

NYC Department of Youth and Community Development

Youth Leadership Development Practices Glossary

May 2016

The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) supports an array of programs for young people. Although they vary in terms of specific settings, objectives, and activities offered, all DYCD programs operate within a framework that is shaped by three interrelated concepts: positive youth development, social and emotional learning, and youth leadership. You can read more about this framework in DYCD's *Common Lens and Language*.

When community-based organizations and DYCD staff work together to provide services and monitor and evaluate them using the same lens and language, our ability to share best practices, identify strengths and weaknesses, and improve program quality increases.



To understand how to promote youth leadership, staff working in DYCD programs must first understand each component of youth leadership. The purpose of this glossary is to provide **definitions** for the attitudes and skills that are included in the youth leadership framework, an **example** of the attitude or skill in action, and a **suggested strategy** to embed the concept into programming. We hope that this glossary provides a clear understanding of the expectations of youth leadership so that all DYCD programs have a shared lens and language.

The glossary is not meant to be read cover to cover; instead, you can access the sections that are most useful to you at a given moment. For example, if you want to focus on “Inner Self Characteristics,” consider looking at the examples for *motivation*, *self-awareness*, and *persistence*.

Youth Leadership

What is it?

Builds on principles of positive youth development through opportunities for leadership, skill-building, shared experiences, and strong youth-adult partnerships. Youth leadership practices have three components: skills and attitudes, action, and reflection.

What does it look like in practice?

All youth can be leaders when program staff establish opportunities for cooperative learning and collective problem solving. Program staff can support different types of leadership by offering active roles in program activities and projects and creating the space for youth to mentor and support each other.

Angel is an active member of his community, participating in various school and community activities. One day while walking home, Angel noticed his neighborhood park was full of garbage and litter. Inspired to make a positive change, he organized his friends and community basketball team in a neighborhood clean-up day.

Autonomy

What is it?

A state of being self-governing, characterized by self-direction and the freedom to make one's own decisions.

What does it look like in practice?

Youth develop a sense of autonomy when they have the freedom to make authentic decisions. Staff can work with younger youth to choose which activities to participate in, whereas older youth (middle and high school) can help shape the direction of the program through youth advisory councils.

*Roberto is an active and energetic eighth grader. As each school year starts, he sits down with his mom to talk about which activities he is interested in participating in for the year. He enjoys having the **autonomy** to choose the activities that most interest him.*

Responsible Decision Making

What is it?

Making constructive choices about personal and social behavior based on ethical, safety, and social considerations and the evaluation of consequences of various actions.

What does it look like in practice?

Youth learn to make responsible decisions through ongoing feedback and coaching from trusted adults and peers. Role-playing using scenarios that youth face in their day-to-day lives is a helpful strategy for thinking through cause and effect. Be sure to have reflection discussions following the activity. Ask what worked well and what could have been improved.

*Juan is constantly under pressure to join his friends in skipping school to hang out at the park. Although Juan is tempted by the thought of hanging out and having fun with his friends at the park, he also knows his teachers would be disappointed if he got caught and he would miss information in class. Juan practices **responsible decision making** and decides to spend time with his friends after school instead.*

Motivation

What is it?

Internally driven by interests, long-term goals, and high standards for oneself.

What does it look like in practice?

Staff can support a young person's sense of motivation when they know their interests. Have formal and informal talks to develop bonds and gain insight and engage in reflection activities (i.e., vision boards, journals) to learn about their passions. Then, guide youth through a goal-setting process and help them track their progress.

*Jaime is an enthusiastic 12th grader. She cares deeply about her community and wants to run for public office someday. Her sense of **motivation** drives her to volunteer with local organizations to gain experience and help make her neighborhood a great place to live.*

Self-Awareness

What is it?

The ability to recognize and describe one's emotions and their influence on behavior, having a sense of one's strengths and weaknesses.

What does it look like in practice?

Encourage youth to understand their emotions by providing a safe space where youth can recognize their strengths and areas of growth. Have open discussions during activities about feelings, stress, and how those things impact one's behavior.

*Lee is a passionate 9th grader. Because she has strong **self-awareness**, she knows that she becomes loud and opinionated when she is excited about a topic. In class, she is partnered with Ebony who is very smart, but quiet. To make sure they can work well on the project, Lee decides to have a discussion with Ebony about their different communication styles. They decide on their topic without any issues.*

Persistence

What is it?

The ability to continue working to reach goals despite challenges, following through on promises and refusing to give up.

What does it look like in practice?

Give youth something to strive for during projects and activities. Because youth will inevitably encounter challenges when working on projects, take those opportunities to introduce strategies that promote persistence (e.g., developing a realistic timeline, establishing benchmarks). Discuss how it feels to both face and overcome a challenge.

*Jessy is highly focused and loves making plans. Last year, she applied for a summer internship at the mayor's office but was put on a waitlist. After all the hard work she put into the application, she was very disappointed about not getting the internship. She decided to take her application to her guidance counselor for feedback before applying again this year. She hopes her **persistence** pays off!*

Inspirational

What is it?

Having a positive attitude that enables one to show appreciation, give praise, and help others achieve their goals.

What does it look like in practice?

Program staff can inspire youth to inspire others by modeling positive attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Interact with youth in a positive manner, being sure to provide genuine praise for specific behaviors.

Noel has always been **inspirational** and enjoys helping others. When working on a group project in science class, he noticed one of his group members seemed frustrated with the project and voiced concerns over whether or not she was able to contribute. Noel pointed out that the group member originally had the idea for their group's hypothesis and explained how they would work together to achieve their goals.

Confidence

What is it?

Believing in oneself and feeling comfortable in a variety of situations, for example, during a disagreement or when talking in a group or with authority figures.

What does it look like in practice?

Empower youth to believe in themselves by creating situations where they can demonstrate success. By incorporating time for knowledge-sharing or reflection in your activities, youth have the opportunity to demonstrate their expertise and share their voice.

*Patty is a trend-setting 10th grader with her own sense of style and **confidence**. She enjoys sewing, designing, and making clothes for her and her friends. To gain experience in fashion, she organized her first runway show with the art teacher to display her creations. She also set up a booth at a local market and has been marketing at the school.*

Active Listening

What is it?

The ability to pay attention when someone else is speaking, listen carefully, paraphrase or respond appropriately to what has been said, and ask questions to clarify or confirm.

What does it look like in practice?

Ask appropriate questions of youth participants. When youth share information, ask open-ended questions that are responsive to the information they shared. By establishing an ask-and-answer mentality, youth will begin to listen more actively and ask questions of their own without hesitation. This skill also will strengthen bonds between staff and youth as they begin to learn more about each other.

*Debbi is very excited about her new summer apprenticeship. On the first day of work, her supervisor explained the project they will be doing during the next six weeks, including the final presentation. Debbi practiced **active listening** and asked if they should be preparing to present their final project to the group in the activity or the whole school. That night, she sent her supervisor an e-mail to confirm her understanding of the project.*

Communicating Effectively

What is it?

The ability to adapt one's communication (e.g., style, method, word choice, nonverbal behaviors) for different audiences and purposes.

What does it look like in practice?

Prepare youth to communicate with multiple audiences. Encourage them to think about how to tailor their communication to the situation and people involved. For example, have youth discuss how they might present an argument to their parents versus their peers. Or how they might present something to their science class versus their teacher.

*Pablo is a 7th grader who believes strongly about the value of his afterschool program. He appeals to his peers on student council to take his issues to a broader audience, and they agree that the issue is important. Pablo first sends out a message on social media, then requests a meeting with the teachers and principal at the school to share his ideas. He knows that **communicating effectively** means he will need to appeal to his different audiences in different ways.*

Persuade

What is it?

The ability to change other's opinions and gain support by talking to them and identifying how actions can show others what they want.

What does it look like in practice?

When program staff establish safe spaces for collaboration and inquiry, youth can engage in healthy debates. During activities, encourage youth to express their opinions and provide evidence for their arguments. Provide them with concrete examples through research and digital media.

*Julian enjoys public speaking. In his junior year of high school, he joined the youth council to **persuade** his peers and school staff to provide better quality lunch at school.*

Shared Purpose

What is it?

An understanding and drive to work toward a common goal through collaborative relationships and inclusion of everyone who is involved.

What does it look like in practice?

Encourage youth to work together. Be sure to include small-group work in your program so that youth have opportunities to solve problems together and work toward a common goal.

*Elizabeth and three of her peers are working together on a community service project. Elizabeth notices during their group meetings that one boy does not participate in discussion and often gets left out. Elizabeth makes a point to talk to him, building on their **shared purpose**, as the group continues working on the project.*

Convener

What is it?

The ability to bring people together while listening to others when making decisions and acting as a role model.

What does it look like in practice?

Provide youth opportunities to be social. Mix up cliques with different grouping strategies and rotate leadership roles to give everyone a chance to be in charge. Encourage youth to develop bonds based on common interests.

*Luis is a popular 9th grader and an excellent **convener**. He is the head of the youth council and organizes fundraisers for local charities. He is good at working with his peers and listens to them when making decisions. Other youth enjoy working with Luis and consider him a “role model.”*

Delegating and Organizing People

What is it?

The ability to understand, respect, and value differences while assigning the “right” people to the right jobs.

What does it look like in practice?

Staff can empower youth when they are given the freedom to manage projects in a variety of ways. Provide guidance on roles, but encourage youth to organize the process. Structure opportunities for success, and pitfalls to empower collective problem solving.

*Anita is the head of the winter coat drive at church. She is in charge of organizing volunteers and donations. Things get busy during the holidays, so Anita focuses on **delegating and organizing people**. Anita knows Jessy has strong attention to detail and Jose has a car. She puts Jessy in charge of tracking donations, and Jose picks up and drops off the donations.*

Learn From Mistakes

What is it?

The ability to learn from mistakes through observation, reflection, and problem solving is a critical part of the learning process. Included in learning from mistakes is the ability to commit to something, persist through difficulties, and master skills.

What does it look like in practice?

Engage youth in hands-on self-discovery and inquiry-based learning activities and projects. Encourage youth to work for a period of time to investigate, respond to, or solve a problem, and provide opportunities for them to discuss different solutions and results.

*Silvia is in charge of the eighth-grade bake sale. She has grown up baking with her grandmother. The day before the sale, she decides she wants to make fresh cookies by herself. She followed the recipe, but forgot to add butter and the cookies burned. Silvia was committed to making her own cookies and decided to **learn from her mistakes** rather than being discouraged. She started over, this time being sure to check the recipe throughout the process and her cookies were a big hit at the bake sale.*

Service Learning

What is it?

An approach to teaching and learning in which youth use academic knowledge and skills to address genuine community needs.

What does it look like in practice?

Involve youth in community change by engaging them in conducting a community needs assessment. When youth are involved in the decision making and planning of community projects, they are more likely to buy-in and support the efforts.

*Felipe is in seventh grade and learned to love gardening from his grandfather. Every day he attends a **service learning** activity where he volunteers at the community garden down the street. He supervises younger kids in composting, planting flowers, and pulling weeds.*

Civic Engagement

What is it?

Individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern.

What does it look like in practice?

Promote civic engagement with youth participants by discussing their individual and collective contexts. Identify what they feel personally and collectively responsible for in their community and what actions they can take to support that sense of responsibility.

*Raul loves history and politics and believes in **civic engagement**. He is first-generation American and is passionate about activism and community issues. He volunteers his time working with undocumented youth applying for college.*

Youth Councils

What is it?

Formal bodies made up of youth who advise high-level decision makers and officials.

What does it look like in practice?

Teach youth fairness, transparency, and justice. Establish a youth advisory board or youth council to establish rules, norms, and program policies. Engage youth in restorative practices (i.e., peer juries) to structure collective decision making.

*Julian is upset about the conditions of the gym and equipment. He appeals to the **youth council**, starts a petition, and gets everyone in the community to sign. Because of the success of his initiative, he is invited to join the youth council at the program.*

Counselor or Leader In Training

What is it?

A process intended to prepare youth to become peer counselors, supervisors, and mentors to younger youth.

What does it look like in practice?

Encourage youth to teach by providing opportunities for youth to coordinate projects and delegate roles. Older youth make great teachers to younger children who need support.

*Barbara has attended summer camp since she was 8 years old and loves the program. Now that she is turning 14, she joins the **Counselor in Training** group to learn from older youth counselors how to lead activities for younger participants.*

Reflection

What is it?

The process of thinking critically and deeply about one's experience by making connections to other experiences, considering the relevance to context, recognizing accomplishments, and making new plans based on that experience.

What does it look like in practice?

Ask youth to reflect on their experiences. Establish a safe space and provide opportunities for youth to discuss what they are experiencing, either during a program activity, in school, or in their personal lives. These discussions can be conducted in small or large groups or individually, by journaling.

*Diego is in the 12th grade and is a gifted artist. He has received formal training and started an art club at his school. Once a month they get together to share their portfolio and engage in **reflection**. Diego makes sure everyone provides one compliment and one critique to help each other grow. They discuss their context and accomplishments and use the feedback to make new plans.*

Other Resources

DYCD has created a suite of materials and resources to support youth leadership development. Starting in July 2016, all program staff will receive training on the common lens and language, and they will learn how to support and coach providers using frameworks and strengths-based approaches. For more information, e-mail PPIE@dycd.nyc.gov.

- *Common Lens and Language*
- Youth Leadership Development Framework
- Youth Leadership Development Practices: Program Staff Self-Reflection Tool
- Youth Leadership Development Survey (draft)

Questions? Suggestions? E-mail PPIE@dycd.nyc.gov