

Youth Engagement in Planning

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What empowers a community—where ordinary people create better places, transform their own and others' lives while solving the public problems of the day? Inclusive planning, for starters. In recent years planning has made great strides in mobilizing broad participation, incorporating a diversity of interests and stakeholder groups of different cultural and economic backgrounds and ages. At the same time, America is home to more immigrants and the diversity of its citizens is expanding.

Planning has also given voice to children and youth, who are often marginalized from the process. Too often, planners, citizens, and officials hold stereotyped opinions about young peoples' capacity to grasp the long-term consequences of actions and their perceived limitations of experience and expertise.

Youth provide a unique and fresh voice to the dialogue. In a growing number of circumstances, children and youth are taking a more active role in shaping their communities. Educator George Wood says, "We need young people engaged as democratic citizens . . . who will have . . . the self-confidence tempered with empathy that it takes to act on behalf of the common good."

Youth engagement has taken many forms. Often youth will be involved in the initial visioning stages of the planning process, where young people participate as a constituent group. For me, however, the ideal planning process is when these goals are met:

- Young people have multiple opportunities to speak about the issues that concern them.
- They experience a sense of satisfaction about their participation.
- They know they have had real influence over issues that are critical to improving the quality of life in their communities.
- They become genuine partners in the planning, design, and decision making.



Carolyn Thomas and Bruce Race, ACP

Seattle schoolchildren join planners at a workshop on transportation and urban design conducted by Sharon Sutton, professor at the University of Washington.

When these goals have been met, the young develop the ability to put democratic citizenship into action and come away from the planning experience with an increased level of social responsibility to the common good.

Initiatives to encourage youth involvement are greatly served by recognizing the importance that interpersonal relationships play in enriching the lives of young people. Youth engagement programs are more successful when the participants are surrounded by supportive relationships. These relationships play a significant role in how quickly a young person grasps the larger context for community problem solving. Below are a series of short case studies on youth engagement in planning programs.

City of Baltimore

The Baltimore City Department of Planning initiated a 14-month process in 1998 to develop a comprehensive plan for the next 10 years and engaged

“The word quickening means new life. It suggests a new stage in the growth and development of our democracy—when democracy becomes not simply what we have, but what we do, with excitement and satisfaction.”

Frances Moore Lappe and Paul Martin Du Bois, *The Quickening of America*

Baltimore’s kids to play a role in helping to shape that future. Children were involved in all aspects of the process. Planning Director Charles Moore enlisted foundations and received numerous grants for three hands-on programs to build the capacity and get feedback from all age groups. The first was a city planning workshop designed to help children ages six to 11 to understand the major components of a city and how these parts interrelate, with children “planning” and “building” a city.

The second workshop targeted middle and high school students, focused on their “Hopes and Dreams for Baltimore.” Through a guided discussion process, the planner solicited ideas from youth and helped them to think creatively and holistically about cities. The third program was a workbook, designed for ages nine to 13, to inform them about the comprehensive plan and the planning process, and provide an opportunity to provide input to the plan.

University of California, Berkeley

Y-Plan, a program directed by the Center for Cities and Schools at University of California–Berkeley, provides meaningful opportunities for young people to serve as key stakeholders in their community with real

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APA conducts workshops to teach planners how to work with youth. This workshop at the San Diego Children’s Museum focused on youth charrettes.

The Variety of Ways to Engage Youth in Planning

You can read more at APA’s at www.planning.org/resourceszine.

Education: Outside the Classroom

Programs that inform youth about planning teach awareness and understanding of how planning functions in civic life.

Examples include:

■ **Teen Partners for Planning** (APA Louisiana Chapter)
Summer camp

■ **Box City and Kids City** (numerous)

An event built around city building with boxes. Box City is a program developed by the Center for Understanding the Built Environment.

Education: Inside the Classroom

■ **Winner of the 2006 APA Public Education Award**, the Amherst and Clarence (N.Y.) Youth Planning Project was developed in accordance with state learning standards. The project incorporated planning and community development into existing curriculums at all grade levels.

■ **Pennsylvania Land Choices: Lessons in Land Use Planning**
A curriculum developed by the Pennsylvania Dept. of Conservation and Environmental Resources

Youth Engagement on a Focused Planning Project

■ **Albuquerque Youth Recreation Needs Assessment** (City of Albuquerque)

This 1998 program developed a plan for youth recreation and involved multiple city agencies.

■ **Philadelphia Planning Commission Community Heritage Preservation Program**

In 2003 the commission developed this outreach program linked to its housing and revitalization efforts.

Youth Engagement in Ongoing Planning Process

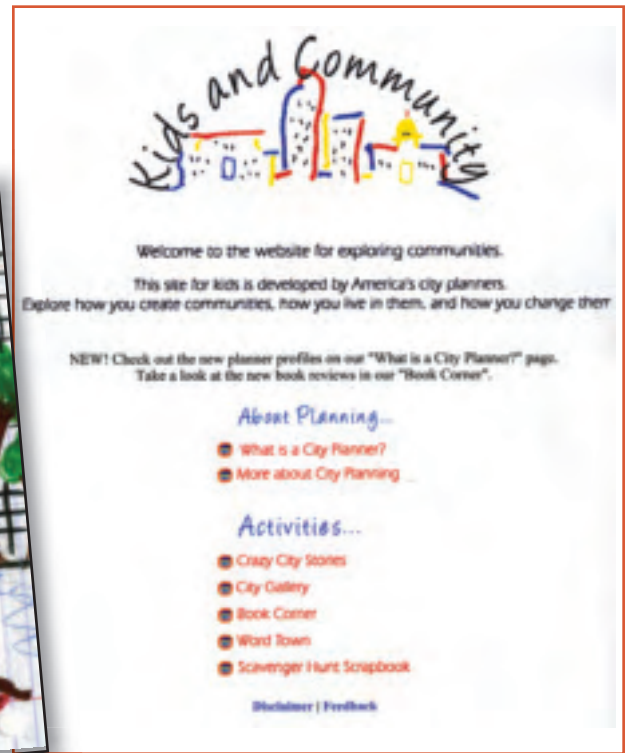
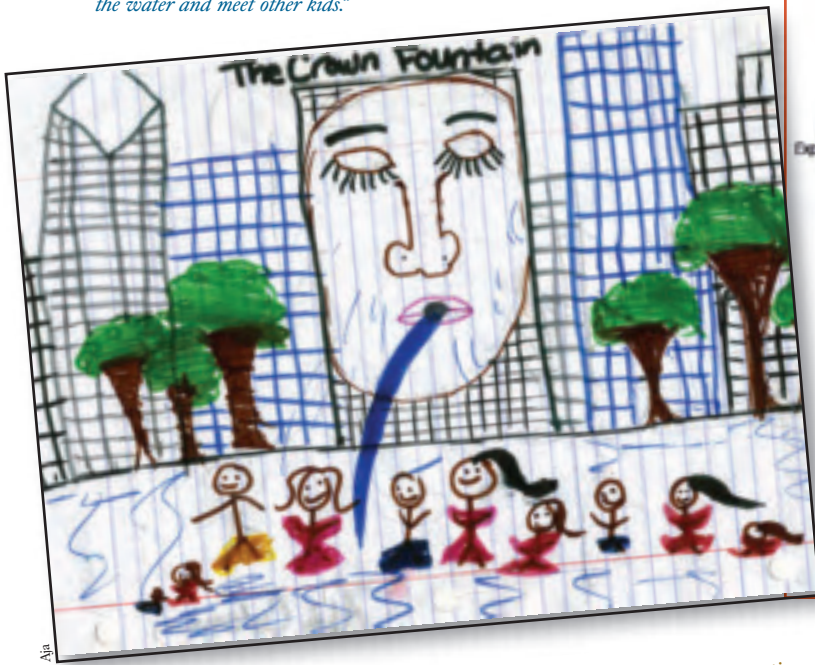
■ **Toronto City ’91**

Toronto’s young people were involved throughout the development of the city’s new comprehensive plan. One element included six projects with separate activities.

■ **Seattle Youth Involvement Network**

The network grew out of the Seattle Youth Summits held in 1991 to draw young people into a planning and civic engagement program. This led to a distinct plan presented by youth in 1993 to the city government, called Seattle Youth Proposal.

A student in Chicago posted this image on Kids and Community's Great Place/Lousy Place. (City Gallery). The student's caption: "My favorite place is the Crown Fountain in Millennium Park. It is located in downtown Chicago. This is where I go on hot summer days to keep cool. I love to play in the water and meet other kids."



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planning projects. These projects help prepare young people to become agents of change while building on core academic subjects. Youth learn the basics of how their neighborhoods operate. At the same time they gain personal, social, and academic benefits such as increased self-esteem and an appreciation for civic life and its responsibilities. Youth develop proposals, conduct surveys, map sites, prepare models, and create budgets in the context of a community revitalization effort while working with residents, neighborhood organizations, and the city council.

National League of Cities

A third approach focuses on municipal leaders. The National League of Cities' Institute for Youth, Education, and Families (YEF Institute) helps municipal leaders focus their ideas and issues concerning children, youth, and families in their communities. Launched in January 2000, the Institute provides guidance and technical assistance to officials to help in their efforts to strengthen families and improve the lives of children and youth.

YEF Institute utilizes "youth master planning," a cutting-edge process that brings together diverse key stakeholders—including young people, city government, businesses, community, faith-based organizations, and others—to better align community resources to improve outcomes for youth. In addition, the plan helps save money and creates opportunities for relevant citizen input and youth participation. Municipal leaders set a long-term agenda, identify communitywide priorities for young people, take specific action steps toward those goals, and maintain the services that produce positive results. Cities such as Charleston, South Carolina; Des Moines, Iowa; Diamond Bar, California; Edmond, Oklahoma; Lakewood, Ohio; and Minneapolis have worked to develop youth master plans. Each city tailors their plan to meet unique local needs.

In addition to providing youth a voice in shaping and implementing the plan, some common elements of a youth master plans are: a vision linked

"We become full citizens by engaging with others, defining our own interests while we uncover their interests. We become full citizens as we gain confidence—confidence that we do have something important to contribute, confidence that through vigorous public dialogue we will come to sound judgment on even the largest public issues."

Frances Moore Lappe and Paul Martin Du Bois



APA's Resources for Youth Engagement

For Youth

Kids and Community Webpage

Ages seven to 11

www.planning.org/kidsandcommunity

This fun and light-hearted website contains five activities that introduce the concept of cities and communities. Young people can submit poems, book reviews, and art work for the site. One of the activities links to a lesson plan.

Recommended Reading for Kids

www.planning.org/resourceszine/articles.htm?ResourceTypeID=4005

Here is a reading list of over 50 books about cities, communities, maps, architecture, environmental and cities, and social action.

High School Essay Contest

www.planning.org/institutions/hessay.htm

The annual contest has high school students in grades 11 and 12, prepare a short plan in essay form. The winner receives a \$5,000 scholarship. This year's topic was "Creating a Green Neighborhood Plan."

For Teachers, Parents, and Planners

ResourcesZine Website

www.planning.org/resourceszine

ResourcesZine is both an online newsletter and a searchable database of information. It contains hundreds of entries on programs, products, education activities, lesson plans, and youth engagement programs. One lesson plan, "Great Place/Lousy Place," links to the Kids and Community website.

ResourcesZine E-Newsletter

www.planning.org/resourceszine

Sign up for this free quarterly electronic newsletter that brings you the latest information on growing field of youth engagement in planning and its related fields. Share this information with a teacher!

Youth Planning Charrettes: A Manual for Teachers, Planners, and Youth Advocates

Bruce Race, AICP and Carolyn Torma, APA Planners Press, 1998

A guide to involving youth in workshops and charrettes.

Youth Participation in Planning

Ramona Mullahey, Yve Susskind, and Barry Checkoway

PAS Report 486, 1999 Available in photocopy.

An overview of successful participation programs around the country. Order through APA's PlanningBooks.com.

Sessions at the 2008 National Planning Conference Las Vegas, April 27–May 1

This year's sessions on the subject of youth engagement:

- Building Communities That Matter to All (\$485)
- Box City and Youth Outreach (\$570)
- Youth Mapping Facilitated Discussion (\$816)

to indicators that measure progress; a broad-based collaboration of interested stakeholders; an infrastructure of shared accountability, and a method for institutionalizing the plan to ensure its sustainability.

Youth Councils

An ambitious strategy for youth civic engagement is the growing movement to establish youth councils or youth commissions—a form of collaborative governance. Communities with youth councils include: Boise, Idaho; Olmsted County, New York; Dallas, Texas; Sacramento County, California; Holyoke, Massachusetts; Kansas City, Missouri; and San Francisco. They operate in institutionalized settings, which greatly legitimizes the role of youth participation in governance. Many communities promote civic engagement and lifelong community membership through active youth councils. These councils have a variety of responsibilities, an important one being the opportunity to affect citywide decision making. There are also an increasing number of youth positions on regular city commissions.

What can youth commissions achieve? They help change the perception about the role that youth can and should play in the community. These commissions allow youth to contribute to identifying issues and shaping policies that influence their quality of life and that of their peers. Their contributions can create change and they learn to partner with adult decision makers. Undoubtedly, the experience of collaboration and partnership with adults strengthens a young person's sense of self-worth as contributing members of the community as their opinions are given credence and respect. Young people nurture their skills to navigate government systems, speak responsibly about issues, develop social capital, and create solutions that work.

Hampton, Virginia

Hampton has garnered much attention including designation as one of the 100 Best Cities for Young People. The award was given by Colin Powell's America's Promise Alliance. The City of Hampton's Youth Civic Engagement is also an award winner and model for providing meaningful opportunities for young people to serve others, influence local decision making, and gain leadership and work experience. Harvard University's

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Government Innovators Network bestowed an award on this program in 2005. The city's youth receive training to survey their peers, make recommendations to the city council, serve on city boards and commissions, and participate in the city's planning department. Input from Hampton youth demonstrating that a youth-focused facility would be underutilized saved the city more than \$3 million.

In 1997, Hampton institutionalized youth participation with the hiring of two part-time staff. The Youth Planners work 15 hours a week and are responsible for the youth component of the city's comprehensive plan. They build relationships among youth and city government and serve as the official voice for youth with city government—helping to identify priority issues for youth and involving them in planning the future.

In communities where young people are involved in shaping policies that affect their lives as well as the lives of others, they work in common purpose to build the civic infrastructure and serve a potent role in crafting a vision. They advance the genuine participation of both children and youth for positive change. The community benefits immediately when young adults assert their rights to participatory democracy. Young people are overcoming the barriers to engagement by building communities, albeit often purely social communities, with the creative use of new technologies—the Internet and sites such as Facebook and MySpace. They have defied stereotypes through self empowerment.

If young people are to develop a commitment to civic life—that is, the conviction, and, yes, the passion—that they can shape and reshape the future of their community, then we need to prepare this diverse audience by using a variety of teaching methods for civic learning as well as to present role models of citizenship.

The theory of America's democratic process is that ordinary citizens can resolve the pressing public issues and answer the emerging social questions of the day. Civic competence is a prerequisite for assuming what Jefferson termed "the office of citizen." Commissioners by their example are engaged as advocates of this meaningful process. It is essential to create an environment where communities invest in their youth and where young people and adults work together to build a culture of shared values of civic empowerment and responsibility and positive social change. □