to the conflict and encourage them to leave the space. Validate youths' emotions, such as by saying that it makes sense to feel frustrated, angry, or hurt in the situation. Maintain a calm tone of voice. Sit off to the side and away from the exit, close enough that the youth can hear you but not so close that you're in their space. Create opportunities for the escalated youth to make choices, for example by saying, "Do you want me to leave the room, or do you want to go outside?" If youth threaten you, communicate your boundaries in a calm but firm way. For example, you could say, "If you keep threatening me, you will need to leave." Only set boundaries you're prepared to follow through with. Telling youth what to do can result in a power struggle, so be selective about when you frame something as a choice versus a firm boundary.

If youth become violent and you are unable to diffuse the situation, you may need to call 911 to protect the youth involved. Be aware that youth may become more escalated after you call the police, so it's important to try to address the situation in other ways first.

After the immediate crisis has passed, consider whether to end the engagement. Youth bystanders may be emotional and need support. Check-in with them about whether they want to continue, not have their input included, or have another chance to participate. Offer youth regulation strategies and help them connect with someone in their life for support after the engagement.^{8,13}

Disclosures

During an engagement, youth may disclose that they or someone else is in danger. Facilitators can set up processes to manage these disclosures in advance, so you aren't caught unprepared in the moment.³ Print off your plan, including important phone numbers, and keep it with your engagement materials.

Respect youths' autonomy. If it's appropriate, get youth to help you call for emergency support. This will help them maintain some control in the situation and reduce symptoms of trauma.⁸

Disclosure of abuse, neglect, or sexual assault. If a youth discloses emotional, physical, or sexual abuse to themselves, if they're under 18, or another minor, call the [Child Intervention 24/7 line](#) even if you don't have all the information. CFS will make a judgement about whether to investigate based on the information you provide.

Disclosure of risk to others. If a youth says they want to harm someone, get more information about the situation. If youth have a clear plan, access to what they need to hurt the other person, and you believe the threat is likely to result in harm, call 911. If youth express that they have a desire to hurt someone else but no clear plan, engage them in safety planning, identifying things they can do to prevent violence. This could include regulation strategies that work for them, locations to avoid, and ways to get out of risky situations. You can also help youth identify people they trust who can support them if they start to get escalated.

Disclosure of illegal activities. Each jurisdiction, employer, and funder has different requirements about the disclosure of illegal activities. In general, you want to maintain youths' confidentiality as much as possible while also complying with the law.² For example, depending on the regulations that apply to you, you may not be required to disclose illegal activities unless you receive a subpoena.¹⁵ Consult with colleagues, employers, funders, and legal experts to determine whether you are required to report illegal activities you learn about in an engagement.

Disclosure of suicide risk. When a youth mentions suicide, follow-up for more information. Ask direct questions, such as "Are you thinking about killing yourself?" or "Do you have a plan for killing yourself?" Youth are in imminent danger of suicide if they want to die, have a plan, and have what they need to complete their plan.⁸ If a youth is in imminent danger of suicide, help them seek care. Call 911 or have a caring adult, like a family member, social worker, or group home worker, take them to the hospital. If a youth has a strong desire to die and is in distress but isn't at immediate risk, you can support them to contact a distress line, such as [Kid's Help Phone](#) or the [Suicide Crisis Help Line](#). These help lines can also help you and the youth determine whether to seek emergency care. If a youth expresses a desire to die but doesn't have a plan and isn't currently distressed, facilitators can connect them with non-emergency mental health supports. For youth who aren't at immediate risk, create a plan together to help them be safer in the short term.^{8,16,17} This could include the ways they know they're starting to feel at risk of suicide, things they can do if they're feeling unsafe, and ways they can reduce their access to what they need to complete suicide.¹⁷ For more information about responding to suicidal crises, facilitators can access suicide intervention training.

Ways of Being and Doing

It is important to understand the cultures of the youth with whom you are engaging. Engaging young people in a culturally appropriate way ensures you honour their whole selves and helps create a sense of safety.

When engaging Indigenous youth, consider having an Elder or knowledge keeper present to help maintain a positive spiritual environment. Depending on the cultures of the young people and Elder or

knowledge keeper, you could start the engagement with a prayer or traditional teachings. If you have the appropriate teachings, you or the Elder or knowledge keeper can support the youth to smudge throughout. Consider holding the engagement as a circle with the Elder or knowledge keeper's help. Circles equalize power dynamics between participants because everyone has the same opportunity to speak. Circles prevent young people from speaking over each other and create space for shy participants to speak up.

For youth from other cultural communities, connect with cultural knowledge holders to get a sense for what might be helpful to support youths' wellbeing. You can tailor the engagement's scheduling, food and other items you provide, and questions to the cultures of the young people you are working with.

Informed Consent

Through the consent process, you will provide youth the information they need to make choices that are right for them and determine whether they are able to think through their decision to participate.

Can Youth Consent to Participate?

Respect youths' autonomy. In Alberta, youth under 18 can consent to engagements if they understand what it means to participate and what the risks and benefits are.¹⁸ Each youth is different so the facilitator plays a role in determining whether a youth is able to provide informed consent.

When assessing whether youth can consent to participate, you can consider four criteria:¹⁹

1. *Can they understand the information about the project and what it means to participate?*
2. *Can they remember the information about the project so they can act on it?*
3. *Can they weigh the information to make a thoughtful choice?*
4. *Can they make decisions on their own and without being pressured by other people?*

A youth's ability to meet these criteria may change over time, so pay attention to any signs that they are no longer able to consent and reassess their ability to meet these four criteria.²

Factors Impacting Youths' Ability to Consent

Create equitable opportunities. Including youth from vulnerable populations ensures their perspectives are considered in decision-making that impacts them.² It's important to acknowledge the factors that make youth more vulnerable while making sure all youth have an opportunity to participate.

Age. Youth experience substantial development in areas of the brain involved in decision-making and managing emotional and social situations.²⁰ You can support youth to make thoughtful decisions by making sure they're in a calm headspace during the consent process, having conversations about consent away from their peers, and helping them think through the potential long-term consequences of their decision to participate.^{3,21,22}

Substance use.⁹ Creating opportunities for youth who use substances to share their experience can help unravel stigma towards substance use.^{23,24} It can be difficult for facilitators to tell whether participants have recently used substances, and questioning youth about whether they're intoxicated can hurt trust.

Figuring out whether a youth is intoxicated is less important than determining their ability to meet the four criteria of consent and maintaining on-going consent throughout the engagement.

Mental health conditions.⁹ Mental health conditions can impact youths' perception, attention, memory, and how they relate to others.²⁵ When working with youth with mental health concerns, facilitators can check in regularly about how youth are feeling and monitor their behaviour to determine whether they can continue to consent.

Cognitive disabilities.⁹ Learning disorders and other cognitive disabilities can impact how youth understand and apply information to make decisions. Facilitators can accommodate youth by providing information in accessible ways, finding lower risk ways to participate, and maintaining on-going consent.

Coercion. All youth can experience coercion, or fear of punishment if they choose to not participate.² Youth may think you are an authority figure, and if they don't agree to participate, something bad will happen to them. To reduce the risk of coercion, be mindful of the reasons why youth may be motivated to participate and ensure that you aren't using these benefits to unintentionally manipulate them.

Youth may misunderstand the purpose of the engagement. An engagement interview might feel like an intake interview and youth may be participating because they think it will lead to them receiving care. Make sure youth know that they will receive care regardless of their participation.² Draw clear lines between the facilitator and the person connecting youth with services. When you're going over the engagement process, let youth know when they will have an opportunity to get their needs met.

Because many youth experiencing houselessness live in poverty,⁹ cash incentives can be very motivating for them. Feeding youth and providing them with access to services before the engagement can support them to make decisions based on their long-term best interest rather than to receive payment.²²

Engagements can feel like an opportunity to connect with a kind adult who listens, which can be motivating for youth who don't have caring adults in their lives. Building relationships is an important part of engagement but be careful about boundaries. Make sure your conversations centre youth and their experiences rather than your own. Be clear with youth about when and how you will stay in touch with them about the outcomes of the engagement. If the engagement is being hosted with a youth-serving organization, allow them to handle the parts of the conversation about resources, while you focus on the engagement questions.

Accessible Consent Process

To help youth consider what they're consenting to, use short, clear sentences and avoid technical language. Provide information through a back-and-forth conversation. Ask youth about key details so they can show their understanding. For example, you could ask, "What can you do if you don't want to participate anymore?" or, "How can you tell me you don't want to answer a question?" Youths' answers will help you assess whether they meet the four criteria for informed consent. Give youth enough time to take in all the information, ask questions, and talk through their decision.² Take a break after the consent process to give youth a chance to reconsider.

Create equitable opportunities. To help youth remember the most important details, make information available in an on-going way. You could use visual aids that are visible throughout the engagement

showing, for example, what they can say if they want to take a break or stop participating.^{2,26} Provide youth a simplified version of the consent information they can read while you speak. Youth can keep this information after the engagement to remind them of the details. For youth with language barriers or cognitive disabilities, use pictures alongside simple words. Provide youth an agenda and use it to show them where you are in the process. Knowing the schedule can help them stay engaged and motivated.

Provide tangible examples to explain complex ideas. To help youth understand what the ultimate purpose of the engagement is, show them the final product of a similar initiative. To help explain what removing identifying information means, show a quote before and after the identifying details have been removed.

Instead of signing a form, youth can provide consent verbally. Consent forms may remind youth of stressful experiences, like interacting with the government, school, or court. Another option is to provide a list of the most important details, talk through each item, and have youth check boxes next to each point if they understand.

Create equitable opportunities. For Indigenous youth, consider offering protocol as a part of the consent agreement. Offering protocol is a sign of respect and helps situate the facilitator as someone seeking to learn. Each culture, community, family, and individual has different protocol practices so it's important to check in with each youth individually. Talk to an Elder or knowledge keeper about whether offering protocol is appropriate for your engagement and what protocol practices are in your area.

Important information you can share with youth to help them make an informed decision about their participation includes:²

- 1. *What are they participating in today?*** What do you hope to learn through the engagement? Who are you engaging? Who are you? Who is paying for the project? What will be created using the information youth share?
- 2. *What does participating look like?*** How long will the engagement take? What will they be asked to do? What is the schedule? When will breaks be? Where is the bathroom? When will they have a chance to connect with services?
- 3. *What are the risks and benefits of participating?*** What are the social or community benefits of youths' participation? What are the financial or material benefits? Be clear that youth will still receive the financial and material benefits if they withdraw from participating. It can be helpful to provide payment at this point, so it's clear you won't withhold it if youth decide to leave early.
- 4. *What does consenting mean?*** What are the different decisions youth can make during and after the engagement? For example, youth can change their mind about participating at any time, choose not to answer any question, or choose to remove their input at a later date. Make it clear that there is a point where their input can't be removed, after the identifying information has been deleted and all the perspectives are combined. Highlight that you will be checking in about whether they want to continue throughout the process.
- 5. *How will youths' identities be protected?*** What information will be shared in the final product? What information will be confidential? In what situations will you have to disclose what you hear with someone else?

6. **Who can youth contact after today if they have any questions or concerns?** Who can youth contact if they change their mind about their participation and want to remove their input? Who can they contact to follow up about services or resources? Who can they contact if they think the engagement was unethical?

Taking care in the informed consent process helps you and the youth determine together how they want to participate and reduces the likelihood that youth will regret their decision.

Facilitation

As you facilitate the engagement, continue to apply the three principles to **respect youths' autonomy**, **maximize benefits while minimizing harms**, and **create equitable opportunities**.

Engagement Structure

Create equitable opportunities. To build flexibility into the engagement, consider breaking the session into parts. Breaking the engagement up can help give youth a sense of completeness if they leave early, provides breaks to check in about consent, and accommodates different youths' needs. A high-level flow for an engagement might look like this:

1. *Relationship building*
2. *Informed consent*
3. *Warm up questions*
4. *A non-emotional topic*
5. *Heavier, more emotional topics*
6. *Another non-emotional topic*
7. *Closing and debrief*

Each phase can be brief. Managing the engagement's flow requires you to adapt to each individual situation. It's more important to be responsive to the youth than to stick to the plan.

Start the engagement with a positive topic that shows off youths' strengths. This helps build trust and lets you get to know the youth as whole people. Ending on a positive helps youth recover from any negative emotions that may have come up in the session. If youth need to leave early, consider having a shortened debrief process ready to give them the information they need and ground them after the conversation. If facilitators prefer a less structured style, have at least a few positive prompts ready in case youth need more time to warm up or to transition out of the engagement.

Create equitable opportunities. To accommodate youth who have different levels of comfort and for youth who do not meet the four criteria for informed consent, include participation options that reduce risk. Here are some factors to consider when adapting the engagement process to fit youths' needs:

- **How is what youth share being recorded?** Interviews could be audio recorded, or facilitators could take detailed or high-level notes.
 - Consider taking notes in a way youth can see, such as writing themes on Post-it notes, on a digital note-taking tool projected on a screen, or on a whiteboard. This gives youth an opportunity to see what you're writing about them and remove parts from the record. If

you're taking notes, it's helpful to have two facilitators so one can pay full attention to the youth.

- **How are youth sharing their perspectives?** Youth could participate in an interview or group discussion, fill out an anonymous survey with or without support, create art, take pictures, or doodle on a graffiti wall.
- **How are youths' stories being used?** You could directly quote youth in the final products of the engagement, only use their stories grouped with responses from other participants, or share youths' art, photos, or notes.

Building Relationships

Each youth comes to an engagement carrying their past, including trauma and other difficult experiences.³ Youth may feel uncertain about sharing with an unfamiliar adult. Early in the engagement, take time to build relationships with the youth you're engaging.

Body language can communicate your trustworthiness. Maintain a relaxed, open posture and avoid crossing your arms or legs or covering your mouth. Use active listening to show youth you're really hearing them.⁴ Youth may experience neutral facial expressions as negative,²⁷ so try to maintain a slight smile. Sit down if youth are sitting. Remove any barriers between you, such as desks and tables. Finally, wear casual clothing to reinforce that you aren't an authority figure.

Respect youths' autonomy. Respect, authenticity, support, and power-sharing all help to build relationships.⁴ Be transparent about the engagement process. For example, if you don't know what topic to discuss next, use it as an opportunity for youth to contribute to decision-making.

Youth are sensitive to inauthenticity.⁴ Some adults try to be relatable by using slang or swearing, but if it isn't genuine, it can hurt trust. Be yourself and give youth information about who you are, within appropriate boundaries. If you're funny, show your sense of humour.

In group engagements, you can build relationships by:

- *Playing a game that helps you learn each other's names*
- *Sharing food*²⁸
- *Creating group guidelines*⁴

Creating guidelines together can support a community atmosphere in group engagements. Have some guidelines prepared to use as examples and fill any gaps. Ask youth a thoughtful prompt, such as, "What do you need from each other to feel safe to share today?" Make guidelines tangible and specific. For example, to clarify a guideline like "respect each other," you could ask what respecting each other looks like, feels like, and sounds like.

Create equitable opportunities. To foster a safe space for Two Spirit, trans, non-binary, and other gender-diverse youth, share your pronouns when you introduce yourself. Then, invite youth to share their name and pronouns if they feel comfortable. Avoid using gendered phrases, such as, "ladies and gentlemen," "boys and girls," or "guys," or pronouns if you haven't confirmed them. Before the engagement, privately confirm youths' preferred names. The name youth use might be different from their name in the database of the partner organizations you're recruiting through, for example.

Trauma-informed Approach

When youth remember difficult memories, they can get triggered, or experience symptoms of trauma.²⁹ However, sharing in a non-judgemental environment and hearing from others with similar experiences can be healing. Research shows that participants generally don't experience long-term negative impacts from sharing stories about traumatic experiences in a respectful environment and that they may even come away with positive feelings about their sharing.^{5,21,30} While some preparation can help you prevent and manage youth feeling triggered, each situation will require a different approach.³⁰

Maximize benefits while minimizing harms. Consider whether there are ways to get the information you need without asking youth to share their traumatic memories in full.³⁰ Youth may be able to use their challenging experiences to shape their perspectives without having to share all the details. Engaging youth in the development of questions can help make sure your questions are respectful.^{29,30} Try using strengths-based questions, such as, "That sounds like a really challenging experience. You must have been so strong to get through it. What do you think helped you make it through?"

In general, taking steps to create a sense of safety, trust, and choice will help youth feel less triggered and be able to move through their feelings.³⁰ By building relationships, maintaining a calm atmosphere, and meeting youths' needs, you help signal that the engagement is a safe space. If you notice tension or discomfort, consider pivoting to more relationship building or less challenging topics.

Respect youths' autonomy. Being in control of their participation can help youth move through traumatic memories. If you notice a youth is starting to withdraw or get emotional, provide them an opportunity to make a choice, such as to keep talking or to pause. If youth seem reluctant to answer a question, move on.²⁹ Look for behaviours that may indicate youth are triggered, such as:

- *Staring in one place, having eyes that look "glazed over", or looking around as though re-living a memory*
- *Changing the speed of their speech or speaking in a monotone voice*
- *Changing their mood, appearing to have low or no emotion, or crying*

Remind youth that it is normal to have strong feelings when discussing challenging experiences.²⁹ Highlight the strengths that show up in their story, such as their resilience, creativity, or resourcefulness. Check for on-going consent and offer a break. To help move out of the traumatic memory, remind youth where they are right now. You can have them visually scan the room looking for items that are each colour of the rainbow, first red, then orange, and so on. Make sure youth have support as they transition out of the engagement and end on a positive note. If youth become triggered in a group engagement, connect with all youth, prioritizing those who are the most upset.

Pay attention to your own emotional state as you're facilitating. Facilitators can get triggered too, especially when there are elements of youths' stories that align with your own experiences.³⁰ Pay attention to your body to notice emotions before they become intense. To regulate in ways participants won't see, try scanning your body from feet to head noting sensations or box breathing: inhaling for four counts, holding for four counts, exhaling for four counts, and pausing for four counts. If your emotions

get too intense, call a break. If the story you're hearing is causing intense emotions for you, it's likely others would benefit from a break, too.

Debrief

Ending the engagement with intention can help youth feel less vulnerable and provide you an opportunity to answer questions and clarify next steps.

At the end of the engagement, ask youth for feedback. This can help you improve your process, and reflection can support youth to integrate their experience. Try ending group engagements with a gratitude circle: have youth share something they're grateful for first and then express your thanks to them for their participation. Describe what the next steps in your work are and how you will connect with them if they want to stay involved.

Let youth gradually transition out of the engagement. You could provide youth opportunities to connect with service providers or mental health supports, grab food or resources to take with them, or casually talk to you and other participants. If youth don't have somewhere to go, they may not want to leave. Before the engagement, learn about day programming, overnight shelters, or winter warming options so youth have a safe place to go. If your workplace policies allow it, offering a ride somewhere can be a helpful way to transition youth out of the engagement.

After the Engagement

Data Management

Maximize benefits while minimizing harms. Managing data thoughtfully can help protect youth even after you've engaged them. Take care to protect youths' identities and confidentiality.^{2,3} Minimize the identifying information you collect. For example, you could collect participants' ages in years rather than their dates of birth. Make sure names, dates of birth, and other identifying information are in a separate password-protected file and not stored alongside interview recordings, transcripts, or notes. Use encryption when transferring files and don't send data over email.

Knowledge Sharing

To ensure you've understood youths' perspectives accurately, consider reconnecting with youth before developing the final products of your project. As you're finding themes and patterns in the data, note questions you could have youth consult on. Frame your interpretations and recommendations in language youth can understand. Share what you heard with youth and get their reactions. Have you captured their experiences accurately? Are your recommendations about things youth actually care about? Does your wording represent youth the way they'd like to be seen?

When sharing the final product of your project, consider how you will reach youth.³ Develop a thoughtful strategy to share your findings with decision-makers to make sure your project has the greatest chance to improve youths' lives.

Make sure your knowledge sharing is respectful by using a strengths-based orientation in your communications. Connect youths' experiences to systemic barriers rather than to deficits.⁸ For example,

instead of saying, “Youth experiencing houselessness have lower rates of school attendance than their housed peers,” you could say, “Schools struggle to engage youth experiencing houselessness,” or, “Schools are not set up to stay connected with youth experiencing houselessness.”

Conclusion

When engaging youth, especially those with complex experiences such as houselessness, it’s important for facilitators to respond to each youth as an individual. Designing flexibility into engagements puts youth in control of their participation, helps facilitators respond to emerging challenges, and provides each youth what they need to participate. If facilitators **respect youths’ autonomy**, **maximize benefits while minimizing harms**, and **create equitable opportunities**, they can collaborate with youth in a trauma-informed and youth-centred way.

Across the engagement process, facilitators can:

1. **Identify opportunities for youth to make choices.** Involve youth in the design of the engagement, offer multiple ways to participate, and look for opportunities for youth decide how the engagement will proceed. Giving youth choices honours their autonomy and helps them regulate their emotions.
2. **Pay attention to the present moment.** Rather than following the predefined engagement plan, respond to each youth and each situation with curiosity. Pay attention to how youth respond to questions, how youth interact with each other, and your own emotions. Trust your ability to make decisions in the moment and respond to mistakes with self-compassion and humility.
3. **Get support from partners.** Community partners can help with recruitment, host engagements, provide youth supports and services, and offer expertise in working with diverse youth. Working with others can create clear boundaries between the engagement and support services and provide safety in dangerous situations.
4. **Stay positive and strengths-based.** Keeping engagements fun and positive can help youth stay focused, build relationships, and reduce the risk of youth getting triggered. Focusing on strengths helps empower youth and highlights the ways systems play a role in youths’ difficult experiences.
5. **Be open to continuous learning.** Youth are the experts in their own experiences. If facilitators are open, youth are full of wisdom and opportunities for learning. Youth share their knowledge in direct and indirect ways. They can help facilitators adapt their process to different situations and create meaningful recommendations.

With care and intention, we can partner with youth to make decisions that address barriers, empower youth, and improve their lives.

References

1. J Santelli, S Haerizadeh, T McGovern. *Inclusion with Protection: Obtaining Informed Consent When Conducting Research with Adolescents*. Vol 2017/05. UNICEF Office of Research; 2017. <https://www.un-ilibrary.org/content/papers/26642166/22>
2. Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*.; 2018. Accessed March 7, 2025. <https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/documents/tcps2-2018-en-interactive-final.pdf>
3. CL Auerswald, AA Piatt, A Mirzazadeh. *Research with Disadvantaged, Vulnerable and/or Marginalized Adolescents*. Vol 2017/06. UNICEF Office of Research; 2017. <https://www.un-ilibrary.org/content/papers/26642166/23>
4. A Way Home Canada. *National Youth Collaboration Toolkit: A Practical Resource for Organizations and Community Groups*.; Undated. Accessed January 20, 2025. <https://awayhome.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/National-Youth-Collaboration-Toolkit.pdf>
5. Nonomura R, Giesbrecht C, Jivraj T, et al. *Toward A Trauma- And Violence-Informed Research Ethics Module: Considerations and Recommendations*. Centre for Research & Education on Violence Against Women & Children, Western University; 2020. <https://www.kh-cdc.ca/en/resources/reports/Grey-Report---English.pdf>
6. Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada. *Homelessness Data Snapshot: Youth Homelessness in Canada*.; 2024. Accessed January 10, 2025. <https://housing-infrastructure.canada.ca/homelessness-sans-abri/reports-rapports/youth-homelessness-2024-itinerance-jeunes-eng.html>
7. Padwa H, Henwood BF, Ijadi-Maghsoodi R, et al. Bringing lived experience to research on health and homelessness: Perspectives of researchers and lived experience partners. *Community Ment Health J*. 2023;59(7):1235-1242. [doi:10.1007/s10597-023-01138-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-023-01138-6)
8. Kozloff N, Bergmans Y, Snider C, Langley J, Stergiopoulos V. Crisis response with street-involved youth. In: Kidd S, Siesnick N, Frederick T, Karabanow J, Gaetz S, eds. *Mental Health & Addictions Interventions for Youth Experiencing Homelessness: Practical Strategies for Front-Line Providers*. Canadian Observatory on Homelessness Press; 2018. <https://homelesshub.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Ch1-6-MentalHealthBook.pdf>
9. Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada. *Everyone Counts 2020-2022 - Results from the Third Nationally Coordinated Point-in-Time Counts of Homelessness in Canada*. Infrastructure Canada; 2024. <https://housing-infrastructure.canada.ca/homelessness-sans-abri/reports-rapports/pit-counts-dp-2020-2022-results-resultats-eng.html>

10. Le H, Rew L. Youth-centered recommendations to address social stigma and discrimination against unhoused youth: An integrative literature review. *The Journal of School Nursing*. 2025;41(1):36-55. [doi:10.1177/10598405231214061](https://doi.org/10.1177/10598405231214061)
11. Chi D, Milgrom P. The oral health of homeless adolescents and young adults and determinants of oral health: preliminary findings. *Spec Care Dentist*. 2008;28(6):237-242. [doi:10.1111/j.1754-4505.2008.00046.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1754-4505.2008.00046.x)
12. Health Canada. Opioid overdose. February 7, 2025. Accessed March 7, 2025. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/opioids/overdose.html>
13. Mindful Teen. Distress Tolerance Skill 1: TIPP. Accessed February 24, 2025. <https://www.mindfulteen.org/dbt/distress-tolerance/tipp-skills/>
14. Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Youth gangs. 2014. Accessed January 29, 2025. <https://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/cycp-cpcj/violence/gang/index-eng.htm>
15. Government of Alberta. Disclosing personal information. Accessed March 6, 2025. <https://www.alberta.ca/disclosing-personal-information>
16. Liu RT, Bettis AH, Burke TA. Characterizing the phenomenology of passive suicidal ideation: A meta-analysis of its prevalence, psychiatric comorbidity, correlates, and comparisons with active suicidal ideation. *Psychol Med*. 2020;50(3):367-383. [doi:10.1017/S003329171900391X](https://doi.org/10.1017/S003329171900391X)
17. Centre for Suicide Prevention. *Safety Plans to Prevent Suicide: A Suicide Prevention Toolkit.*; 2020. Accessed March 6, 2025. <https://www.suicideinfo.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Safety-plans-to-prevent-suicide.pdf>
18. University of Alberta. Capacity + Competence to Consent. Accessed January 29, 2025. <https://www.ualberta.ca/en/research/services/research-ethics/human-research-ethics/informed-consent/capacity-to-consent.html>
19. Alderson P. Competent children? Minors' consent to health care treatment and research. *Social Science & Medicine*. 2007;65(11):2272-2283. [doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2007.08.005](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2007.08.005)
20. Patton GC, Sawyer SM, Santelli JS, et al. Our future: a Lancet commission on adolescent health and wellbeing. *Lancet*. 2016;387(10036):2423-2478. [doi:10.1016/S0140-6736\(16\)00579-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)00579-1)
21. Mathews B. Adolescent capacity to consent to participate in research: A review and analysis informed by law, human rights, ethics, and developmental science. *Laws*. 2022;12(1):2. [doi:10.3390/laws12010002](https://doi.org/10.3390/laws12010002)
22. Montagrin A, Martins-Klein B, Sander D, Mather M. Effects of hunger on emotional arousal responses and attention/memory biases. *Emotion*. 2021;21(1):148-158. [doi:10.1037/emo0000680](https://doi.org/10.1037/emo0000680)

23. Aldridge J, Charles V. Researching the intoxicated: Informed consent implications for alcohol and drug research. *Drug and Alcohol Dependence*. 2008;93(3):191-196.
[doi:10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2007.09.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2007.09.001)
24. Salazar ZR, Vincent L, Figgatt MC, Gilbert MK, Dasgupta N. Research led by people who use drugs: centering the expertise of lived experience. *Subst Abuse Treat Prev Policy*. 2021;16(1):70.
[doi:10.1186/s13011-021-00406-6](https://doi.org/10.1186/s13011-021-00406-6)
25. American Psychiatric Association's Task Force on Research Ethics. Ethical principles and practices for research involving human participants with mental illness. *Psychiatric Services*. 2006;57(4):552-557.
[doi:10.1176/ps.2006.57.4.552](https://doi.org/10.1176/ps.2006.57.4.552)
26. Canedy C, Rumala BB, Coleman SE, Roary R. *Engaging People with Lived Experience of Inequities: Meeting Facilitation Guide*. People with Lived Experience; 2020. Accessed January 20, 2025.
https://9d727b7c-9f85-4a4d-9342-d1e572d97f4e.filesusr.com/ugd/21b173_1f80c99080364486987adc2a57806fd5.pdf
27. Pfaltz MC, Passardi S, Auschra B, Fares-Otero NE, Schnyder U, Peyk P. Are you angry at me? Negative interpretations of neutral facial expressions are linked to child maltreatment but not to posttraumatic stress disorder. *Eur J Psychotraumatol*. 2019;10(1):1682929. [doi:10.1080/20008198.2019.1682929](https://doi.org/10.1080/20008198.2019.1682929)
28. O'Mahony S, Douglas H, Achilleos J. Food for thought: Young people and youth workers' perceptions of food insecurity and the youth work response. *Youth*. 2024;4(4):1453-1468.
[doi:10.3390/youth4040092](https://doi.org/10.3390/youth4040092)
29. Malhotra G, Machado S, Aslam G. *Trauma Informed Approaches to Data Collection*. EnCompass LLC; 2023. https://encompassworld.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/Trauma-Informed-Approaches-to-Data-Collection_Jun2023.pdf
30. Isobel S. Trauma-informed qualitative research: Some methodological and practical considerations. *International Journal of Mental Health Nursing*. 2021;30. [doi:10.1111/inm.12914](https://doi.org/10.1111/inm.12914)

Appendix A: Scenarios

Set-up

Timing

Situation: A youth participant misses an interview. The facilitator tries to reschedule with the youth, but they don't have a cellphone, so it requires a lot of back-and-forth communication between the facilitator, a social worker, and the youth. The facilitator feels like rescheduling is taking weeks and they're getting frustrated. Trying to simplify the scheduling, the facilitator proposes a single time that works for their own schedule the next time they see the youth. The youth senses the facilitator's frustration, and they really want the \$50 gift card, so they agree to the time. The facilitator doesn't realize that they scheduled the interview when the youth's uncle drives them to the food bank. The youth misses their opportunity to get food this week because they were at the engagement.

Strategy: Instead of offering a time that works for the facilitator, they manage their frustration and ask the youth when might work for them. The youth responds, "I don't know." The facilitator asks if sometime on Thursday might work, and whether they have anything they usually do on Thursdays. The youth says they go to the food bank with their uncle on Thursdays after his work. The facilitator schedules an engagement with the youth in the afternoon on Thursday and arranges a ride for them to meet their uncle afterwards to go to the food bank.

Safety

Physical Safety

Situation: A youth arrives at an interview severely limping and wincing on each step. The facilitator says, "It looks like you're in a lot of pain! Are you okay?" At first the youth avoids the question, but after the relationship building steps of the interview, they share that they have been struggling with their foot. It started with an in-grown nail, but now it's looking weird, and the youth is worried about an infection. The facilitator offers to call a mobile health service they have a connection to, but the youth says they'd rather show the facilitator first. The foot is swollen, red all over, and purple in places. The facilitator offers the connection to healthcare again, but the youth is hesitant. They don't want to have to answer a bunch of questions. The last time they saw a doctor, they felt judged.

Strategy: They pause the interview. The facilitator tells the youth that they are worried about their foot, and they recommend the youth sees a healthcare provider before it gets worse. They ask the youth whether there are any adults or friends in their life who they would feel comfortable going to the doctor with. The youth says no. The social worker from the partner organization hosting the interview, who is familiar with the youth, offers to call the mobile health service and lets the youth know they can attend the visit if that would help them feel more comfortable. The youth agrees and they call the health service together on speakerphone. After seeing the foot, the healthcare provider recommends they go to a nearby hospital. The social worker takes the youth to emergency and waits with them.

Psychological Safety

Situation: A facilitator sets up different groups for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth, Indigenous and racialized youth, and youth with disabilities. When they're recruiting, a youth says that they're Two Spirit, and they don't know if they should attend the 2SLGBTQIA+ group or the Indigenous and racialized group.

Strategy: The facilitator asks the youth what they would prefer. They could join either group, they could create a new group, or they could have a one-on-one interview. The youth picks creating a new group. They agree that if no one else signs up, they'll have a one-on-one interview. The facilitator works with a local Two Spirit organization to recruit more youth with these intersecting identities and to connect youth with culturally appropriate 2SLGBTQIA+ supports.

Disclosures

Situation: In an interview, a youth tells a story of an argument with their friend. The two youth were fighting over a bike, both claiming they owned it. The other youth is larger, so they ended up getting the bike. In the interview, the youth jokes about stabbing their friend and taking the bike.

Strategy: The interviewer recognizes an opportunity to seek out more clarity about the situation. They say, "I'm worried you might stab your friend. Would you?" The youth says that they were just joking and that this friend is like a brother. They're always making jokes like that. The interviewer engages the youth in informal safety planning, helping them think through what they would do if they were considering being violent.

Informed Consent

Factors Impacting Youths' Ability to Consent

Situation: After a break in a group engagement, a youth comes in from outside smelling like cannabis and seeming sleepier. The facilitator tries to pull them aside, but the other youth can hear the conversation. The facilitator asks, "Did you smoke weed on the break? If you did, you're going to have to leave." The youth denies that they smoked cannabis, saying the smell is coming from a joint in their pocket. The facilitator argues with the youth and the youth leaves angry. The other youth hear this argument, and the rest of the engagement is awkward.

Strategy: Rather than asking the youth if they smoked cannabis or re-engaging one youth about informed consent in front of their peers, the facilitator engages the whole group in a conversation about informed consent and the facilitator reminds youth that they can say "pass" to skip any question. In the transcript, the facilitator flags the youth's responses so that they're only used at a group level and not directly quoted.

Situation: A facilitator is engaging youth to develop social media videos about smoking and vaping. The facilitator chooses to not show the youths' faces in the videos to protect their privacy. The youth and facilitator meet weekly to discuss the health risks of smoking and vaping and make videos. After three

months, the youth stop attending. They tell the partner organization hosting the project that they thought they would become famous through the videos. They feel used and like they wasted their time.

Strategy: The facilitator arranges a meal with the youth at the partner organization. They make sure youth receive full payment for participating and have an honest conversation about what they could do differently next time. In the future, the facilitator chooses to engage youth in decision-making about their privacy and discusses the purpose of the engagement to avoid misunderstandings.

Accessible Consent Process

Situation: A facilitator does a pilot interview with one youth and uses this experience to inform the development of the consent process for their engagement project. The pilot youth was confident and outspoken. They got bored when the facilitator spent too long on details like the consent form. When the facilitator starts engaging more youth, they go over the consent information quickly. A youth agrees to participate, but they don't make eye contact with the facilitator. When the facilitator starts asking questions, the youth doesn't answer. They put their hood up and look down at their hands. The social worker who is supporting the engagement notices what's happening and is concerned about the youth's wellbeing.

Strategy: At the next break, the social worker suggests they loosen things up. When the youth comes back, the facilitator asks them some easier questions, such as what they like to do for fun. The facilitator asks follow-up questions and uses active listening. After some back and forth conversation, the facilitator says they've noticed the youth seemed a bit uncomfortable before the break and asks if they can do anything differently to help them feel more comfortable to share. The youth shares that they are bit confused about why they're talking. The facilitator reviews the consent information in a conversational way. They check in with the youth about whether they want to continue talking about their experience.

After the interview, the facilitator and social worker review the consent process to identify opportunities for youth to make decisions. They break the information down into simpler terms and give options for different ways to participate. They add in relationship building questions before the consent process, so youth feel more comfortable advocating for themselves.