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MCH Innovations Database Practice Summary & Implementation Guidance

Toolkit: Creating a Youth Advisory Board

Engaging youth voices to inform adolescent and young adult health programs and policies.



Location

Indiana



Topic Area

Family & Youth Engagement



Setting

Community



Population Focus

Adolescent & Young Adults



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Section 1: Practice Summary

PRACTICE DESCRIPTION

Over the past four years, the Indiana Department of Health has worked to build a Youth Advisory Board and create a space for meaningful youth engagement. After much planning, the first Indiana Youth Advisory Board (IYAB) was formed in June 2022. The board has grown from a promising idea to a meaningful component of Indiana's public health landscape. Launched in 2022 as a joint venture between the Indiana Department of Health (IDOH) and Department of Mental Health and Addiction (DMHA), the first IYAB included a group of 45 young people, ranging in age from 14 to 24. The second cohort consists of 60 new youth and six returning leaders from the first cohort. Their collective energy, commitment, and hard work has had a significant impact on how Indiana understands and addresses the health needs of adolescents and young adults. All youth serve as paid board members to the department of health and the team consistently strives to have youth lead the work: impacting youth and young adults most significantly by giving them a voice and space in state government. The board aims to impact the future of Hoosier youth and young adults by amplifying their voices when it comes to health needs and empowering them to educate, change, and lead.

IDOH participated in AMCHP's Adolescent and Young Adult COIIN in 2020 – 2021 in hopes to increase mental health screening among youth. One arm of the project worked specifically with healthcare providers, school nurses, and insurance companies to increase screening in clinical settings and reimbursement for screening. On the other hand, we worked directly with youth to understand stigma related to mental health and any assets or barriers when it comes to youth mental health. After working alongside youth for multiple focus groups, IDOH hired a youth to serve as its first youth consultant. This youth employee helped plan for the first youth advisory board. Our first recruitment cycle from March 1 – 31, 2022, yielded 229 applications. We ultimately selected 45 youths and worked alongside them for two years. Our second application cycle opened in April 2024, and we received 540 applications and selected 60 new board members. We also asked six original board members to return as leaders to the new board. After working alongside youth through two recruitment cycles, we learned so much information and we want to be able to share that with other states and organizations looking to engage youth. We created a toolkit (attached to this submission) that we hope can be used and replicated in many other spaces around the nation.

The IYAB is grounded in Hart's Ladder of Youth Participation/Engagement (<https://www.trainerslibrary.org/ladder-of-youth-participation/>). We have worked from the bottom rung up to the top by ensuring IDOH and DMHA staff are there to guide and support, but youth can and should be leaders in state government when it comes to advocating and educating others on youth needs. We have grown from one youth employee to having 66 engaged youth. While adult leaders are critical in managing the operations of the board, the youth are responsible for outcomes of the board.

CORE COMPONENTS & PRACTICE ACTIVITIES

The goal of our program is to ensure that decision-making at the state level not only involves the voices of young people but is led by their expertise. The core components of this program include all aspects of recruiting youth members and regular engagement throughout the year.



These might include in-person meetings, virtual meetings, full group meetings, sub-group meetings, meetings, conferences, speaking events, and training. Please refer to the toolkit for additional information on recruitment and core components. <https://www.in.gov/health/mch/families/indiana-youth-advisory-board-iyab/>

Core Components & Practice Activities		
Core Component	Activities	Operational Details
In-person Meetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationship Building Team Agreements Understand Youth Health Needs Forming Committees 	A kickoff meeting sets the youth board up for meaningful relationships with leaders and other youth on the board. This provides a solid foundation to build upon health and wellbeing issues that are impacting youth most today and establish workgroups and committees for the upcoming year.
Monthly All IYAB Meetings (Virtual)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Icebreakers History & Overview from IDOH/DMHA staff Committee Report Outs Upcoming Events Guest Presenters 	These meetings are critical to regular engagement of the board where they continue to build relationships with their peers, understand the work being done at state agencies related to youth and young adults, provide a space to report on committee updates, hear about and sign up for future events, and provide a space for guest speakers that can help continue to build knowledge.
Monthly Committee Meetings (Virtual)	Focus on critical health-related issues	Each committee is a smaller group working on a health-related issue that has been identified by the youth board as a whole. They work on projects, presentations, conference submissions, grant applications, and more. These are youth led with an adult sponsor there to assist.
Conferences/Speaking Events (In-person & Virtual)	Present on panel or in group at local or national conferences	These activities provide a space for youth to lead the conversation. Mostly, we gather a panel of youth to speak about key issues at conferences like mental health, substance use, and more.
Skill Development (In-person & Virtual)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public Speaking Resume Building Presentations 	Our adult leaders work with youth to build and refine skills to accomplish tasks and be prepared for in-person events.



HEALTH EQUITY

Youth engagement is considered equity work when it involves young people in meaningful ways that give them a voice and a role in decision-making through:

- Shared leadership: Youth and adults work together to achieve goals, and youth are involved in decision-making.
- Authentic youth voice: Youth are involved in the design and implementation of programs, and their voice is reflected in the organization's policies and practices.
- Recognizing unique perspectives: Youth are encouraged to share their perspectives and backgrounds, which can be learned from.
- Safe environments: Youth are protected, and their voices are valued in safe and respectful environments.
- Continuous learning: Organizations continually evaluate and promote learning.

Some ways to advance equity through youth engagement include:

- Increasing funding: Increasing funding for youth-focused programs and directing funding to youth and youth-led organizations.
- Changing funding practices: Converting inequitable funding practices to trust-based, flexible, and unrestricted funding.
- Balancing practitioners and academics: Balancing practitioners and academics as experts to ensure learning is reciprocal and mutually beneficial.
- Centering historically silenced voices: Amplifying and honoring unheard voices.

EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS

We developed this toolkit in hopes that other states would be using this to create their own youth board and learn from the content we created. We have been keeping track of downloads and shares on LinkedIn and keeping comments/feedback in a shared drive as it is received. The toolkit was developed and designed based on the institutional knowledge from Kate and Sam – who have been a part of this since the beginning – and wanted to make sure our knowledge and legacy was not kept to ourselves. So far, this has been well received at three conferences (the FYSB APP Conference, the TPP Grantee Conference, and City MatCH) and shared widely via LinkedIn. We are keeping track of shares and asking for feedback on the toolkit. This will be reviewed and updated quarterly.

We successfully completed our first cohort of youth and have generated strong interest in the second cohort. At the end of the toolkit, we collected testimonials from our youth that highlight its impact. Participants shared important statements like, “The IYAB has shown me that my voice matters and is wanted,” and, “Being on the IYAB has allowed me to flourish and explore areas of public health that I am passionate about.” One member expressed, “I feel more fulfilled and connected to the change I always wished for.” We knew we had achieved our goal when they shared, “I feel truly empowered and grateful that the IYAB allowed us so much freedom and self-direction in our work.”

In addition to the positive feedback from our youth advisory board members, we have seen increased interest from other organizations seeking input from the IYAB. These organizations have invited youth to assist in developing materials for 988, create social media campaigns, and participate in a three-year project on youth absenteeism, among other initiatives. State leaders have openly shared their appreciation for the board. After a meeting with The Children’s Commission, one legislator remarked that the discussion led by the board was “the



best presentation I have seen in state government.” This meeting resulted in the formation of a new task force addressing issues related to mental health, bullying, and suicide, which will be the first task force to require a young person on its leadership board. Others are expected to follow this model in the coming year.

Another legislator commented on LinkedIn, stating, “Indiana is better because of you,” and noted how fortunate state agencies are to have the board as team members. Due to the success of our board, other state agencies have begun establishing new lived experience boards, opening new doors for collaboration. Our federal partners have also expressed continuous admiration for the board's accomplishments.

Furthermore, the board has contributed to planning for the future of Indiana by authoring a letter included in the most recent Indiana Behavioral Health Commission Report. Their numerous discussions have garnered significant support for Indiana’s Youth Risk Behavior and School Health Profiles Surveys, helping ensure that state decisions are data-driven and informed by young people from all corners of the state.

Section 2: Implementation Guidance

COLLABORATORS AND PARTNERS

Indiana’s youth advisory board is a collaboration between two state agencies: the Indiana Department of Health and the Division of Mental Health and Addiction. Our partnership allowed us to engage youth ages 14 - 24 from around the state. As of now, our youth board has most often been engaged with Indiana’s Children’s Commission and community-based partners on key policy initiatives.

Practice Collaborators and Partners			
Partner/ Collaborator	How are they involved in decision-making throughout practice processes?	How are you partnering with this group?	Does this stakeholder have lived experience/come from a community impacted by the practice?
Youth and Young Adults	The board is composed of youth	Monthly meetings to elevate youth voices and many speaking engagements	YES! They have lived experience shared in their applications and on the board – often struggling with mental health and impacted by social media
DMHA	They are co-leads on the project and support the IYAB financially via Garrett Lee Smith	Co-leads on the project	Yes – this team has lived experience and works to address mental health needs of youth to further prevent suicide



Indiana
Children's
Commission
(CISC)

Providing youth additional
space for their voices to be
heard

*Youth Day at the
Statehouse

BEST Initiative for
school absenteeism

Yes – this task force has
legislators and important
agency heads to help champion
the needs of youth that are part
of the CISC strategic plan

REPLICATION

Indiana has collaborated with states and community-based organizations across the United States to share best practices and lessons learned. Our successful practices have already been replicated in numerous settings. To continue spreading our work, we developed a toolkit that showcases our best practices, along with ideas gathered from youth engagement research and discussions with partners. In many sections of the toolkit, readers will find suggestions for various pathways to success.

INTERNAL CAPACITY

Adult leaders are responsible for organizing projects and tasks for the Youth Advisory Board (YAB) while board members drive the work and determine that projects align with their goals. The YAB is supported by many adult leaders who work in different capacities. This support is crucial for success. At IDOH, two staff members work with the board 10% of their time, and a third team member coordinates most of the work and dedicates 80% of their time. At DMHA, two staff work on the board 10% and 30% of their time. For more detail on adult lead roles and responsibilities, refer to the toolkit - <https://www.in.gov/health/mch/families/indiana-youth-advisory-board-iyab/>.

PRACTICE TIMELINE

For more information on this practice's timeline and specific practice activities, please contact Kate Schedel at kschedel@gmail.com and Samantha Mundt at samundt@iu.edu.

PRACTICE COST

The budget will vary based on the rate paid to youth members, the total number of members, and the number of hours of youth engagement per year. The best thing is this budget can be very flexible! In Indiana, we pay our youth members \$20 per hour and they can work up to 10 hours each month. Time engagement often varies month-to-month, with most members working 3 - 5 hours. It's important to account for travel costs, training, events, swag, food, drink, and more when building your budget. For more detailed information, please contact Kate Schedel at kschedel@gmail.com and Samantha Mundt at samundt@iu.edu.



LESSONS LEARNED

- 1) Youth engagement in public health - especially state public health - has greatly impacted the programs and services we offer for adolescents and young adults. We can better understand root causes of issues facing youth and create solutions that will have a lasting impact.
- 2) Paying youth and recognizing their expertise is critical. It has helped us get a representative youth advisory board with applicants coming from every corner of the state. Many of them have lived experience that is essential to our work. Creating established jobs for them enhances their experiences and adds to their work experience and skills gained as IYAB members.
- 3) Youth are busy and flexibility is key – they can't make every meeting and they can't make all of the events, but showing up and being a consistent adult in their lives matters.

We encountered many challenges in implementation: it took us longer to set up pay than expected, it was hard to plan an in-person event when everyone could make attend, virtual meetings in big groups can be hard for our youth so the smaller committee meetings can help balance this out, and youth like food and swag (and many grant funds don't allow this – so we had to find additional funding). We addressed all challenges as a leadership group – we meet monthly to review any issues and plan for each monthly meeting. After each meeting, the team is assigned tasks and responsible for figuring out solutions.

Be flexible with the team who is responsible for the youth board. We know it is a lot of after work or weekend hours connecting with and meeting with youth. We have always provided flexibility, but our team still has to find balance in flexing around hours with so many other meetings and work. We continue to monitor our time and try to find solutions for impact.

NEXT STEPS

We continue to have our second cohort of the board. We have shared our toolkit in many spaces over the past couple of months and hope that this document continues to be updated and grow as we learn more best practices. As mentioned above, the toolkit will be a live document that will be reviewed and edited at least twice per year moving forward. We have asked for continuous feedback from people using the toolkit and will add information when needed.

APPENDIX

- [Youth Advisory Board Toolkit](#)

