

PRESENTATION GUIDE: RESOURCE 17

Community Change Idea: Youth-Led, Youth Voice Events

School and community events can be a great way for youth to practice presenting their ideas in public.

This experience is even more powerful when youth have played a central role in designing the event. Events are a big undertaking for anyone, so it is important to create collaborative structures so that youth are partnering with adults who can help organize their timelines and execute harder tasks (like getting permissions for spaces or making purchases).

This list of events is intended as a starting point to inspire the creation of youth-led youth voice events, not necessarily as a comprehensive to-do list. That said, any youth-led event planning process should enable youth to lead decisions about the following:

- Vision of the event
- Theme of the event (i.e. names, color, feel)
- Focal issues or topics covered in the event
- Day-of hosting and MC duties
- Choice of speakers
- Target audience
- Publicity methods
- Key activities for audience
- Sharing via social media

While these kinds of creative decisions can be empowering for youth, it is deeply demoralizing when youth feel like they are impossible to pull off. Adult collaborators can be important partners in making sure this doesn't happen by serving some of the following roles:

- Offering templates or examples of ideas to kick off the brainstorming process
- Keeping an eye on the scope of ideas within the given timeline and helping prioritize
- Guiding the process of creating a timeline and list of planning steps
- Guiding the process of creating any necessary committees (i.e. program, publicity)
- Keeping youth accountable by asking them to report on progress towards deadlines
- Helping create contingency plans in case something goes wrong
- Helping youth shift direction or downsize if running out of time
- Providing encouragement and feedback along the way and/or mediating conflicts

As with any event, the process gets easier once there are chances to repeat the event model, which can also create a valuable tradition for the school every year. When an event becomes a tradition, then future youth have an idea of what an event model looks like, which can help them be even more innovative about the experience. A few ideas for possible events includes:

1. **Youth Mini-Conferences.** (*Level of Difficulty: Hard*) This type of event is intended as a way for youth to share what they find exciting or interesting about their school. Mini-conferences should take place once a year during an evening or weekend time slot and are best when they involve different grade levels and diverse representation of the student population. While the format varies, mini-conferences involve a keynote speaker (or several, depending on time), youth panels, and poster sessions. Poster sessions are science-fair style, where youth present posters about student life at the school. Depending on time, mini-conferences might also include a demonstration activity (i.e. having a student demonstrate basketball or skateboard moves, or teach the audience how to draw). They also can add more low-key elements, including fireside chat or roundtable discussions that youth lead about issues at the school.
2. **Get Involved Event.** (*Level of Difficulty: Medium*) This type of event helps youth advocate for issues that they care about, where they raise awareness and persuade people to get involved. It can take place during the school day or as an after-school or evening event. These events can range in difficulty -- they can be a simpler event with tables/booths or more like a mini-conference. For the simpler option, youth can set up tables around the school all on one day, with each table focusing on a particular cause or issue of importance. Tables should include literature about the topic, a display of some kind, and a clear call to action on how people can get involved or follow up. Depending on the campus set up, these events are nice when tables can be scattered all around campus, but can also take place in a multi-purpose room.

3. Youth-Led Assemblies. *(Level of Difficulty: Easy-Medium)*

This takes school-wide structures that already exist and asks youth to put their own unique spin to focus the event on what is important to them. The easy version assumes that the school already has some kind of assembly; the harder version is when that structure has to be created from scratch. Youth-led assemblies are flexible, but should include these roles: youth MC, featured youth speaker, featured youth performer, and featured youth reporter. The MC opens the assembly and facilitates the event, while the featured speaker and performer share powerful stories, experiences, and talents with the group. The reporter is someone who reports out on exciting but lesser-known happenings at the school as well as opportunities for youth involvement. Assemblies work best when there is a youth committee who works with educators to select a rotating group of youth for these roles.

4. Youth Voice Parties. *(Level of Difficulty: Hard)*

These events create a sense of community that celebrates youth voice. Similar to a talent show, open mic, or showcase event, youth voice parties invite youth to sign up for slots to express their voice. Options include telling a true personal story or a fictional creative story, a comedy act or group improv, an advocacy speech on an issue they are passionate about, or an informative presentation on a topic they are obsessed with. There can be 6 to 8 youth speakers (more than that loses attention), interspersed with fun, carnival-like activities (e.g. cookie decorating). It can also include an audience participation activity (i.e. writing ideas about a prompt on slips of paper and then posting them or tying them somewhere or creating a large group art project). At a smaller scale, these events can be repeated; otherwise, they make a great schoolwide tradition at the end of the year or before the holidays.

