



Maine Youth Thriving

A Guide for Community Action



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How to Use This Guide

This guide was created just for you!

We have a wonderful opportunity to work together in our communities to support youth. You may be a group of caring neighbors, faith group, formal coalition, or a cross sector of community members who want to promote mattering and resilience for our young people. No matter what group you are in, this guide will help you process and learn together as you develop community solutions.

The Youth Thriving Guide is designed to provide communities with tools and resources to help empower and support youth. It is a roadmap to help you develop a shared vision for encouraging young people in your community. The guide uses a health equity and social justice approach, making it inclusive of all populations. You can choose to use all the tools included or those that best fit your community. We hope you find this guide helpful.

Introduction

No matter what part of Maine we call home, all of us want to live in strong, healthy communities. But wherever we live, we often end up focused on the problems we see around us – maybe there aren't enough jobs or housing, or families are struggling with substance use and poor mental health.

Promoting the well-being of young people is one of the most important investments we can make in the future of our towns and cities. It is increasingly clear that many of these important public health challenges have their roots in our early experiences. When young people are valued and cared for, they thrive – and go on to become adults who succeed and help our communities grow. All of us have a role to play in creating opportunities for youth; together, we can identify the strengths of our communities and the opportunities where more work can be done to support a positive future for young people. This guide will present eight keys to helping youth to thrive in our communities.



“When young people discover they can be agents of change, wonderful things happen. They start to serve in the neighborhoods, learn about public issues, create innovative solutions to tough public challenges and eventually become the voters, community project builders and leaders in our communities and nation.”

– Alma Powell
Chair Emeritus
America’s Promise Alliance

What Helps Young People Thrive?



MATTERING

All of us want to be seen, heard, and valued by others. It's important that young people feel they matter to their communities. Mattering goes beyond just thinking that people care – it's the belief that you can meaningfully contribute, and that others depend on you and are invested in your success. Showing young people they matter in your community is an active process, and everyone can play an important role.



SUPPORTIVE FAMILIES

Parents, guardians, and other family members are usually the most important people in the lives of youth. Families that offer love and guidance build a foundation for young people to be healthy and successful. One of the most powerful ways we can support youth is by supporting their families and making sure they have the resources they need to keep kids safe and healthy.



RELATIONSHIPS WITH CARING ADULTS

While relationships with family are important, connections with other caring adults can be deeply meaningful for young people. Having at least one relationship with a supportive adult – like a coach, or a neighbor, or an employer – can help young people feel valued. Those important adults can act as mentors for youth, by helping to connect them to skills and opportunities – or just being there to listen.



EMPOWERMENT & LEADERSHIP

Young people are the experts on their needs and experiences. For our work to be effective, youth must have a central role in identifying the challenges and strengths of our communities. Adults can help by creating opportunities for young people to contribute their skills and act as leaders on issues that are important to them. This includes leadership opportunities at school and in the local community. Being involved in meaningful ways aids youth in their skill development. Furthermore, youth involvement in leadership provides valuable perspectives that adults may not have considered.



LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Many valuable lessons take place at school. However, classrooms are not the only place where youth learn. There are many opportunities outside of the school building for youth to have quality learning experiences. Before and after school activities are fertile ground for learning. Hobbies and trades are additional sources of learning that can lead to future employment and successful careers.



EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Many people begin employment in young adulthood. Providing opportunities for youth to have purposeful employment helps the entire community and economy of Maine. Positive work experiences in young adulthood can lead to improved confidence and hope for future work prospects.



HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS

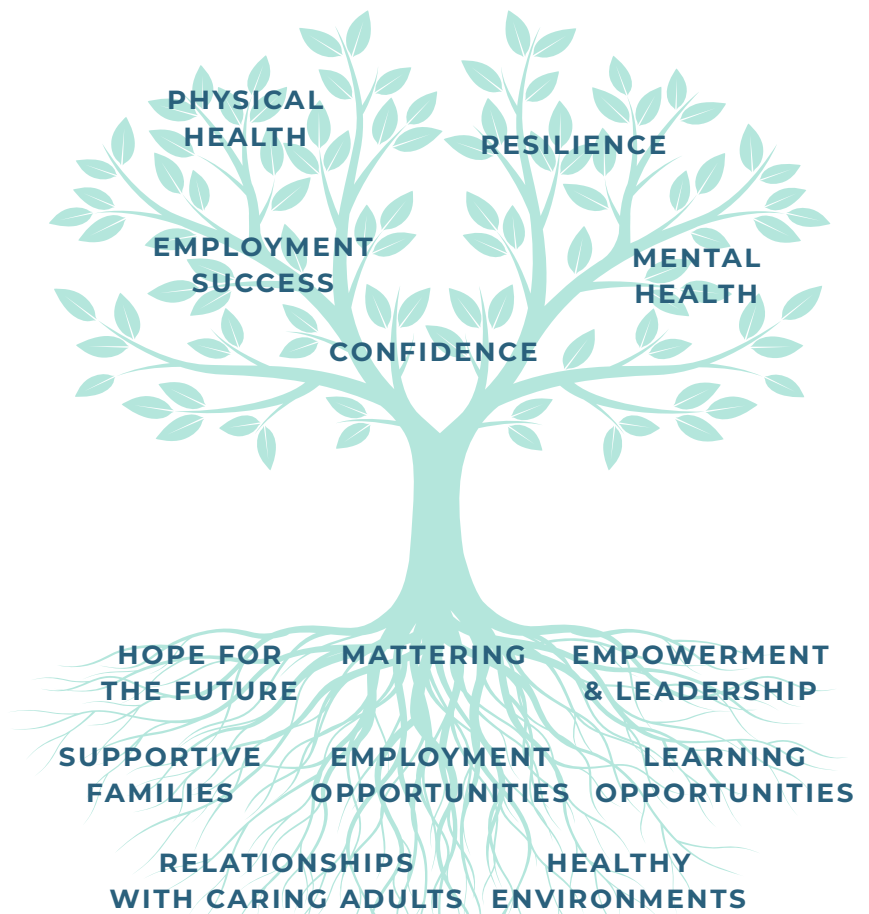
All youth deserve the opportunity to grow up in healthy environments. This includes safe and enjoyable spaces to live, work, and play. These environments can strengthen family relationships and community connectedness. Examples include green spaces that are used for outdoor recreation and community gardens. Safe neighborhoods free from violence and access to healthy food systems also help create healthy and stable environments.



HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

A strong belief in a positive future helps youth stay healthy in the present. Having clear goals and aspirations reduces the likelihood that young people will use substances or engage in other potentially risky behaviors. Adults can help promote hope for the future in young people by addressing issues they care about, such as climate change, health care and a variety of equity issues.

Envision the eight keys as the foundation for success. When we support youth with them, we increase their chances of success as adults. They will be more likely to experience good physical and mental health, demonstrate confidence and resilience, and engage in employment that fulfills them and meets their economic needs. Research has shown each of these individual components help youth to be successful and thrive. We'll explore each concept as we move through the guide.



Fostering Authentic Relationships with Youth

Every adult can foster authentic relationships with young people.

Meaningful, supportive relationships are the foundation of healthy growth for young people. Engaging youth in our communities strengthens their resilience and healthy development. When we authentically partner with young people, adults learn and benefit as well.

How do we make authentic connections?

For some adults, making real connections with young people may seem daunting. It helps to know a little about what is happening for young people during adolescence.

Although human brains do not fully develop until approximately 25 years old, youth may begin work (age 15), drive cars (age 16), and graduate high school long before then. Young brains are in an extended state of growth. During this period young people typically explore who they are, what matters to them, and how they want to interact with peers and adults. Research tells us that young people hold four core values: to stand out, to fit in, to measure up, and to take hold. Adults who celebrate a young person's values and interests will find themselves in authentic relationships with those youth.



How can we support young people's strengths and values?

Young people care deeply about their friends, families, and communities. They offer a unique perspective on the kinds of meaningful changes that will benefit youth and adults. To build understanding between adults and youth, consider how your work together will fit with the developmental priorities that are important to young people. During adolescence, young people are exploring how to:

- **Stand out:** developing a sense of identity and pursuing independence
- **Fit in:** building comfortable connections with others and gaining peer acceptance
- **Measure up:** learning new skills and competencies, and achieving desired results
- **Take hold:** making commitments to particular goals, beliefs, and ideals

We can build strong partnerships between youth and adults.

Young people are experts in their own experiences and have unique perspectives on how our communities can do better. As adults who know and care for these youth, we have opportunities to support them in achieving their goals. Through strong partnerships, adults can create environments that value youth contributions and incorporate their ideas into initiatives for change. Our communities are stronger when youth and adults work together.

There are five core strategies adults may use when fostering relationships with young people:

1. Express Care

Show young people they matter to you. Ask about how they are doing. Invite and listen to their stories about things they find interesting. Consider individually tailored questions, especially in smaller settings, to reflect your commitment and care.

2. Challenge Growth

Encourage young people to keep getting better. Model what it looks like to expect the best from yourself. Encourage young people to explore their interests, make new friends, support their families – and also share the ways you are growing as a person.

3. Provide support

Help young people complete tasks and achieve goals. Learn about their aspirations as well as immediate challenges. Offer specific supports – like a ride to their job interview.

4. Share Power

Treat young people with respect and give them a say. In both individual and group settings, ensuring a young person's perspectives are included in decision-making sends a powerful message to youth as well as their peers. From small to large, like deciding together where to eat or including youth representatives with voting power on the town council, sharing power typically reserved for adults demonstrates trust and values the contributions of young people.

5. Expand Possibilities

Connect young people in your network with others who can broaden their world. Linking youth to people and places currently outside of their web increases their social capital and expands their imagination for the future.

Many adults are not used to working in partnership with young people – and vice versa! As you are developing your team, consider including activities that help youth and adults get to know each other. This allows for the opportunity to practice listening and collaborating. The following exercises can be a way of breaking the ice and building comfort among all members of your group.

Activity: Temperature Gauge

Description: This is an activity that uses movement to gauge a group's opinions on a subject. The room is divided into five zones. One end of the room is "red hot." The next second section is "warm." The middle of the room is "temperate." The following section is "cold." And the final part of the room, opposite the "red hot" zone, is "freezing cold." Participants are told that each part of the room reflects how they feel about a topic: "red hot" being the best, "freezing cold" being the worst. Use this activity to provide a low-risk environment for opinions to be shared and group consensus reached. The goal of the exercise is not to debate anyone's opinion or belief – make it clear that there are no right or wrong answers. You are practicing taking risks and respecting others' ideas.

Participants: Any size is appropriate, so long as there is space to move in the room. This activity can be done with students, adults, or a mixed group of youth and adults. This can be a useful activity to promote the voices/opinions of those in the room who are less willing/able to speak up in traditional meeting structures.

Materials & Timing: You will need prepared questions that are aligned with the topic being discussed/addressed by the group. In addition, you will need corresponding signs for each zone to provide useful visual cues for the group. Allow 10-20 minutes for the full activity.

Activity: Participants respond to a series of statements or scenarios by moving their bodies to the section of the room that reflects their opinion. Questions should start off low risk and increase in complexity/difficulty.

- Swimming in the ocean is better than in a river (low risk example)
- Chocolate is the best dessert (low risk example)
- Math is the hardest subject (low risk example)
- There are opportunities for adults and young people to co-lead initiatives (riskier example).

As your group builds trust, you can move into more challenging topics for the group to share their opinions

- Young people feel like they matter to this community.
- Adults in this community actively engage youth to get their ideas about important issues.
- All families in this community have access to the resources they need to be successful.
- Our community can make changes to help young people thrive and be successful.

Debrief: Reconvene the group and ask how the activity felt as a way of expressing their opinions. Were group members affected by the movements of others? What did they learn from the responses? End the activity by focusing on places of existing consensus and exploring what actions the group might take to encourage change or growth in the larger community.

Activity: Tell Me Everything You Know

Description: Together the group brainstorms what they know about a topic and identifies their sources of information. The facilitator asks clarifying questions and records the answers for the groups. Step two of this activity switches the question to “what do you want to know” and “potential sources.” Again, the facilitator asks clarifying questions and records the answers.

Purpose: This activity is designed to give participants a chance to think critically about the information they rely on and where it was learned. Second, it invites the participants to have curiosity and to strive for continued learning.

Participants: Any size is appropriate. This activity can be used with youth or adult groups. With adults, this activity is useful for identifying similarities between how adults and youth make logical leaps in reasoning, thus shifting how adults view youth decision making. With youth, this activity can be helpful to identify areas for continued learning and youth-driven research.

Materials & Timing: Facilitators will need a flip chart pad and markers. Allow 20-30 minutes for the full activity. Prep on whiteboard or chart paper four columns, covering the second two columns until prompted within the activity.

Activity - Part 1: Facilitate a charted brainstorm of everything the group members think they know about a pre-selected topic (i.e., young people’s access to meaningful work opportunities). Track the knowledge shared alongside the source of the information – i.e. how the person sharing knows it to be true. Focus only on the initial two columns “What you (think) you KNOW” and “Sources of information” for this part, covering the final two columns.

Debrief – Part 1: Pause and ask the group what they notice so far on the chart paper. Encourage the group to reflect on the information already shared – how confident do they feel about each piece of information? What do they think about the sources? What makes each credible or not and why? How do they determine credibility for themselves?

Activity – Part 2: Using space in the third and fourth columns, ask the group if there seem to be gaps in the information. What do we still need to know? Where could we go to find this information? Why are our sources of information relevant? How diverse do we want the list to be to feel confident in our deductions/outcomes? Chart any new ideas or sources in the corresponding additional columns. Leave the charted brainstorm posted and invite participants to continue thinking of (and/or writing directly on the charts) additional information they want to know about the topic as the session continues.

Debrief – Part 2: Reconvene the group and ask what topics are still on their minds. How did facts and opinions show up during the conversation? What are the next steps the group wants to take together?

The Maine Youth Action Network contributed the information in this section. For additional curricula or guidance on how to foster authentic relationships with young people, please visit www.myan.org.

Using a Health Equity Approach

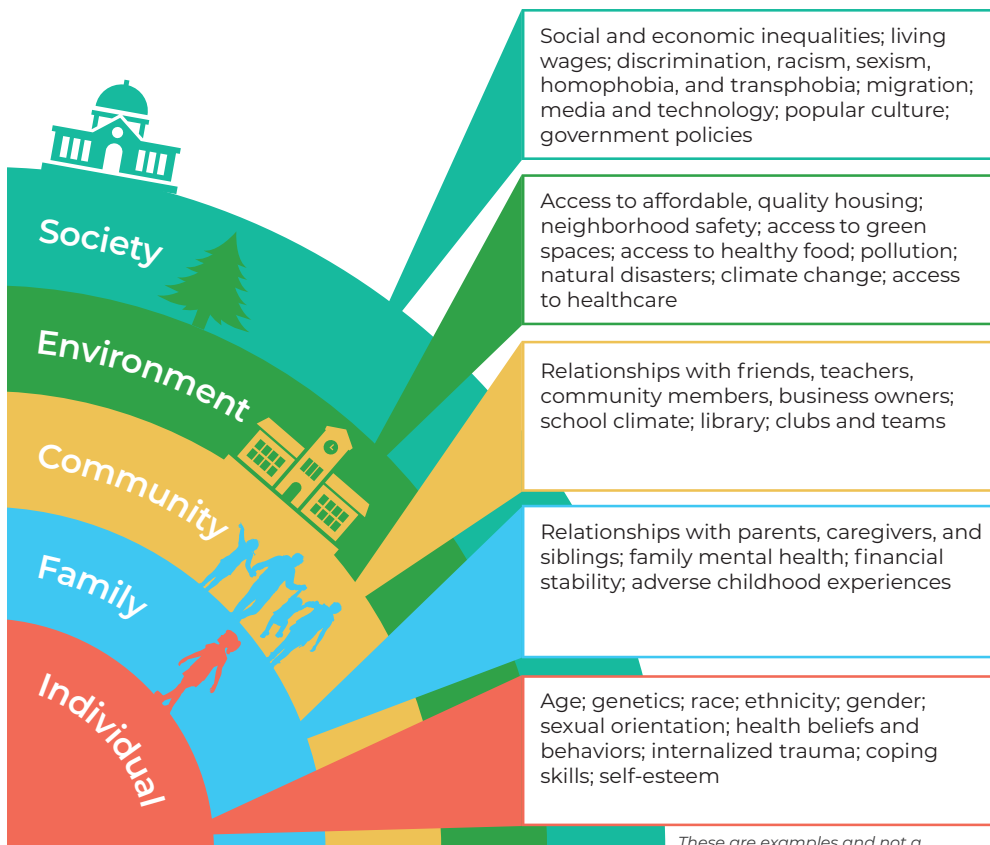
Health equity means everyone has a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible. This requires removing obstacles to health such as poverty, discrimination, and their consequences, including powerlessness and lack of access to good jobs with fair pay, quality education and housing, safe environments, and health care.

–Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

To create thriving communities, **all** young people need to feel they are valued and celebrated. This means going beyond just treating all youth fairly. We need to address the ways our community systems are set up to promote better access to resources and good health for some youth and families but not all.

A **health equity** approach means making sure people have opportunities based on their needs and knowing that different groups of people may need different things to reach their best health. To promote well-being for all youth, we must make sure our actions address strengths and barriers at different levels. While creating change at the community or societal level can seem challenging, collective efforts to reduce inequality and promote resilience can have a huge impact.

Many factors can shape the well-being of young people.



Let's Talk

1. Who are the youth who live in our community?
2. How do we ensure that we collectively address the needs of all youth in our community? How do we approach our work with a health equity lens?
3. What biases and opinions might be present in our community that contribute to poor outcomes for youth?
4. How do we work across all these levels to make sure all young people in our community can be healthy and valued?

Creating a Shared Vision for Thriving Youth

Creating a shared understanding, or vision, of what a community that supports youth looks like is an important step toward building a stronger community. This facilitator's guide will lead you through an exercise you can do with your community members to develop your vision statement.

What is a Vision Statement?

A vision statement describes your dream for your community and what you are striving to reach. Vision statements should be a few short phrases or a sentence that states your hope for the future. Craft a statement that is:

- Understood and shared by members of the community
- Broad enough to include a diverse variety of perspectives
- Inspiring and uplifting
- Easy to communicate

Sample Vision Statements:

- Healthy teens
- Safe streets, safe neighborhoods
- Education for all

*Adapted from the Community Tool Box (<https://ctb.ku.edu/en/best-change-processes/establishing-a-vision-and-mission/overview>)

Before you start, now is a good time to make sure your participants are people who can support youth to thrive. Are youth involved? Are youth-serving organizations involved?

First, gather the group to begin your discussion using the facilitator script, which is noted in blue italics below.

Today, we're going to create a shared vision for our community. Let's picture our community as one that fully supports the well-being of our young people.

If you feel comfortable, close your eyes. Picture a community in which youth thrive throughout all phases of their development, including early and middle childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. In this community, youth have strong, positive, stable connections to family, peers, school, supportive adults, and community. Youth are recognized by the people around them for their strengths and are provided opportunities for civic engagement, service, and leadership. They are accepted and offered safe spaces to be themselves.

Now ask people to open their eyes. Ask if there is someone who would like to listen and take notes during the discussion. Capture these responses in a format that allows all participants to see them (e.g., white board, flip chart, shared electronic document). If you have many participants, you can ask them to respond to these questions in small groups, and then have groups report out.



1. *What did you see when you envisioned this supportive community?*
2. *What parts of your vision are already here in our community? What are we already doing well to help youth thrive?*
3. *What parts of your vision are not already here?*

Next, ask participants to break into small groups to discuss these questions.

1. *What are our priorities for creating a supportive community for youth?*
2. *How can we best build upon the assets and strengths of our community?*
3. *What community systems are in place to support this work?*

The facilitator should rotate through the groups to understand the conversations that are happening. When the allotted time is over, ask the groups to report out again, and record their responses.

Ask participants:

Do you see any themes, or repeated responses that “paint the picture” of what this will look like?

Finally, work with the group to reframe the vision into a brief, aspirational statement. Congratulate the group on a job well done!

For groups who are ready to take action, here are some possible next steps:

- The group may be ready to meet again to develop some action plans.
- The group may decide to have a more in-depth conversation and involve some missing voices and perspectives.
- The group may decide to have additional dialogues to dig deeper on specific actions of importance to them.
- The group may share information with others about existing community efforts that highlight the vision of thriving youth in the community.

Community Supports

How does a community support thriving youth? While every community is unique, there are some key components all communities should aim to have. These include safe places for youth to gather, places for youth to be physically active, good schools, places for employment, quality housing, green spaces, opportunities to engage positively with adults, and community values that welcome and respect all people.

How many of these can you find in the image below?



Creating Caring Communities

Now that you have your vision, recognizing the necessary community supports for youth thriving is an important first step. But, how do you get there? Many people in your community care about youth and want them to succeed – but it can be a challenge to figure out how to pull everyone together so you can act on issues affecting young people. The more time you put in to building up relationships and partnerships, the more effective your work will be. A diverse group is more likely to come up with creative ideas and unexpected solutions. These new perspectives can help shift your vision from *what always has been*, to *what could be possible* for youth in your community.

Key questions to ask before you begin:

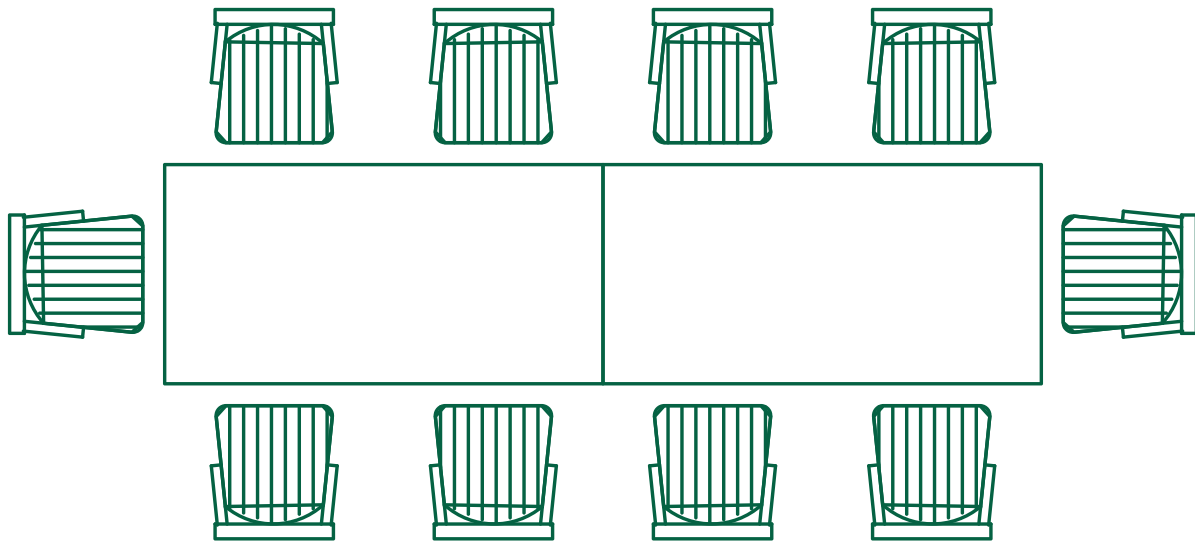
- Who is already at the table? What sectors of your community do they represent?
- Who do you need to invite to create a more inclusive team? Are there representatives of groups or populations who aren't already included?
- How might you engage people who care about youth wellbeing, but might not see themselves as having things to offer to your planning process?
- How will we make sure young people are actively included on our team and have a meaningful voice in our discussions and decisions?

ACTIVITIES

Community Map: Sometimes it helps to visualize the groups, places, and people that currently play a part in the lives of youth in your community. Work together to draw pictures or words that represent all of those sectors of your community. Some sectors might be obvious (like schools or youth-serving agencies) but try to think bigger-picture; maybe there is a business where many young people work, or a restaurant where youth like to gather. Once you have mapped out your community, think about how those groups and organizations connect to each other. You might come up with something that looks like this:



Set Your Table: Using your map, think about how your group will include adults and youth from across the community. If some sectors aren't already represented, consider who you could invite to join your group.



ACTIONS

Use the table below to decide who you will invite to join your team. When you reach out, consider why this person is a good fit and what they might be able to offer. People are more likely to participate if they feel like they will be valuable members of the group.

WHO	SECTOR	WHY THIS PERSON	INVITED BY



To prepare to invite these new team members, create a short 'elevator' pitch, which is a short (about 30 seconds) way of introducing yourself, describing your project, and why someone should get involved. Put your elevator pitch here. Note: you may want to modify it a little based on who you are reaching out to.

ELEVATOR PITCH:

Community Snapshot

Before you decide where to place your efforts, you need to understand what your community already has. Close your eyes and think about your community. What are the strengths of your community? What factors make your community shine? Jot down some of the community strengths you identified in the first column.

Now, think about parts of your community that could be made stronger. What are the opportunities for improvement? Make a note of those in the second column.

 STRENGTHS	 OPPORTUNITIES

Now, consider what may be happening outside of your community – in the state, in the country, in the world – that might impact your community. Write those in the box below.

 **WHAT'S HAPPENING OUTSIDE OF OUR COMMUNITY?**

How can we get our youth more involved?

Photovoice is a helpful tool for engaging with youth.

Discover more at:

www.photovoiceworldwide.com/wpsite/what-is-photovoice/



Mattering

What does it mean to matter?

It means you feel seen, heard, and valued by others. People depend on you and your absence would not just be noticed – it would have an impact. Mattering is important at home, at school or work, and in your community.

The benefits of mattering when you are young can last a lifetime. We have all heard (or been told) stories of that one adult who made a difference in a child's life. Sometimes that connectedness is the result of a long-term relationship. Sometimes a small interaction has a big impact. Any of us can be that one adult who makes a difference.



How can I make someone feel they matter?

There is no “right” way to connect with someone and show them they matter. How and when you engage with the young people in your community is entirely up to you!

You can start small:

- Make eye contact and say hello.
- Show appreciation or gratitude in a specific way. “Thanks for helping me clean up after the meeting. You saved me so much time!”
- Ask a question that shows you know something about them. “How was your trip to Boston?”
- Ask a question about something they care about. “What is your favorite Tik Tok account?”
- Be yourself! Show young people that being your authentic self is not only safe, but encouraged.
- Model healthy relationship, boundary, and consent practices.
- Ask. Listen. Respect.
- Fly a rainbow flag at your home or business to show LGBTQ+ youth they are welcome.
- Use [inclusive language](#) on signs and registration forms.

You can talk to young people to identify barriers to youth mattering in your community:

- Ask them to offer information about the issues they care about. Don't assume you know how they feel or what's important to them.
- Do adults ask for their opinions and take them into account when making decisions?
- Do they have the power to make decisions on issues impacting their lives? How can you work together to create opportunities for young people to hold more decision-making power?

You can evaluate policies that impact young people in your community:

- Are there safe, welcoming places for youth to be when they're not in school?
- Does your community have loitering laws? Curfews? Accessible, affordable transportation options? Ask how your municipality can analyze policy impact on youth.

We've all been conditioned in ways that can undermine mattering. Avoid:

- Offering unsolicited advice.
- Trying to problem solve when listening is the thing that is needed.
- Non-consensual interactions. This can include things like hugging someone without asking first or asking the same question more than once in hopes of receiving a different answer.
- Reinforcing or perpetuating stereotypes portraying teenagers in negative ways.
- Making assumptions about someone's identity based on outward appearance.

This is what mattering looks like...

Creating a welcoming space

To some people, a group of young teenagers hanging out in a parking lot vaping might look like a problem. To the staff at [York Library](#), it looked like an opportunity.

"We wanted them to know that vaping isn't allowed on the property, but also that they are more than welcome to come inside."

Before long, those same teens were coming to the library every day after school.

"They were looking for a place to be that's safe and welcoming and where there are resources when they need them."

With an influx of teens and no money to remodel, the librarians went into problem solving mode. A meeting room and a storage area were repurposed. The teens are helping to transform them into spaces where they can hang out, do projects, and just be teenagers.

The staff knows it's working because they've heard it directly from the source.

"When we re-opened after COVID, one of our regulars said, 'I'm so glad the library's open again. This is my safe place.' We hear stuff like that all the time."

Their advice?

"You need to think outside the box. I don't have the space I need, so what do I have or who do I know that can help?"

Building bridges

[Teens to Trails](#) helps middle and high school students connect with nature through outdoor clubs.

Transportation is their number one barrier, because of costs and logistics.

"We need to find ways to get kids outdoors, nearby. Community land trusts are a great resource, and most kids don't even know they exist and that they are allowed to go there. These spaces are a safe, healthy place for kids to be."

But they don't just hand young people a trail map and send them on their way. Teens to Trails makes a point to make the connection between youth and land trusts, arranging an introduction and helping to build a relationship.

"Establishing that person-to-person relationship lets kids know they are welcome and helps adults with the land trust overcome any concerns they might have when teenagers show up on their trails."



Through these new relationships, young people establish new connections to their community and, in many cases, give back by helping to care for these public spaces.

Maybe there's a better way

After years of making decisions about which plays to produce, the volunteer director of a high school theater program decided to give her students decision-making power.

"Maybe I should give them their choice. I hadn't thought about it that way before. Maybe we were going about it the wrong way."

So, she asked. At first, the students didn't know how to react.

“They’re not used to being asked, which I thought might be the case, so I was prepared.”

She explained some of their options, but made it clear the ultimate decision was in their hands.

“They chose the Addams Family. Turns out, they had been hoping to do that play, but didn’t think I would choose it. They couldn’t believe they actually got to pick the play. They’re so excited!”



Will she use that process again?

“Absolutely!”

Group discussion questions:

- How can adults convey mattering in our community?
- How might we imagine our neighborhoods when youth feel they matter?
- Can you suggest a business in your community that is welcoming and safe for youth? What does that look like?
- What would mattering look like in public spaces? Provide an example please.
- How might we redesign a public meeting or spaces so youth have power to make decisions that impact their lives?

TAKE AWAYS	
What can we do to make our youth feel like they matter?	



Supportive Families

Why is this important?

Family relationships are often the foundation of well-being for young people. Many people think of adolescence as a time when young people pull away from their families. However, research shows young people are strongly influenced by their parents' values and beliefs. Young people who report positive, supportive relationships with family caregivers are less likely to report mental health challenges in adolescence and adulthood. It is important young people feel the love and support of their families.

All families have assets and strengths, which may look different based on cultural traditions and how strongly social norms and policies impact them. Sometimes, there are stressors that can impact a family, which may hinder their ability to support their youth. These may be outside of their control such as:

- Poverty, economic downturns, and unemployment
- Limited education opportunities
- Racism, sexism, and homophobia or transphobia
- Historical trauma
- Mental Health or Substance Use Issues
- Lack of social support



How can you make a difference?

When families have the resources to meet their children's basic needs – like housing, food, and safety – they are better able to provide the emotional support young people need to thrive. Communities can support individual families through efforts such as food security programs, social support groups, free childcare programs, counseling services, and efforts to create welcoming environments for the members of their community who are experiencing hate and discrimination disproportionately. It is important that communities can create atmospheres that eliminate stigma and shame so families will be able to access offered services. It is important that systems are easy to navigate and connected with “no wrong door” policies, which facilitate access to a myriad of services through one entry point.

Communities can also make it possible for families to support their youth by advocating for broader policies that promote affordable housing, reduce food insecurity, and connect families to much needed social services. Access to these vital resources can prevent adverse childhood experiences that can have a negative impact on a young person’s future mental and physical health.

Group discussion questions

- What are the barriers families face in supporting their youth?
- How can our community support families that struggle with housing insecurity?
- What resources are available for families supporting youth who are disabled?
- Who should be at the table as we consider strategies and policies that empower families to be more supportive to their youth?
- How can we as a community support youth who do not have a supportive family?

TAKE AWAYS	
How can we support families as they care for young people?	



Relationships with Caring Adults

Why is this important?

The presence of caring adults in the lives of youth – at school or in the community – sends a message to young people that they are valuable. A relationship with a caring adult, other than a parent or caregiver, has been shown to be a powerful protective factor in preventing substance use and poor mental health. Connections to caring adults can offer youth essential support, especially if the family or caregivers of that young person are struggling to meet their needs. These relationships go beyond being kind, but also being a capable, caring adult who helps build resilience by modeling healthy relationships, teaching emotional regulation and problem-solving skills, and providing support during difficult times.

How can we make a difference?

Caring adults, including family friends, neighbors, teachers, coaches, and other community members, can support youth through building skills and connections that help them be successful. There are many characteristics of a caring relationship, including:

- **Trust** – “showing up” for young people, and following through on your commitments to them
- **Attention** – putting the young person and their needs first in the relationship
- **Empathy** – seeing the world through the young person’s eyes, and valuing their perspective
- **Availability** – investing your time and energy into your relationships with young people
- **Affirmation** – providing positive feedback, and celebrating their successes
- **Respect** – giving young people a say in decisions that affect them, and recognizing they are the experts on their own experiences
- **Belief** – having high expectations that young people can achieve their goals, and be accountable and responsible in relationships

For more information please see Laursen EK, Birmingham SM. (2003). Caring relationships as a protective factor for at risk youth: an ethnographic study. *Families in Society*. 84(2),240-246.

Group discussion questions:

- How can we foster feelings of trust, empathy, and attention between adults and young people?
- How do we convey messages to adult community members that they play a critical role in the lives of young people?
- Are there opportunities to encourage new connections in our community between adults and young people? Examples can include community arts programs, youth-friendly spaces and shared interests.
- Where are the youth-friendly spaces that provide opportunities for young people to be themselves and create authentic connections with adults?



TAKE AWAYS	
How can we promote opportunities for positive adult/youth relationships?	



Empowerment & Leadership

Why is this important?

There is room for all voices to be heard in a thriving community. As we work to create communities that support youth, it's essential young people have the opportunity to meaningfully contribute to decisions. Youth should also have a say in decisions that affect them. Young people are experts on their needs and experiences, and efforts to promote youth well-being are more effective when young people are involved from the very beginning.

Youth who feel their voice is being heard are more likely to engage with and consider taking leadership roles. The skills and relationships developed by youth when stepping into leadership opportunities are important protective factors that reduce their risk for substance use or poor mental health. We show our community values and appreciates youth when we make it a priority to engage young people and recognize all they have to offer as community leaders.

How can we make a difference?

- **Involve young people from the beginning.** We often invite youth into existing meetings or groups once the structure and goals have been set. Having youth engaged as early as possible ensures their voices help shape the foundations of your network.
- **Recruit diverse voices.** Some youth participating in groups have support systems that encourage them to flourish. It's important to take the extra step to invite and accommodate youth who may have a harder time participating. Young people who are most affected by challenges in your community have lived experience, which is vital to creating impactful programs and/or policies that may benefit youth from all backgrounds. This includes youth who experience health disparities, out of school youth, or young people in mental health or substance use recovery.
- **Make the meetings accessible.** Find meeting times and locations that are convenient for young people to attend. Consider arranging transportation or providing stipends for youth participation.
- **Build meaningful skills.** For some young people, participation in your group might be the first time they have stepped into a community engagement role. Be intentional about sharing skills involved in running a group – such as facilitation, conflict management, brainstorming, and action planning.
- **Celebrate successes.** Creating community change can be a slow and challenging process. Work with young people to recognize small “wins” and thank them for their participation.

Group discussion questions:

- How can we provide opportunities for young people to meaningfully contribute to our community?
- In what ways can young people in our community learn about leadership? Are leadership opportunities available for all youth?
- In what ways can we “open up” our community to make sure that youth voices are present where decisions are made, such as school board meetings, town council, or planning committees?
- How can we make our meetings and events more accessible for youth from all backgrounds?



TAKE AWAYS	
How can we create opportunities for contribution and leadership among youth in our community?	



Learning Opportunities

Why is this important?

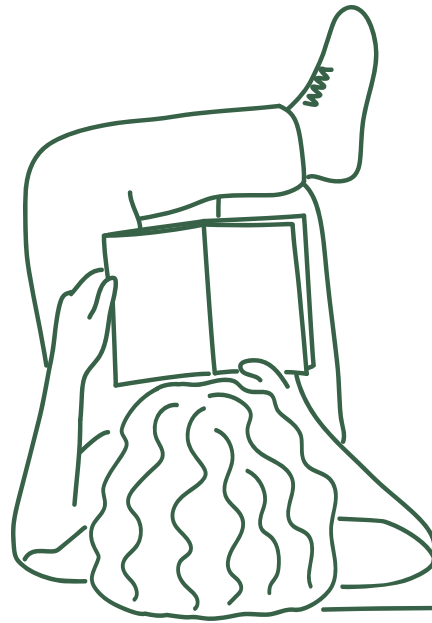
Many valuable lessons take place at school. However, classrooms are not the only place where youth learn. There are many opportunities outside of the school building, formal and informal, for youth to have quality learning experiences. Before and after school activities, community events, and youth centers, for example, are fertile ground for learning. Hobbies and trades are sources of learning that can lead to future employment and successful careers. Structured mentoring programs and informal learning in safe and welcoming environments are both important learning strategies for young people. There should be positive learning opportunities for youth each and every day in our communities.

How can we make a difference?

- We can provide many opportunities to not only learn, but to offer the chance for youth to stretch and grow. It starts with meeting youth where they are while at the same time offering them ways to help your business, organization, or the community. Providing the support to try new things and learn informally, as well as formally, is valuable for young people. Providing support to try new things, and to learn informally as well as formally, is valuable for young people—no matter the outcome.
- Think about ways to identify how your organization or business already invests in building learning relationships. Seek ways to highlight them and give youth the opportunity to engage and lead. Build upon what is going on, make it visible, and keep a spotlight on the positive things.
- We recognize learning does not happen entirely in the education system. However, we can partner with the schools in our community and provide opportunities for new learning opportunities. Think about what is needed in curricula or extracurricular activities. How can we contribute to creating new learning opportunities in the community?
- Create safe and inclusive environments where all youth have opportunities to learn. Multi-generational learning possibilities can be helpful to youth, along with community projects that offer new skills. Creating a good peer environment through the use of groups can also create learning opportunities.
- Broaden the connections. Connect youth to people who share their interests or can expand their world view.
- Make it fun, keep it light, and seek humor for all to enjoy.

Group discussion questions

- How can my community create more learning opportunities to support youth? How can we leverage the in-school needs and interests with community generated opportunities?
- What are some of the formal and informal barriers to youth learning in our community? How can we remove such barriers or create opportunities?
- How can our community highlight the accomplishments?



TAKE AWAYS

What can you do to facilitate or provide youth learning opportunities in your community?	



Employment Opportunities

Why is this important?

Providing youth with opportunities for meaningful work is beneficial for businesses, young people, and the whole community. Youth-friendly work environments not only help businesses to be productive, but also become a supportive environment where young people can be proud of their contributions. Inclusive employment opportunities help youth to build relationships, gain confidence, and foster competence. This can help youth begin a path towards independence.



Meaningful work for young people can mean a formal role in a business or organization, or informal employment like babysitting or dog walking. The important thing is that employment is an opportunity for building responsibility, motivation, and interpersonal skills like teamwork and collaboration. These early work experiences provide a chance to youth to identify what they do – or don't – like about potential career paths. Employers who are committed to nurturing relationships with younger employees play an important role in building skills and goals that will set youth up for future success in whatever field they choose.

How can we make a difference?

- Take a “whole person” approach to young workers. Most young people are juggling lots of commitments and responsibilities: school, family, and extracurricular activities. As an employer, recognize that youth may need flexible schedules and the ability to prioritize important non-work events (like final exams or family gatherings). Even more importantly, be curious about young people's lives outside of work. Employers are often key mentors for youth as they look towards the future.
- Take an active role in helping youth navigate a path to meaningful work. Some young people have a sense of what they might want to do for a career – but not much idea of how to achieve those goals. Share your story about how you came to your current employment. What kinds of education and training did you need? What do you like about your work, and what do you find challenging? Do you have professional connections that might help youth as they are starting out? You can help young people turn overwhelming decisions into achievable plans.

- Look past preconceived notions about young people. Our culture has lots of negative ideas about young people, and youth are often portrayed as irresponsible or unprofessional. Question your own assumptions and challenge yourself to see the potential in all youth. Youth employees likely have less experience and may need to build their skills. To help, work with them to make a plan with clear goals and expectations. You may need to provide additional support or supervision, but it's an investment that can pay off for both your business and the young people who work for you.
- Inclusive business environments help support ALL youth. Make it clear you do not tolerate discrimination in your workplace, and affirm young people (and adults) of all backgrounds and experiences. Consider displaying a rainbow flag during LGBTQ Pride Month. Hire bilingual employees and have signs available in multiple languages. Having a diverse workforce of all ages is good for your community and your business.

Group discussion questions

- How can businesses in our community create employment opportunities that support youth?
- How do young people in our community learn about different kinds of careers? How can they gain hands-on experiences that prepare them for different kinds of work?
- What can young people contribute to our economy and businesses that will make them more successful?
- What are some of the barriers to youth career support and how can we build on our existing community resources to help youth succeed?

TAKE AWAYS	
What can we do to promote youth employment opportunities in our community?	



Healthy Environments

Why is this important?

It is important youth grow up in an environment that supports positive mental, emotional, and physical health. Healthy, safe environments for youth can look like many things, such as outdoor spaces that encourage recreation and physical activity, indoor facilities for youth to gather and engage, safe routes to walk or bike to school or work, or opportunities to pursue activities they enjoy. When youth have opportunities to engage in activities with other youth or adults, it helps to build meaningful connections and supportive relationships.



How can we make a difference?

- Encourage the development of green spaces, sidewalks, crosswalks, and adequate lighting in your community. Access to green spaces is associated with improved mental health, academic achievement, and overall well-being among youth. Furthermore, youth who are physically active are less likely to experience depression and anxiety. Include signs to let young people know they are welcome!
- Reflect on things you can do to make spaces more youth-friendly. Is there a space available at your workplace, faith-based or community organization that can be converted to a safe space for youth? If so, seek youth input and decorate it to show your support. This might include visual imagery, such as a Black Lives Matter or Pride flag. It may also include artwork from local youth. Include options for entertainment that promote social interaction and connectedness, such as music, books, and gaming systems.
- Think about issues specific to your community and the barriers that may hinder a healthy environment. One example may be poor air quality, which can cause health issues and reduce opportunities for physical activity. Another example is the lack of broadband access in rural areas, which can increase social isolation and reduce access to education and healthcare. Share your concerns about these issues with elected officials and policy makers.
- Consider ways in which healthy foods can be more accessible, such as through food pantries, farm-to-school programs, healthy vending machines, point of sale interventions, or a community garden.

- Think about how unhealthy products are marketed in your community, such as commercial tobacco, cannabis, vaping, or alcohol. Discuss with community leaders how youth access to these harmful products can be reduced.

Group discussion questions:

- What does a healthy environment look like to you?
- What are some of the barriers to healthy environments?
- Where are the public spaces in our community that are safe and welcoming for ALL youth?
- Is there adequate visual representation in our community of all people?
- How can we ensure young people are part of making environments healthier for themselves and their peers?

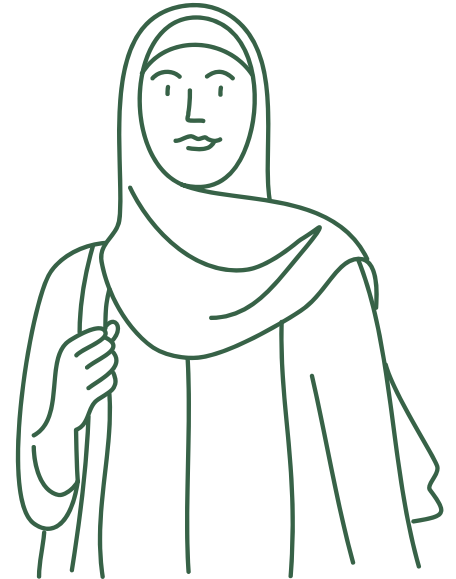
TAKE AWAYS	
What can we do to promote healthy environments in our community?	



Hope for the Future

Why is this important?

Believing in a positive future can have a powerful impact in the present for youth. When young people have hope that they will have a positive future, they will be more likely to believe in themselves and develop aspirations. This leads to healthy relationships and opportunities in adulthood. They are also less likely to engage in risky behaviors that could jeopardize those goals. While educational or professional achievements are important, it's essential young people have a positive vision that includes family, friends, and community relationships. It's also important adults advocate for issues young people care deeply about, such as cleaner energy sources, accessible healthcare and racial equity. Research shows young people who are hopeful about the future are less likely to use substances or to engage in violence.



How can we make a difference?

The foundations of a hopeful tomorrow are built on the experiences that young people have today. The more youth are exposed to different possibilities, and the more they see different versions of professional and personal success, the more likely they are to see an exciting future for themselves. There are many ways in which communities can take an active role in creating these opportunities for young people. Promoting hope for the future can mean:

- Work with employers to help youth learn about different career paths, including details about required education and training. Encourage real, on-the-job experiences, like job shadowing, internships, and apprenticeships.
- Provide opportunities for young people to participate in new experiences and cultivate their passions. Social justice activism, agriculture, art, outdoor activities, sports – these are all ways for youth to build their skills and create connections for the future.
- Celebrate positive things happening in your community. Directly involve youth in community planning efforts – such as strengthening the downtown business district, creating a community garden, building a new school, or creating a rail trail.

Group discussion questions:

- In what ways do young people in our community learn about a wide range of educational or professional pathways? Are experiential opportunities available for all youth?
- How can we encourage young people to set short-term and long-term goals for their future? How can youth build and practice goal-setting skills?
- How do we celebrate diversity within our community, and demonstrate that this is a welcoming place to live?
- What do we offer to young people that would encourage them to give back to our community when they become adults?

TAKE AWAYS	
How can we promote hope for the future among youth in our community?	

Action Planning Template

Once you've considered your options, you are ready to take action! Sometimes it is a challenge to move from a broad goal to effective and strategic action. Creating an action plan can help you determine how you can have the greatest impact using the resources that are available to you (which could be people, time, or funding). This template will guide you into clearly describing:

- *Specific and measurable objectives*
- Strategies that are *evidence-based* (meaning science has shown they are effective)
- Decisions about *responsibilities, deadlines, and resources needed*
- How your work connects to *state and national efforts*

Ideally, this tool will be completed by a team of people from the community, with input from local youth. Use the 'Take Away' notes you made for each of the Eight Keys for Youth Thriving to help you complete this tool.

How to Use this Tool

To think about where you want to focus your work, consider:

- **Who do we serve?** Youth can be found in every community. Where do they live, work, and play in yours?
- **What is our greatest need?** Selecting where to put your focus is hard, especially when everything feels important. Your time and resources may be limited, so think about which youth are not currently getting the supports they need, or other gaps that can be addressed.
- **What can we do to make a difference now, and what changes will take longer to achieve?** Some of the activities in your action plan will make an impact right away, but other objectives might require additional time and resources to achieve. Consider mixing short-term "wins" with longer term "stretch" goals; it can help keep people motivated and focused on the future.

Acknowledgement

This Action Planning Template is a modified version of the *Austin/Travis County Action Plan Template Kit*, which was in turn based on the work of the Wisconsin CHIPP Infrastructure Project and the Healthy Wisconsin Leadership Institute's *Action Plan Template*. The Healthy Wisconsin Leadership Institute is a continuing education and training resource supported jointly by the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health and the Medical College of Wisconsin. The Maine Resilience Building Network and the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention acknowledge they benefitted from the prior work by these agencies and thank them for their great work.

Instructions

Below are both a blank template for you to complete and a sample to help illustrate how it can be used. Complete one section for each goal you identify. Add sections for additional goals or objectives as needed. Adapt this tool as you see fit for your community or organization.

The following brief description of each section will help to guide your work. (Note: Planning terms are used in many ways. You may find other definitions of terms such as “objective” or “goal.” The list below is intended to explain how those terms are used in *this document*. Adapt the terms as needed to fit for your community or organization.)

VISION	This is the vision your team created
GOAL	This is the big picture idea your work will address
MAKING A DIFFERENCE	Outcome measures help you determine whether your work is making an impact and helps you measure your progress. Clearly describe how you will be able to measure whether your intended change has occurred. Select indicators of progress for both the short term (1-2 years) and long term (3-5 years). Identify what sources of information or data you will use for those indicators (or your plan to develop a measurement system if necessary).
OBJECTIVES	<p>This is a clear statement of what you intend to achieve. Create objectives that are SMARTIE:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific (what are we doing?), • Measurable (how will we know we did it?), • Achievable (what are we able to do?), • Realistic (can we actually do it?), • Time-framed (how long will it take us?), • Inclusive (how are traditionally-marginalized groups involved in decision-making?), and • Equitable (how are we addressing systemic inequity, injustice, or oppression?) <p>Short term objectives should address knowledge and skills development. Long term objectives should measure behaviors and health outcomes.</p>
PRIORITY POPULATION	While all youth need support to thrive, objectives should address the population group(s) in your community that have the highest needs for support.
ACTIVITY	Outline the steps you will take to achieve each objective. The activities are the “how” portion of the action plan. It is best to organize activities chronologically by start dates. Place each activity in a separate row and add as many rows as you need to the template.
BY WHEN	Identify the start and end date for each activity.
WHAT IS NEEDED	Include all resources needed for this action step. (Examples: funding, staff time, space needs, supplies, technology, equipment, and key partners.)
LEAD PERSON/OR-ORGANIZATION	Identify by name the key person who will be responsible for the activity, provide direction for the work, and monitor progress.
WHAT WILL BE CREATED	When this activity is complete, what will be the final “product”? For example, the result could be a changed policy, a training provided, or a resource you created.
PROGRESS NOTES	Track progress of completion of activities. If conditions have changed or an unexpected issue has emerged, you may need to use this information to revise your activity.

TEMPLATE

Youth Thriving Local Action Plan

VISION:

GOAL:

HOW WE WILL KNOW WE ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE?

In the Short Term (1-2 years)	Source	Frequency
In the Long Run (3-5 years)	Source	Frequency

OBJECTIVE #1:

Priority Population(s):

ACTION PLAN

Activity	By When	What is Needed	Lead Person/ Organization	What Will Be Created	Progress Notes

OBJECTIVE #2:

Priority Population(s):

ACTION PLAN

Activity	By When	What is Needed	Lead Person/ Organization	What Will Be Created	Progress Notes

OBJECTIVE #3:

Priority Population(s):

ACTION PLAN

Activity	By When	What is Needed	Lead Person/ Organization	What Will Be Created	Progress Notes

DESCRIBE PLANS FOR SUSTAINING ACTION

EXAMPLE

ABC Town Youth Thriving Local Action Plan

VISION: Youth and adults working together to strengthen our community

GOAL: Increase feelings of youth mattering in the community

HOW WE WILL KNOW WE ARE MAKING A DIFFERENCE?

In the Short Term (1-2 years)	Source	Frequency
Youth participation on school board with voting privilege	School board minutes	As scheduled
5 or more businesses display rainbow flag decal on exterior window	Walking tour	Annually
In the Long Run (3-5 years)	Source	Frequency
The proportion of high school respondents on the Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS) reporting that they believe that they matter in their community will improve from 54% in 2022 to at least 58% in 2025.	MIYHS	Annually
The proportion of middle school respondents on the Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS) reporting that they believe that they matter in their community will improve from 56% in 2022 to at least 60% in 2025.	MIYHS	Annually

OBJECTIVE #1: Youth representative on school board will have voting privilege by January 2024.

Priority Population(s):

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) youth
 Youth living with disabilities
 Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) youth

ACTION PLAN

Activity	By When	What is Needed	Lead Person/ Organization	What Will Be Created	Progress Notes
Meet with superintendent and school board chair to discuss youth voting privileges	Aug. 2023	School board manual	School group and advisors	Voting privilege November 2023	
Presentation to school board members by LGBTQ youth group at board retreat	Aug. 2023	OUT Maine Material School board manual	LGBTQ school group and advisors	Vote by school board to add item to October 2023 agenda	

OBJECTIVE #2: 10 Businesses will show support of BIPOC youth by displaying decal on exterior window

Priority Population(s):

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) youth
 Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) youth
 Youth living with disabilities

ACTION PLAN

Activity	By When	What is Needed	Lead Person/Organization	What Will Be Created	Progress Notes
Youth attend business chamber meeting	Oct. 2023	Brief presentation	Youth group, Youth-friendly business owners	Support of decal	
Youth meet with select persons to discuss decal	Sept. 2023	Brief presentation	Youth group, Youth-friendly business owners	Support and request to present to other community committees including planning committee	

DESCRIBE PLANS FOR SUSTAINING ACTION

Helpful Tools

These are tools you may find helpful as you develop your plan.

National Resources

- Youth Thrive, a program of Center for the Study of Social Policy
www.cssp.org/our-work/project/youth-thrive
- National Mentoring Resource Center
www.nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org
- Crisis Supports for the Autism Community
www.suicidology.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Autism-Crisis-Supports.pdf

Maine Resources

- Maine Resilience Building Network
www.maineresilience.org
- Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention Suicide Prevention Program
www.maine.gov/suicide/index.htm
- Maine Youth Action Network
www.myan.org
- Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS)
www.maine.gov/miyhs

Evaluation Resources

- CDC Evaluation Framework:
www.cdc.gov/evaluation
- Community-based Participatory Action Research:
www.hc-v6-static.s3.amazonaws.com/media/resources/tmp/cbpar.pdf
- Ripple Effects Mapping for Evaluation:
www.s3.wp.wsu.edu/uploads/sites/2063/2013/12/REM.Complete.pdf
- Ripple Effects Mapping for Community Development:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=6rFdZVSETPU

Resource List

Maine Organizations

Maine Suicide Prevention Program

www.maine.gov/suicide/index.htm

A program of the Maine CDC, the Maine Suicide Prevention Program provides resources, technical assistance, and training in suicide prevention best practices for professionals and community members across the state.

Maine Resilience Building Network (MRBN)

www.maineresilience.org

MRBN is a statewide public health organization with a network reaching more than 2,000 individuals and organizations across Maine. MRBN provides professional development and educational programming, technical assistance and consultation to organizations, systems, and communities. MRBN also engages in public policy to build capacity to address the impact of ACEs, enhance resilience and protective factors, and integrate trauma-informed practices.

211 Maine

www.211maine.org

211 is a free, confidential information and referral service that connects people of all ages across Maine to local services. 211 Maine is based in Maine and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

4H Maine

www.extension.umaine.edu/4h

4H provides hands-on educational and leadership programs for youth in Maine. It emphasizes the importance of building the life skills needed to be successful adults.

Autism Society of Maine

www.asmonline.org

The Autism Society of Maine provides education and resources to support the valued lives of individuals on the autism spectrum and their families.

Big Brothers Big Sisters

Bath/Brunswick: www.bbbsbathbrunswick.org

Mid-Maine: www.bbbsmidmaine.org

Southern Maine: www.somebigs.org

Big Brothers, Big Sisters provides one-to-one mentoring programs for youth ages 5-14.

Black Portland Organizers Working to End Racism (P.O.W.E.R.)

www.blackpowermaine.org/who-we-are

Black P.O.W.E.R was formerly Black Lives Matter Portland. The organization works to end systemic racism via dismantling or transforming racist systems, investing in the Black community, and protecting and advocating for all Black people in the community.

Boy Scouts of America–Pine Tree Council

www.pinetreebsa.org

The Pine Tree Council carries out the mission of the Boy Scouts of America in ten counties in central, western, and southern Maine through a locally operated non-profit corporation chartered by the national council and supported by local volunteers and contributors.

Disability Rights Maine (DRM)

www.drme.org

DRM is Maine's Protection & Advocacy agency for people with disabilities. DRM represents people whose rights have been violated or who have been discriminated against based on their disability. DRM also advocates for public policy reform, providing training on rights and self-advocacy.

GEAR Parents Network

www.gearparentnetwork.org

Gear Parents Network is a family driven, totally parent-run organization with the primary mission to empower parents and caregivers of children and youth who have emotional and behavioral health needs to affect their own life decisions through sharing lived experiences and knowledge, promoting hope and self-reliance with no shame, no blame and no judgment.

Girl Scouts of Maine

www.girlscoutsofmaine.org

The Girl Scout mission is to develop girls to be leaders in their own lives and in the world they live in. Girl Scouts of Maine covers the state, with over 12,000 members and 4,300 volunteers.

Hardy Girls Healthy Women (HGHW)

www.hghw.org

HGHW is a Maine nonprofit that partners with girls and gender expansive youth to ignite curiosity, promote thinking critically, build coalitions, and challenge the status quo. HGHW works with 1,200+ girls and gender expansive youth annually through year-round, statewide programs.

Junior Maine Guides

www.juniormaineguides.org

Junior Maine Guides is a youth program that teaches enjoyable and healthy outdoor experiences, while fostering personal development.

Maine Boys to Men

www.maineboystomen.org

Maine Boys to Men addresses the development of boys in the context of their relationships, socialization process, and cultural environments. They believe it is not the boys but rather the culture in which they live and grow that needs repair. While holding boys and men to a higher degree of individual accountability, they also put an appropriate level of focus on the environment – families, schools, community organizations, and peer culture – as the key agents of change in the lives of boys.

Maine Developmental Disabilities Council

www.maineddc.org

The purpose of the Council is to ensure that individuals with developmental disabilities and their families participate in the design of, and have access to needed community services, individualized supports, and other forms of assistance that promote self-determination, independence, productivity, integration, and inclusion in all facets of family and community life.

Maine FFA Association

www.maine.gov/doe/learning/ffa

The Maine FFA Association (formerly known as “Future Farmers of America”) makes a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth, and career success through agricultural education. Maine students in grades 7-12 are eligible for FFA membership if they are enrolled in at least one course related to agriculture and have a local FFA chapter with an advisor.

Maine Access Immigrant Network (MAIN)

www.main1.org

MAIN bridges access to health and social services for immigrants and refugees in Portland, Maine. They work to build a stronger multicultural community in Portland, and to address refugee health literacy, health care enrollment, and coordination of health care benefits and non-clinical care. MAIN provides resource and referral information that is culturally and linguistically appropriate in English, Arabic, Somali, and French to ensure equal access to programs and services for new Mainers from Africa and the Middle East.

New Mainers Public Health Initiative (NMPHI)

www.nmphl.org

NMPHI aims to empower, inform, and educate new Mainers about preventive health measures through the promotion of healthy habits by developing the capacity to mobilize community partnerships in identifying and solving health problems in order to bridge the gap in health care service delivery and decrease health disparity. NMPHI also advocates for better access to health resources, more sensible healthcare policies and overall better health equity.

Maine Parent Federation

www.mpf.org

The Maine Parent Federation provides education and support for Maine's diverse families, children, and youth, especially those with disabilities, special healthcare needs, or other challenges, ages birth to 26, and the professionals who serve them, to ensure effective services and successful outcomes.

Maine Trans Net

www.mainetrans.net

Maine Trans Net is a community-based organization led by transgender people for transgender people. They provide peer-to-peer support groups, social and community events, advocacy for the transgender community across Maine, and transgender cultural competency training for medical, mental health, and social service providers.

Maine Young People's Caucus

www.yceme.org/young-people-s-caucus

The Maine Young People's Caucus includes young adults (ages 14-26) who care about issues and systems that affect young people – juvenile justice, child welfare, education, racial justice, mental health, employment pathways, transportation – and who want to use their voice to help make change. Youth leaders meet regularly to build connections with one another and discuss their experiences and ideas, and work alongside commissioners and legislators to inform them about the issues impacting young people across the state of Maine.

Maine Youth Action Network (MYAN)

www.myan.org

MYAN is a statewide network of adults and young people who believe in the transformative power of youth leadership. MYAN collaborates, convenes, and partners to build young people's leadership on issues of social justice, restorative practices, and public health; and the capacity of adults, organizations, and systems to use positive youth development and social-emotional learning principles in their work with youth.

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Maine

www.namimaine.org

NAMI Maine provides support, education, and advocacy for the 1 in 4 Mainers who are affected by mental illness. They provide social and emotional support; advocate for improved quality of services; educate, inform, and provide resources; raise public awareness and promote understanding of mental illness; promote the importance of peer support for all persons affected by mental illness; train volunteers and professionals; and foster a statewide network of affiliates and support groups.

OUT Maine

www.outmaine.org

OUT Maine supports LGBTQ+ youth and their families and allies with specialized programs; empowers queer youth to be their most authentic, resilient selves through events; to be school climate change agents through Gay-Straight-Trans Alliance (GSTA) clubs they support; and educates behavioral and physical health care providers, educators, clergy and other professionals who, through their affirmation and support, can change these young people's lives.

Teens to Trails

www.teenstotrails.org

Teens to Trails works with schools to build meaningful relationships between students, caring adults and the natural world while sharing fun outdoor experiences. They provide adult and student leaders with the training, financial support, and reliable resources they need to start and sustain an exciting Outdoor Club at their school. Support includes professional development and programming, grants and scholarships.

Wabanaki Public Health & Wellness

www.wabanakiphw.org

Wabanaki Public Health & Wellness' mission is to provide community-driven, culturally centered public health and social services to all Wabanaki communities and people while honoring Wabanaki cultural knowledge, cultivating innovation, and fostering collaboration.

National Organizations

Annie E. Casey Foundation

www.aecf.org

The Annie E. Casey Foundation focuses on strengthening families, building stronger communities, and ensuring access to opportunities for youth to succeed. A focus is placed on advancing research and solutions that can overcome barriers to success, help communities demonstrate what works and influence decision makers to invest in evidence-based strategies. Grants are available to address the needs of youth facing the greatest challenges.

Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

www.casel.org

CASEL is a nonprofit organization seeking to make social and emotional learning part of a high-quality and equitable education for all. The organization envisions all children and adults as self-aware, caring, responsible, engaged, and lifelong learners who work together to achieve their goals and create a more inclusive, just world.

The Center for Communities that Care

www.communitiesthatcare.net

The Center for Communities that Care mission is to promote the healthy development of young people through high-quality implementation of Communities that Care PLUS, Guiding Good Choices parenting program, and other preventative interventions. Personalized training and coaching is provided for communities.

GLSEN

www.glsen.org

The Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network is a nonprofit organization working to ensure LGBTQ students can learn and grow in a school environment free from bullying and harassment. The organization conducts extensive research to provide evidence-based solutions for K-12 education and authors developmentally appropriate resources for educators. They also support student-led efforts to positively impact schools and local communities.

Prevention Institute

www.preventioninstitute.org

Prevention Institute is a national nonprofit that seeks to build capacity for prevention and health equity in key policies and actions. They work alongside the community to promote health, safety, and wellbeing initiatives. The nonprofit also supports communities in efforts to reverse policies and practices that unevenly distribute resources and works to enact policies and practices that enable all communities the opportunity to be healthy.

Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) (Health Disparities and Community Health Programs)

www.rwjf.org/en/our-focus-areas/topics/health-disparities.html

RWJF works to identify and address the root causes of health inequality. The RWJF Culture of Health Prize recognizes communities working together to transform neighborhoods, schools, and businesses so that everyone has an opportunity for better health. A variety of grant programs are available for communities.

Search Institute

www.searchinstitute.org

Search Institute is a nonprofit organization that promotes positive youth development and advances equity. It offers practical solutions to help youth succeed through workshops, surveys, resource hubs, and research. Tools and resources are shared with partners, including schools, organizations, and practitioners to build and strengthen developmental relationships.

Sources of Strength

www.sourcesofstrength.org

Sources of Strength is one of the first suicide prevention programs that uses peer leaders to enhance protective factors associated with reducing suicide at the school population level. The program has been shown to increase youth and adult connectedness. It has also increased positive perceptions of adult support for suicidal youth and the acceptability of seeking help.

Suicide Prevention Resource Center

www.sprc.org

The Suicide Prevention Resource Center is the only federally supported resource center devoted to advancing the implementation of the National Strategy for Suicide Prevention. It supports suicide prevention infrastructure and capacity building through consultations, training, and support for Zero Suicide.

Yellow Tulip Project

www.theyellowtulipproject.org

Yellow Tulip Project is a youth driven movement working to end the stigma around mental illness. This is done through outreach and advocacy work, and by encouraging communities to be open to talking about mental illness.

Youth.gov

www.youth.gov

Youth.gov promotes the goal of positive, health outcomes for youth, including online youth engagement, program development, effective strategies, and opportunities for collaboration. This government website provides facts about youth, funding opportunities, and other tools to help communities effectively serve youth.

Youth Empowerment Project

www.youthempowermentproject.org

Youth Empowerment Project provides youth mentoring and advocacy, community-based education, and enrichment programs that can help to develop skills and strengthen ties to family and the community. The goal is to connect young people to the opportunities, relationships, and resources they need to achieve their potential.

Youth Leadership Advisory Team (YLAT)

www.ylat.org

YLAT is a youth and adult partnership committed to improving outcomes for youth who are or have been in foster care. This is a joint project between Maine's Youth in Foster Care, the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, and the Muskie School at the University of Southern Maine.

YouthPower

www.youthpower.org

YouthPower promotes positive youth development and advancement, providing a learning network and resources for those that serve youth. It also seeks to improve the capacity of youth-led and youth-serving institutions, engaging young people, their families and communities so that youth can reach their full potential.

Glossary

- **Action Planning** – Use of a tool to develop a program designed to achieve specific outcomes. An action plan is a living document that focuses on what needs to be accomplished in order to achieve outcomes, including what, who, how, and when.
- **Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)** – ACEs are potentially traumatic events occurring in childhood (0-17 years). ACEs can have a big impact on future violence victimization and perpetration, and on lifelong health and opportunity. Examples of ACEs include experiencing violence, abuse, or neglect; witnessing violence in the home or community; having a family member attempt or die by suicide.
- **BIPOC** – Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (used to refer to people of nonwhite communities).
- **Equity** – (Health) equity is achieved when every person has the opportunity to “attain his or her full (health) potential” and no one is “disadvantaged from achieving this potential because of social position or other socially determined circumstances.”
- **Gaming** – The action of playing video or computer games. Some youth aspire to turn their love of gaming into a career.
- **Inclusive Language** – Inclusive language acknowledges diversity, conveys respect to all people, is sensitive to differences, and promotes equal opportunities.
- **Influencer** – A person with the ability to influence others to do or buy something. Social media influencers are often able to translate their social media presence into income through brand sponsorship.
- **LGBTQ** – Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer or questioning. Sometimes this will be noted as LGBTQIA+, which means lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual. The “+” designates any other gender and sexual identities.
- **Mattering** – The essence of mattering is the belief that you are seen, heard, and valued. It’s more than being included or fitting in – it’s feeling you are contributing in a meaningful way. Others depend on you. Your absence would have an impact. Ideally, you feel you matter at home, at work, at school, and in your community.
- **Mentoring** – Mentoring provides youth with adults who can develop an emotional bond with the young person. The adult typically has greater experience than the young person and can provide support, guidance, and opportunities to help youth succeed and meet their goals. Mentoring relationships are all unique and can be formal or informal. The essential components include creating caring, empathetic, consistent, and long-lasting relationships, often with some combination of role modeling, teaching, and advising.

- **Primary Prevention** – Primary prevention involves implementation of interventions designed to enhance protective factors and reduce risk factors before they occur.
- **Protective Factor** – A condition, behavior, or other factor that reduces risk. Examples of protective factors include mattering, relationships with caring adults, physical activity, and opportunities for education and employment.
- **Resilience** – The ability to recover quickly from difficulties.
- **Risk Factor** – A condition, behavior, or other factor that increases risk. Examples of risk factors include smoking, sedentary lifestyle, Adverse Childhood Experiences, poverty, and racism.
- **Social and Emotional Learning** – Social and emotional learning refers to a wide range of skills, attitudes, and behaviors that can impact on student success inside and outside of school.
- **Social Media** – Websites and applications (apps) that enable users to create and share content or to participate in social networking. Examples include Tik Tok, Tumblr, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Reddit, YouTube, Pinterest, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Houseparty, Whisper, MeetMe, and Yubo.
- **Stakeholder** – Stakeholders are people or organizations invested in a program or policy, including participants, funders, and people with lived experience related to the issue.
- **Strategy** – A defined set of actions that are designed to accomplish a goal or objective as implemented in a program. It can also include a policy or combination of strategies.
- **Thrive** – To have the capacity to flourish, even in the face of adversity; when wellbeing is strong and getting stronger.

Add Your Own Definitions

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