

Practical Strategies for Incorporating Youth Voice in Programs & Services



When designing and developing programs and services for newcomer youth, it is critical to incorporate their ideas, feedback, and perspectives. Doing so **increases youth engagement and participation, while ensuring programs are more relevant, responsive, and effective** in meeting the needs of newcomer youth.

There are a number of strategies providers can use to better incorporate newcomer youth voices in programs and help develop newcomer youth leaders within their communities. Below are four practical strategies for organizations to consider:

CREATE SPACE TO LISTEN TO NEWCOMER YOUTH INPUT REGULARLY

- 1 **Offer multiple ways for youth to share** ideas and feedback, such as: group discussions, individual check-ins, spontaneous drop-ins, anonymous suggestion boxes, and surveys
- 2 **Review & analyze feedback** on a regular basis
- 3 **Follow through with an action plan** based on youth's feedback
- 4 **Share changes** offered by newcomer youth and **give them credit**



PROVIDE INCENTIVES TO ENCOURAGE NEWCOMER YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

- 1 **Incorporate snacks and meals** at youth meetings and programs
- 2 Provide newcomer youth with **decision-making responsibilities, leadership roles, and mentorship opportunities**
- 3 **Offer monetary stipends or scholarships** for regular participation in a project or program, when available and appropriate





DEVELOP LEADERSHIP SKILLS OF NEWCOMER YOUTH

- 1 **Share & invite** newcomer youth to participate in leadership opportunities
- 2 **Mentor & train** newcomer youth leaders
- 3 Encourage newcomer youth to **recruit & mentor others**

ORGANIZE A NEWCOMER YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL

- 1 **Recruit a diverse group of** newcomer youth advisors with backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives that reflect the communities you serve
- 2 **Create opportunities** for newcomer youth to vote, serve in leadership roles, and participate in decision-making
- 3 **Partner** with newcomer youth to establish project goals, priorities, objectives, and expectations
- 4 **Provide training, mentorship, and leadership opportunities** to support newcomer youth in contributing to the council and project
- 5 **Solicit & incorporate feedback** from youth council members to strengthen programs, services, and overall project outcomes



Creating leadership opportunities and establishing youth advisory councils are powerful ways to elevate newcomer youth voice, but they require time, funding, and organizational capacity.

When resources are limited, these approaches may not always be possible. The strategies in the next section offer practical, low-cost ways to keep newcomer youth meaningfully engaged even when funding is limited.



Centering **Youth Voice** When Resources are Limited



Reduced funding can be challenging, **but limited resources don't have to result in limiting meaningful youth engagement.** Organizations can continue to center newcomer youth voice by inviting youth to provide input into existing programs and services, partnering with and training non-refugee-specific community organizations to reduce barriers, and offering flexible opportunities for youth participation and leadership.



SHIFT ORGANIZATIONAL NORMS

- **Offer staff flexible schedules** to accommodate youth availability without requiring additional staffing resources
- **Have strategic conversations** with staff at all levels of the organization to brainstorm ideas about incorporating youth into existing programs
- **Create volunteer and internship opportunities** for newcomer youth to share their voice and develop leadership skills

PARTNER WITH EXISTING PROGRAMS & OPPORTUNITIES IN THE COMMUNITY FOR NEWCOMER YOUTH

- **Map existing community-based programs and services** that may benefit newcomer youth in your community
- **Develop & maintain relationships** with staff at partner organizations to understand where gaps or barriers exist for newcomer youth engagement
- **Offer support**, such as cultural orientation or strategy sessions, to non-refugee-specific community organizations to address barriers that prevent newcomer youth participation in existing programs

