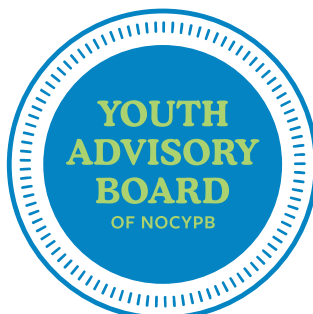


# **Dismantling Adulthood Toolkit: How to Build & Maintain a Youth-Centered Organization**

**BY THE YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD OF THE  
NEW ORLEANS CHILDREN & YOUTH PLANNING  
BOARD (CYPB)**

**APRIL 2021**



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This toolkit is a project of the Youth Advisory Board of the New Orleans Children and Youth Planning Board (CYPB), composed of 19 active youth members between the ages of 14 and 24, plus four alumni. The Dismantling Adulthood Subcommittee, a subgroup of the Youth Advisory Board, are the toolkit creators and authors.

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Foundational knowledge on adulthood through a two-day Dismantling Adulthood Workshop facilitated by [Rethink](#) in June 2020 and the [NOYA Authentic Youth Engagement Checklist](#) served as inspiration for this toolkit.

This project was launched through a grant by the [Forum for Youth Investment](#), an organization committed to strengthening the presence of Youth Voice and actively dismantling adulthood.

*The information shared in this toolkit comes from a combination of youth experiences, best practices, and local and international resources.*

*We are here for this subject, and this is our first iteration of ongoing work. We are at the beginning, not the end.*

*We hope that we've named, credited, and acknowledged everyone who has been a part of this process, and we are eager to hear your comments, suggestions, and questions.*

Get in touch with the CYPB Team at [\*\*info@nolacypb.org\*\*](mailto:info@nolacypb.org).

**Learn more about CYPB and follow along with our work at:**

Website: [www.nolacypb.org](http://www.nolacypb.org)  
 Facebook: [@NewOrleansCYPB](https://www.facebook.com/NewOrleansCYPB)  
 Instagram: [@nolacypb](https://www.instagram.com/nolacypb)  
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## ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

### What is the purpose of this toolkit?

To raise up the voices of young people and demonstrate to organizations how to do the same with actionable tools. This toolkit is intended to promote action towards becoming and sustaining practices as a youth-centered organization.

### Who should use this toolkit?

Organizations, groups, troops, teams, committees, councils, etc. that engage and serve youth.

This toolkit was created by a group of New Orleans youth leaders that believe the ideas, recommendations, and resources here are applicable and actionable within and far beyond our city.

### What is inside this toolkit?

**An introduction** to what adultism is and what youth-centered means.

**An organizational self-assessment tool** with a set of metrics and tips organized across three levels to support power-sharing between young people and adults.

**A scorecard** for documenting the current assessment for your organization as it currently operates.

**An action template** for prioritizing tangible goals for where you would like your organization to be and how you are going to get there.



**Deeper Dives:** Recommended resources and discussion questions for further learning and reflection.



**CYPB launching a Youth Advisory Board was key to effectively understanding the youth's social, mental and organizational structural challenges they face daily. We are committed to continue to work side by side with our youth to ensure that they have input in the policies created on their behalf.**

*- Larry Barabino Jr., CYPB Chair*

## HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

**Build your base of knowledge on the value of including Youth Voice in your organization and how to implement youth-centered practices to dismantle adultism and share power.**

**Self-reflect on where your organization currently is in becoming youth-centered and sustaining those efforts.**

**Engage in open and brave dialogue with the adult and youth members of your organization to share an understanding of your current strengths and opportunities for growth.**

**Set goals and agreements for making real changes to mindsets, structures, practices, and habits towards sustaining youth-centered practices.**

**Be accountable to the adult and youth members in your organization by monitoring your progress, course-correcting when you're off track, and celebrating when you get it right.**



**From its governance to its practice, CYPB consciously infuses youth aspirations, ideas, and voices. This deliberate action will assuredly produce more thoughtful leaders and strengthen the City of New Orleans in countless ways. Youth-centered organizations across the country can benefit from the insights gained in our collective work.**

*- Dr. Shannon Perry,  
CYPB Secretary*

**We're working as a team—the youth and the adults—in a collaborative effort. And it needs to be like that when we are dismantling adultism. We have to set the foundation for the generation [following] us to go above and beyond, and not have anything in their way because we are breaking down barriers and getting over the systemic hurdles of adultism. We're not trying to take power, we are trying to share it in a way that benefits us both.**

*-Lavonte Lucas, 2020-2021  
CYPB Youth Leader*



## VISION STATEMENT

We remain committed and connected to the [New Orleans Youth Master Plan](#), a 10-year (2020-2030) comprehensive roadmap for creating and sustaining a positive youth development-focused, results-oriented New Orleans that works for all young people, birth to 24 and beyond.

This toolkit moves our city towards the goals and solutions outlined in the Youth Voice category of the New Orleans Youth Master Plan, and is a delivery of our Youth Vision.

This is our vision for, by, and about New Orleans youth.

**New Orleans is a city where the full self-expression, leadership, creativity, and culture of all children and youth comes together to create a true community where everyone succeeds.**

- **We are community builders. Regardless of the communities we come from, our backgrounds, or the schools we attend, we are part of the solution, not the problem.**
- **We have experiences, we face problems, and we come up with creative solutions. These are all valid. We are worthy of being heard and included.**
- **There is no future for New Orleans without us.**
- **We can define our own story, and our story of New Orleans must reflect our contribution and leadership. The story must be for us, about us, by us.**
- **We recognize as a city that each generation has its movement that is advanced by youth leaders. Today, our generation sets the stage for the next one to come.**
- **The children and youth of New Orleans are not broken or damaged. We can rise above circumstances and have the ability to define our own path. We are beautiful. We believe in our healing, our restoration, and our future.**

**New Orleans children and youth represent a powerful, unified, diverse, socially conscious, intelligent network, capable of working with adults to lead New Orleans in becoming a more compassionate, just, and equitable city.**

Developed by New Orleans Youth at Flip the Script: Creating a New Youth Narrative, a CYPB Youth Advisory Board Event, June 2020

## WHAT IS ADULTISM?

Adultism's most basic premise is that adults are superior to young people. It is the prejudice against and oppression of young people by older people..

Negative or condescending beliefs about young people reinforce and justify the misuse of adult power over young people through social institutions, rules and laws, customs, and attitudes. Adultism exists across a continuum, from subtle and seemingly unremarkable words and actions to explicitly aggressive and destructive abuses of adult power.

In our society, adultism is largely the norm for interactions between adults and young people, allowing it too often to be invisible, internalized, and iterative.

### Deeper Dive:



- Read: [Adultism & Adult Privilege by Safe @ School](#)
- Read: [Adultism in Schools by SoundOut](#)
- Workshop: [Dismantling Adultism Workshop by ReThink](#)

The issue presented is that New Orleans youth are often seen as the problem rather than partners in the solution. I see opportunity to collaborate with adults in the city, there just needs to be an easier way to communicate. It's a lot of adults that already have feelings of doubt when it comes to working with children. We all need to stop doubting and start inspiring each other so that we can all make change. A change of perspective from both parties will be a start.

*-Keva Pierre, 2021 Youth Advisory Board Member*

## WHAT IS A YOUTH-CENTERED ORGANIZATION?

*Youth-Centered* means that young people are actively engaged to initiate and participate in decision-making and action with adults in order to benefit the whole community.

A youth-centered organization is intentional to value and uplift Youth Voice, making sure young people are heard and accounted for in decisions that impact their lives, futures, and communities. To be youth-centered means that you actively build up youth leadership and life skills, offering experiences and opportunities that prepare young people for current and future roles.

### What does a Youth-Centered Organization look like?

**Young people hold positions of power and are given opportunities to lead projects, make decisions, and spearhead change**

**Young people are acknowledged and credited for their contributions**

**Young people are compensated for their expertise**

**Youth are able to speak their mind and get their vision turned into reality**

**There is an inclusive foundation of support for youth to learn from failures and grow**

**The organization is inclusive, accessible, and goal-oriented**

**All young people are welcome into spaces and allowed to voice their opinions, including spaces traditionally held by adults**

**The organization is resourceful and pragmatic, without erasing hopefulness**

**There is direct communication between youth and legislators, stakeholders, researchers, analysts, and the general public**



#### Deeper Dive:

Visit [bit.ly/youth-v-adult-centered](https://bit.ly/youth-v-adult-centered) to explore an interactive causal loops map of youth-centered vs. adult-centered organizations.

**Mutual Respect**

**Safe Spaces to Speak Mind**

**Youth Vision**



## PRE-ASSESSMENT

### IS THERE COMMUNITY INTACT?

Does your organization currently engage young people?

**YES**



Great! Go ahead to the next page to learn how to use the toolkit and assess your organization.

**NO**



While you may not currently engage young people, here are some tips to help you think about how you might begin.

### ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

1. Be intentional about the number of young people you choose to engage at the onset based on capacity, resources, and momentum.
2. Determine a fair process for how you identify the young people you choose to engage.
3. Let us get to work right away and be upfront about our roles and responsibilities. Be clear about the structure that is set up for our work.
4. Be mindful and respectful of our time, energy, and other commitments.



#### Deeper Dive:

**Read: Ways to Involve Young People** (Youth on Board)

**Read: Positive Youth Development Framework** (YouthPower)

## USING THIS TOOLKIT FOR ACTION

Your engagement with this toolkit is about your relationships, your truths, and your organization's commitment to actively dismantling adultism and becoming youth-centered.

Here are two possible pathways to navigate the information and assess your organization. We encourage you to approach the learning and action in ways that make sense for your organization.

### PATHWAY 1

#### FOCUS ON ONE LEVEL

1. Jump right into the level where you see your organization as it currently operates:
  - Level 1 - Building the Foundation
  - Level 2 - Advancing Youth-Centered Approaches
  - Level 3 - Youth-Centered with Continuous Improvement
2. Give your organization a score between 1 and 5 for each metric associated with the level you select. Add up your metric scores to get your total score for that level.

OR

### PATHWAY 2

#### CHECK IN AT EVERY LEVEL

1. Start with Level 1 and give your organization as it currently operates scores for each metric on the page. Add up all of your Level 1 metric scores to get your Level 1 score.
2. Move onto Levels 2 and 3, respectively, and repeat the process above to get your Level 2 and Level 3 scores.
3. Total your Levels 1, 2, and 3 scores to get your summary score.

## FOR BOTH BOTH PATHWAYS:

**As an organization, host a collaborative discussion between the adult and youth members. Consider reviewing the Safe Space tips on page 12 to help you prepare the environment.**

**Use your individual scores and the discussion questions as a jumping off point to come to agreement on a score for your organization as it currently operates.**

**Use the Action Template as a guide for prioritizing and tracking 3 goals you will work towards in the next 6-12 months to strengthen your youth-centered practices.**

**Check back in with your Organization after a set amount of time to track your progress. Did your score improve? Will you commit to an active process of learning and action?**

### **SOME WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT:**

**By committing to an active process of using this toolkit, you are already demonstrating youth-centered approaches. This toolkit can serve as an enhancement to your efficiencies and best practices, and a guide for examining opportunities to know and do better.**

**Sweeping change in deep-rooted and reinforced beliefs, attitudes, policies, and practices of adultism will likely not happen overnight. However, be encouraged that progress is possible, and it starts with you.**

# ORGANIZATIONAL SELF-ASSESSMENT - LEVEL 1

## BUILDING THE FOUNDATION

### Metric

### Tips for Improvement

#### Community Building

Mark  
your  
score!

Is there a welcoming environment?

Score: 1 2 3 4 5

Are there opportunities to form relationships, feel connected to the group, and foster a sense of togetherness?

Score: 1 2 3 4 5

1. Consider smaller group sizes or subgroups to support more opportunities for interaction and participation, especially in virtual settings.
2. Bonding comes from talking about issues that matter to us, even and especially when the issues are hard.
3. Make time for conversations about who we are and why we're here for this work. This should be prompted or led by young people.

#### Safe Space

Are there expectations for success and opportunities for failure?

Score: 1 2 3 4 5

Is real and honest communication possible?

Score: 1 2 3 4 5

1. Make it clear that failure does not equal the end of the world. Offer opportunities to talk about what happened, how to grow from it, and how to turn it into a success.
2. Operate as a team, not a hierarchy. Ensure that people at all levels of the organization are approachable.
3. Open the floor to new ideas, even really big ones! This will lead to more possibilities for collaboration.
4. Commit to being a community of inclusivity and diversity, and match those intentions with action.

#### Mutual Respect

Is there acknowledgment and valuing of what everyone brings to the table?

Score: 1 2 3 4 5

Are there genuine demonstrations of appreciation and gratitude?

Score: 1 2 3 4 5

1. Say thank you with specifics on what it's for and why it matters.
2. See everyone as an individual.
3. Acknowledge what is happening in the world around us and our lived experiences in the current context. This opens doors to spark empathy, ideas, and action.
4. Make space for checking in on and prioritizing well-being. We are all human beings.

Total Score for Level 1: \_\_\_\_ out of 30 total points

## ORGANIZATIONAL SELF-ASSESSMENT - LEVEL 2

### ADVANCING YOUTH-CENTERED APPROACHES

#### Metric

#### Tips for Improvement

#### Healthy Connections, Networking & Mentorship

Do you share useful resources and knowledge that mutually benefit youth and adults?

Mark  
your  
score!

Score: 1 2 3 4 5

Do you share useful experiences and opportunities that mutually benefit youth and adults?

Score: 1 2 3 4 5

1. Establish a consistent form(s) of communication, set a standard for sharing information, and give us lead time when sharing opportunities and scheduling meetings.
2. Ask us about our needs and interests to inform how you could support our leadership development and life skills.
3. Be mindful about our mental and emotional health.
4. Be generous in sharing, and celebrate successes together.

#### Active Listening

Do you have consistent methods for listening to young people?

Score: 1 2 3 4 5

Do you incorporate youth experiences, ideas, and voices into the work?

Score: 1 2 3 4 5

1. Surveying is your friend. Incorporate our ideas and feedback into the organization's operations, projects, and programs.
2. Give credit where credit is due.
3. Ask us how we would like to advocate for ourselves.
4. Pass the mic. Create opportunities for young people to lead in multiple ways, and offer support as needed (without taking over).

#### Direct & Full Youth Participation

Are young people invited to and prepared to participate in key decision-making meetings?

Score: 1 2 3 4 5

Are young people included in full cycles of planning, action, and evaluation?

Score: 1 2 3 4 5

1. Be transparent and upfront about the full picture of a project (i.e., timeline, inputs, partners, barriers, next steps etc.)
2. Provide an outline or overview for what needs to be planned so that we can be prepared to execute.
3. Ask yourself: is this event, meeting, or activity something that would be better off led by youth? If yes, give the opportunity to young people.

Total Score for Level 2: \_\_\_\_ out of 30 total points

## ORGANIZATIONAL SELF-ASSESSMENT - LEVEL 3

### YOUTH-CENTERED WITH CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

#### Metric

#### Tips for Improvement

##### Demonstration of Value

Do you offer stipends, useful gift cards, service hours, school or technical credit, scholarships, etc. to the young people you engage?

Mark your score!

Score: 1 2 3 4 5

Are you consistent, timely, and fair in the ways you compensate young people for their time, talent, and energy?

Score: 1 2 3 4 5

1. Set a standard of giving things such as stipends or relevant gift cards. This shows us that our time isn't being looked over. Pizza is not cash.
2. Consider how you can support our next life stage (i.e., scholarships—because we might be about to go to college or into a training program).
3. Encourage others in your network to uphold this standard.

##### Power-Sharing

Is there recognition of each person's strengths and assets, equitable distribution of responsibilities, and shared credit for work done?

Score: 1 2 3 4 5

Are there opportunities for youth to communicate directly with different sets of stakeholders?

Score: 1 2 3 4 5

1. Give youth an active position to show our leadership.
2. Help us express our strengths by giving us the mic and building our leadership. Don't downplay youth or our abilities.
3. Create opportunities for us to engage directly with stakeholders.

##### Leading With Youth Vision

Do you lift up Youth Voice in your organizational direction and decisions?

Score: 1 2 3 4 5

Are your norms, values, culture, and actions shaped by youth vision?

Score: 1 2 3 4 5

1. Give youth a seat at the table when determining the direction of the organization (e.g., new members, new projects, new collaborations)
2. Put value towards our ideas and opinions, and commit to the directions that youth want to take the organization.
3. Don't categorize youth concerns as "youth issues" only. Our issues are community issues like everyone else's.

**Total Score for Level 3: \_\_\_\_ out of 30 total points**

## DEEPER DIVE

### RESOURCES

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

#### BUILDING THE FOUNDATION

**Read:** [The Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture](#)

(Showing Up for Racial Justice)

**Read:** [Six Good Youth Works Practices](#) (YouthREX)

**Read:** [Amp's Top Ten Tips for Engaging With Young People](#) (Pathways RTC)

1. How does your organization demonstrate a value for mutual respect between youth and adults?
2. What does a safe and welcoming space look like in the context of your organization?
3. Where do you see opportunities to build up and maintain your sense of community?

#### ADVANCING YOUTH-CENTERED APPROACHES

**Read:** [The Developmental Relationships Framework](#)

(The Search Institute)

**Read:** [Ways to Involve Youth Throughout the Life of a Program](#) (Youth.Gov)

**Read:** [Why Young People Should be Decision Makers](#) (Youth On Board)

1. Where do you see opportunities to enhance the leadership opportunities your organization offers to the young people you engage?
2. How does your organization listen to young people? How do you demonstrate your value for Youth Voice?
3. How sustainable are your organization's efforts to be youth-centered? What rules, relationships, and ways of thinking reinforce youth-centered approaches?

#### YOUTH-CENTERED WITH CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

**Read:** [On Being Youth-Centered: A Guideline for Individuals and Organizations](#)

(Nova Scotia Health Promotion and Protection)

**Watch:** The Promise of Adolescence

- [The Justice System](#)
- [The Education System](#)
- [The HealthCare System](#)

1. What does power-sharing between youth and adults in your organization look like? How do you know when you are getting it right?
2. How do young people shape the vision and values of your organization?
3. How does your organization promote or uplift youth-centered approaches across your networks? Who is in your sphere of influence?



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

- 1.** As an organization, commit to a process and timeline for implementing the Dismantling Adultism toolkit. Include youth and adult members of your organization in an opportunity to assess the organization.
- 2.** Use your individual assessments of your organization as a starting point to guide conversation between youth and adult members of your organization.
- 3.** Consider these guiding questions: what are your current strengths? Where is there opportunity to grow?
- 4.** Together, determine a shared score for each metric.
- 5.** Add up your points to get your score. This represents where your organization is at this point in time in building and maintaining a youth-centered organization.
- 6.** Use the action template to support accountability in making real change and progress. Set goals for where you want to be in 6-12 months, and determine how you can get there together.



## SCORECARD

**Date of Assessment:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Pathway 1:**

(If you assessed only one level)

**Pathway 2:**

(If you scored for all three levels)

**How did you score your organization?**

Level \_\_\_\_\_ (1, 2, 3)

**Score \_\_\_\_\_ (0-30)**

Level 1 Score \_\_\_/30

+ Level 2 Score \_\_\_/30

+ Level 3 Score \_\_\_/30

**= Summary Score \_\_\_/90**

### With Your Group

After discussion with youth and adult members of your organization to agree on a shared score.

**How did your organization agree to score itself?**

Level \_\_\_\_\_ (1, 2, 3)

**Score \_\_\_\_\_ (0-30)**

Level 1 Score \_\_\_/30

+ Level 2 Score \_\_\_/30

+ Level 3 Score \_\_\_/30

**= Summary Score \_\_\_/90**

For your records, list who participated:

\_\_\_\_\_

### Stay with Your Group

**Goal Setting:**

1.

**Name up to 3 metrics you are going to prioritize over the next 6-12 months. Be specific!**

2.

3.

## ACTION TEMPLATE

	GOAL 1	GOAL 2	GOAL 3
Goal			
Action / Activity			
Benchmark (where you are)			
Target (where you want to be)			
Who is involved?			
Timeline / By when?			
How will you determine that you are on track and successful?			
How will you celebrate success?			

## GLOSSARY

A brief list of key terms defined to support your foundational knowledge.

### Activism

The use of direct and noticeable action to achieve a result, usually a political or social one. This could include participation in community organizing for social & economic change.

### Adultism

Prejudice or discrimination against young people as a group.

### Mental & Emotional Health

Obtaining psychological and social well being by navigating the complexities of life successfully. Utilizing the appropriate coping mechanisms to achieve well-being without discrimination.

### Mentorship

The influence, guidance, or direction given by an experienced and trusted adviser.

### Youth-Centered

An initiative or approach that meaningfully engages young people.

### Youth-Focused / Youth-Based

An initiative that is largely devised and implemented by young people.

### Youth Voice

The active, distinct, and concentrated ways young people represent themselves throughout society.



I've seen a greater awareness of youth issues by Board members and the community. We are really committed to making organizational structural shifts to support young people as they lead us. CYPB needed to understand what it meant to have young people working side by side with us.

- Monique Robinson, CYPB Treasurer

I think it's important to have adult leaders too, because that's where the resources come from, and other voices. But I think the adults should actively push the youth voices and try to get other adults to come and listen.

- Christiana Williams,  
2020-2021 Youth Advisory  
Board Member



## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

We acknowledge that our list of tips, resources, and discussion questions are not exhaustive. We hope that what is here offers a starting place for your organization to work together towards youth-centered approaches.

Share your comments, questions and feedback with us at [info@nolacypb.org](mailto:info@nolacypb.org).

## STAY CONNECTED

Learn more about CYPB and follow along with our work at:

**Website:** [www.nolacypb.org](http://www.nolacypb.org)  
**Facebook:** [@NewOrleansCYPB](https://www.facebook.com/NewOrleansCYPB)  
**Instagram:** [@nolacypb](https://www.instagram.com/nolacypb)  
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## THANK YOU!

New Orleans children and youth represent a powerful, unified, diverse, socially conscious, intelligent network, capable of working with adults to lead New Orleans in becoming a more compassionate, just, and equitable city.