

USCRI

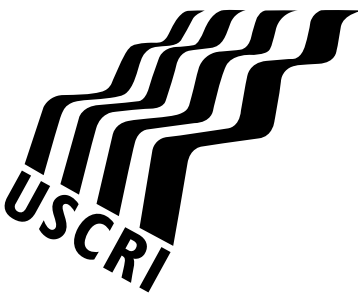
Centering Youth Voice:

Engaging and Including Newcomer Youth in Programs and Services

Refugee Youth Resource Center

June 2026

INTRODUCTIONS



Sean Dinno

Trainer and Resource Specialist, USCRI
Refugee Youth Resource Center

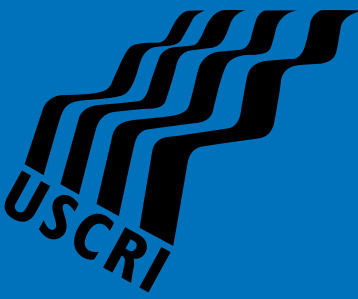
Salimah Shamsuddin

Refugee Resettlement Subject Matter Expert,
USCRI Refugee Youth Resource Center

Laura Weiss

Program Manager, USCRI Refugee Youth
Resource Center

PANELISTS



Timon Gurung

ELL/Refugee Resilience Expert &
Speaker, CoolSpeak



Julia Nett

Youth Development
Professional

WHO ARE WE?



- Refugee Services
- Policy and Advocacy
- Humanitarian Legal Services
- Anti-Trafficking Services
- International Programs
- Children's Services

**Note: USCRI is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)*

REFUGEE YOUTH RESOURCE CENTER



- Building provider capacity to foster refugee youth resilience and child safety
- Services include:
 - Monthly webinars
 - Targeted trainings
 - Case consultation helpline
 - Resource website for clients and providers
 - Community resource directory
- Visit us at refugee-youth.org

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the webinar, you will be able to...

- ① Describe why meaningful inclusion of newcomer youth voice strengthens programs and services for newcomer children and youth
- ② Identify practical ways to incorporate newcomer youth perspectives, leadership, and feedback into programs, including in low resource or non-newcomer-specific settings
- ③ Recall lessons shared directly by newcomer youth and practitioners about the impacts of meaningful engagement and support



Why Youth Voice & Empowerment Matter

INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION



Please share responses in the chat

- How have you seen programs impacted or improved by including newcomer youth voices in the design and development?



THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUTH VOICE



**INCREASED ENGAGEMENT
& MEANINGFUL
PARTICIPATION**



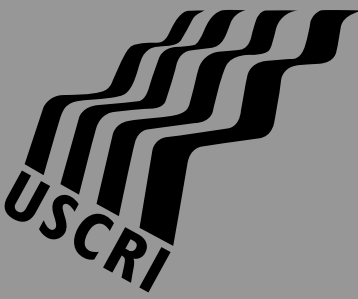
**YOUTH
EMPOWERMENT &
LEADERSHIP**



**TRAUMA-INFORMED,
CULTURALLY-RESPONSIVE
PRACTICE**

A Helpful Framework for Newcomer Youth Engagement

LEVELS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT



YOUTH-LED

COLLABORATE

INVOLVE

CONSULT

INFORM

Adapted from [AECF](#), [UNICEF](#), & [David Driskell](#)

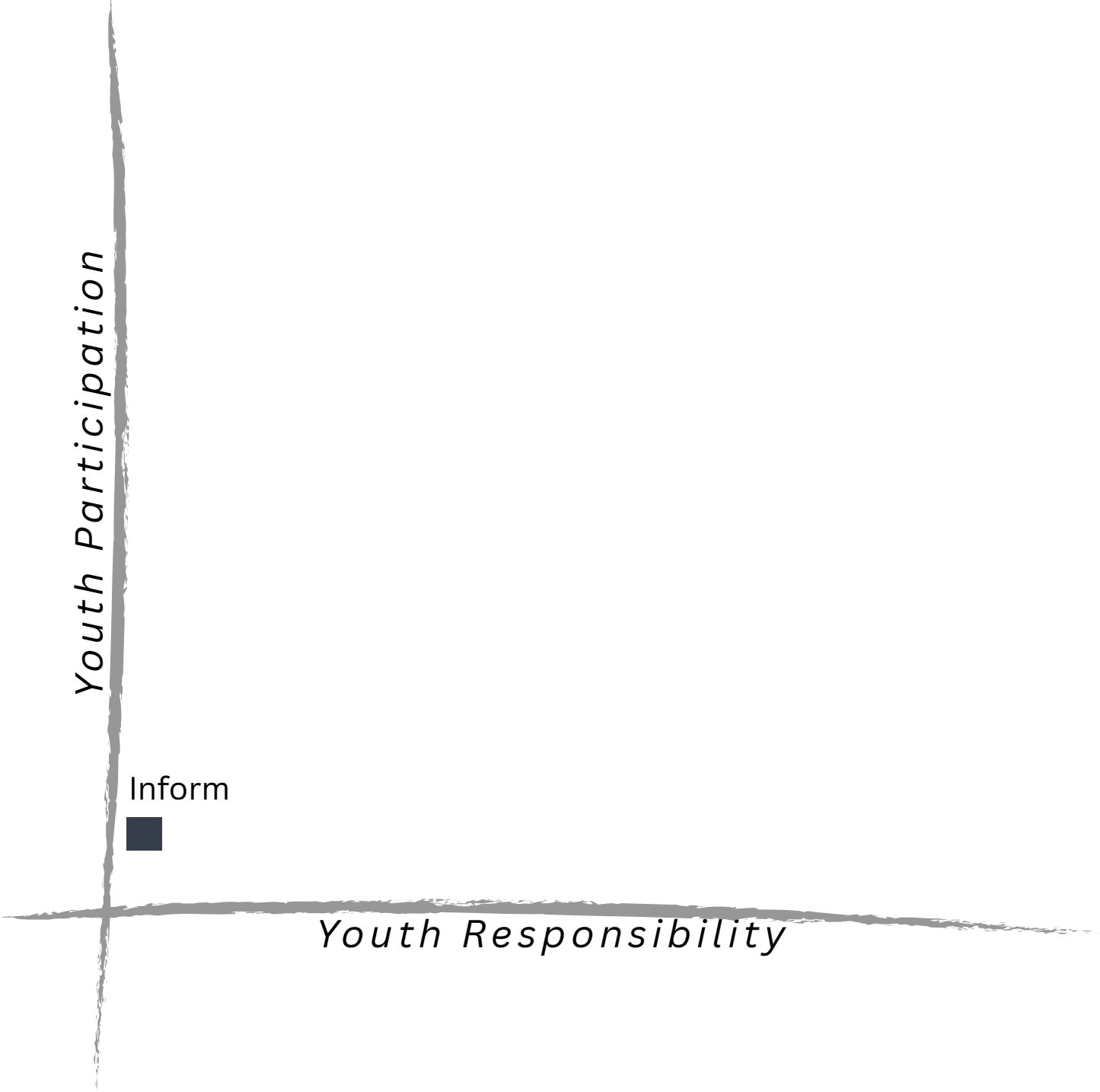
LEVELS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

INFORM

Adult staff plan, design, and implement all aspects of the project, while youth are briefed on the project and assigned roles during implementation.

Example

Adult staff at a local community gardening nonprofit develop an after-school program for newcomer youth, recruit youth in local schools, and assign them to various roles within the project.



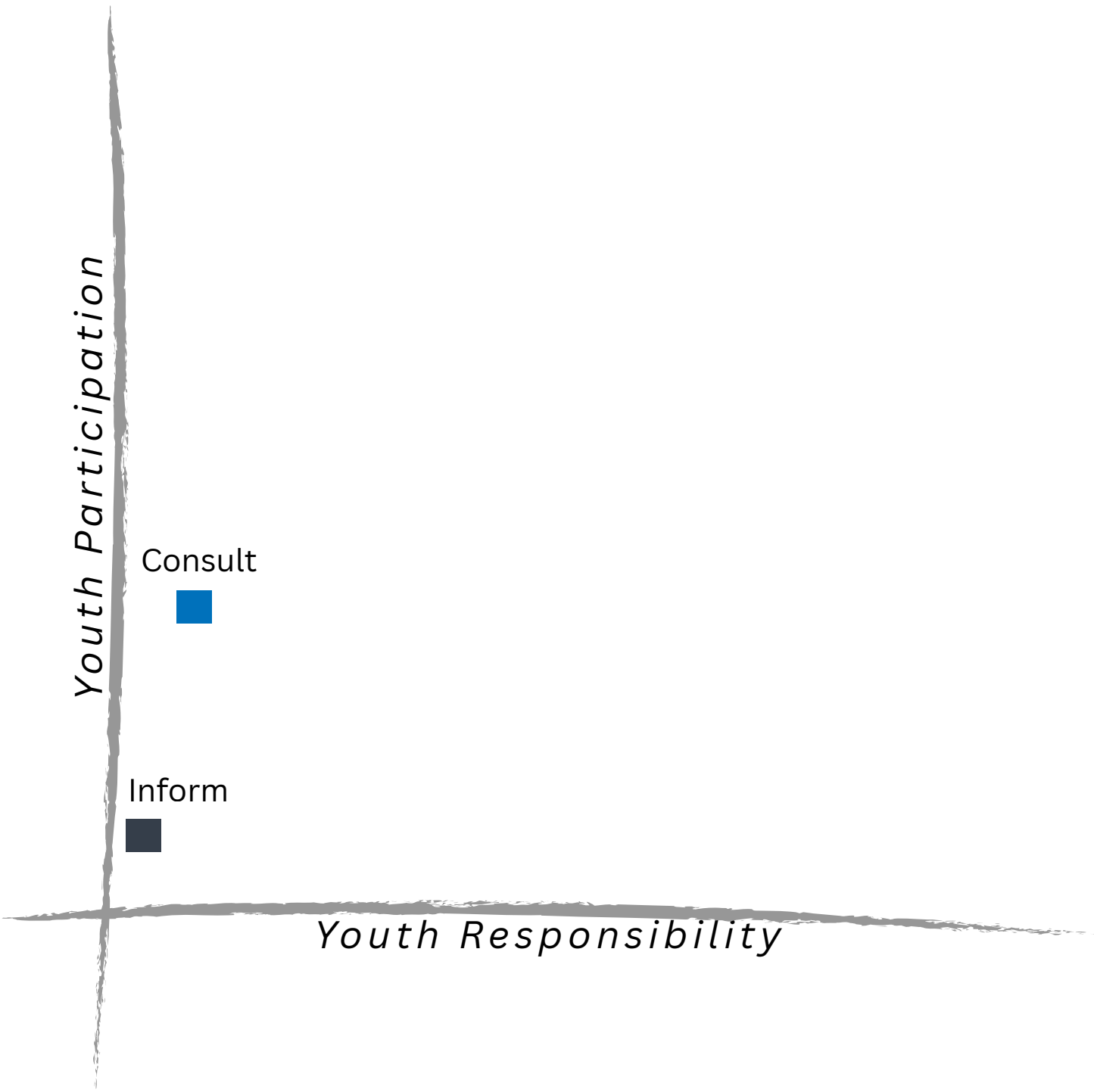
LEVELS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

CONSULT

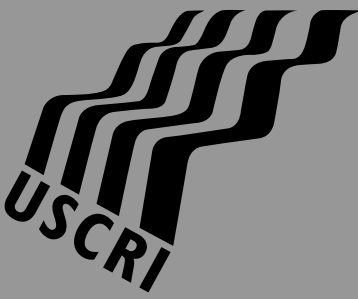
Adult staff communicate with newcomer youth during the program planning phase to gather input and feedback, while managing and executing all aspects of the project.

Example

A Youth Mentorship Program Coordinator invites newcomer youth to complete a feedback survey about a proposed program. Program staff analyze and incorporate feedback into program delivery.



LEVELS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT



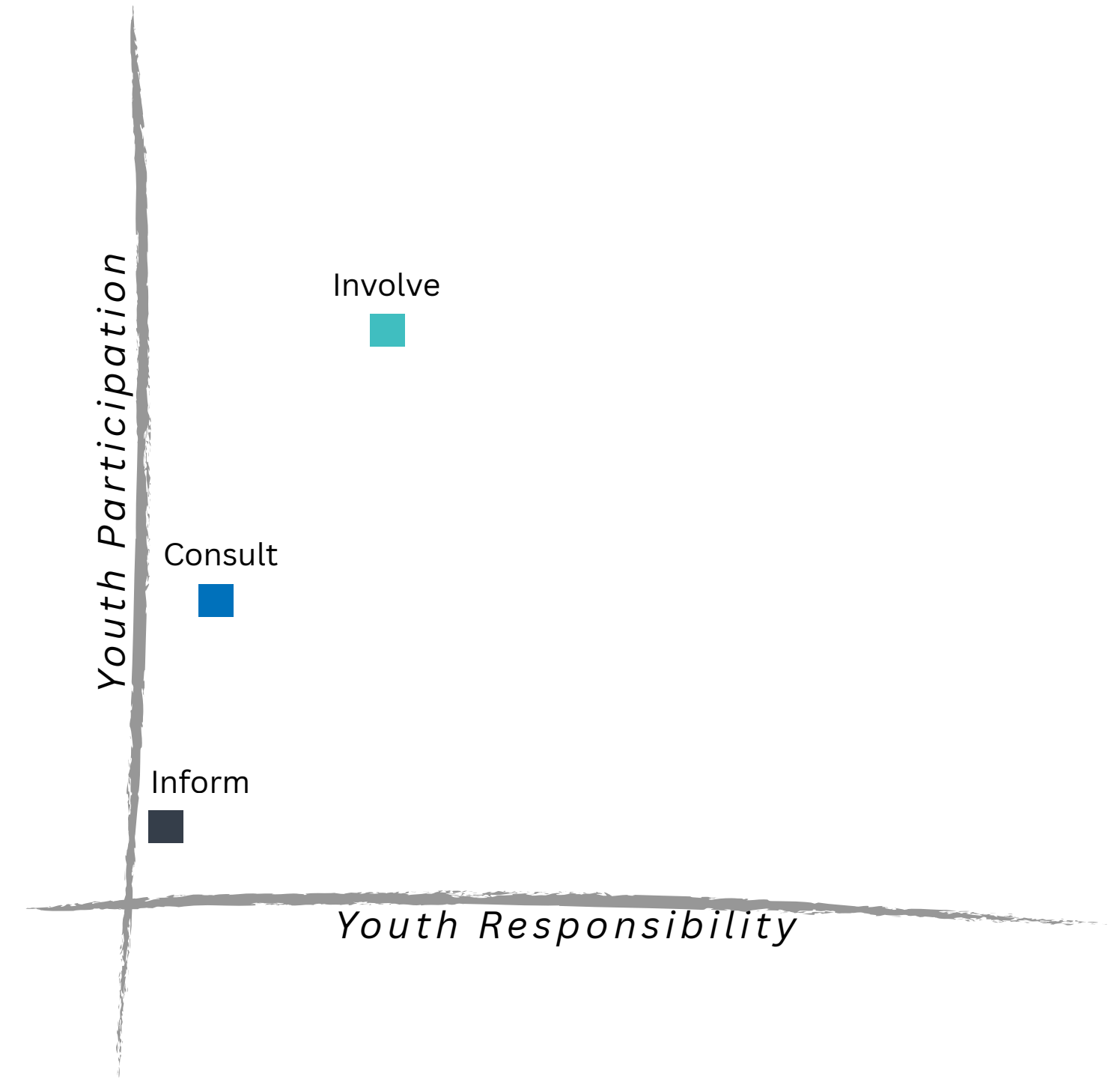
INVOLVE

Newcomer youth participate in the entire program development process while adult staff still execute and manage the project.

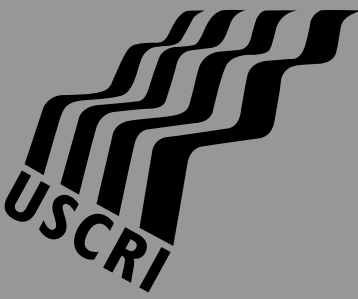
Example

A church attended by many newcomer families involves newcomer youth in planning a neighborhood clean-up. Newcomer youth share ideas on outreach strategies, activities, and program design. Adult staff oversee overall coordination and decision-making.

Adapted from [AECE](#), [UNICEF](#), & [David Driskell](#)



LEVELS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT



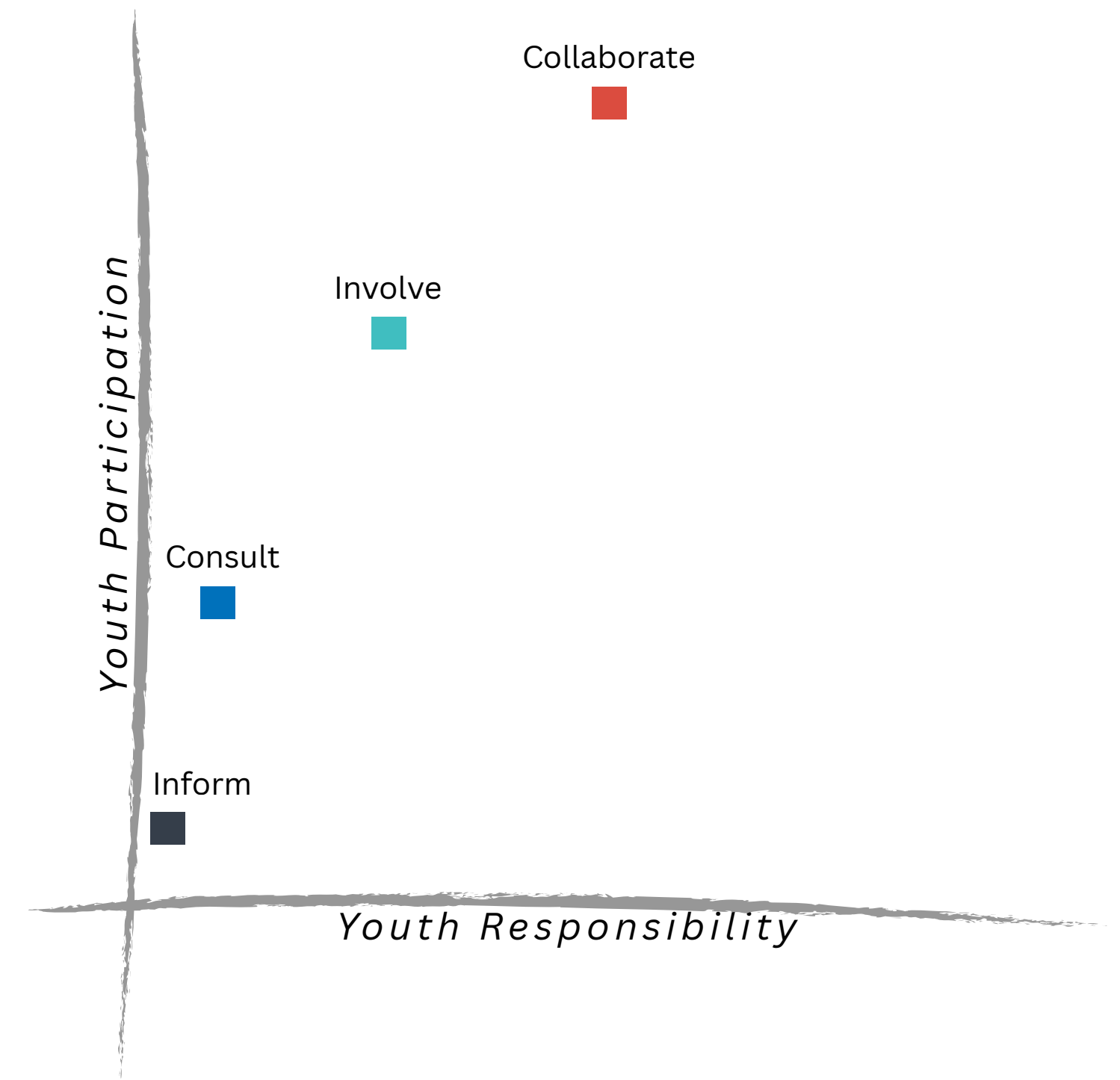
COLLABORATE

Newcomer youth partner with adult staff to cast vision, design, and execute the program deliverables, sharing equal responsibility of the project with adult staff.

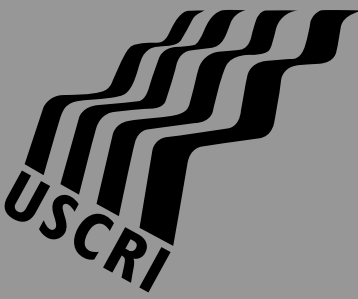
Example

A community-based organization creates a newcomer youth advisory council and appoints youth to help design and implement programs that directly impact them, alongside staff.

Adapted from [AECE](#), [UNICEF](#), & [David Driskell](#)



LEVELS OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT



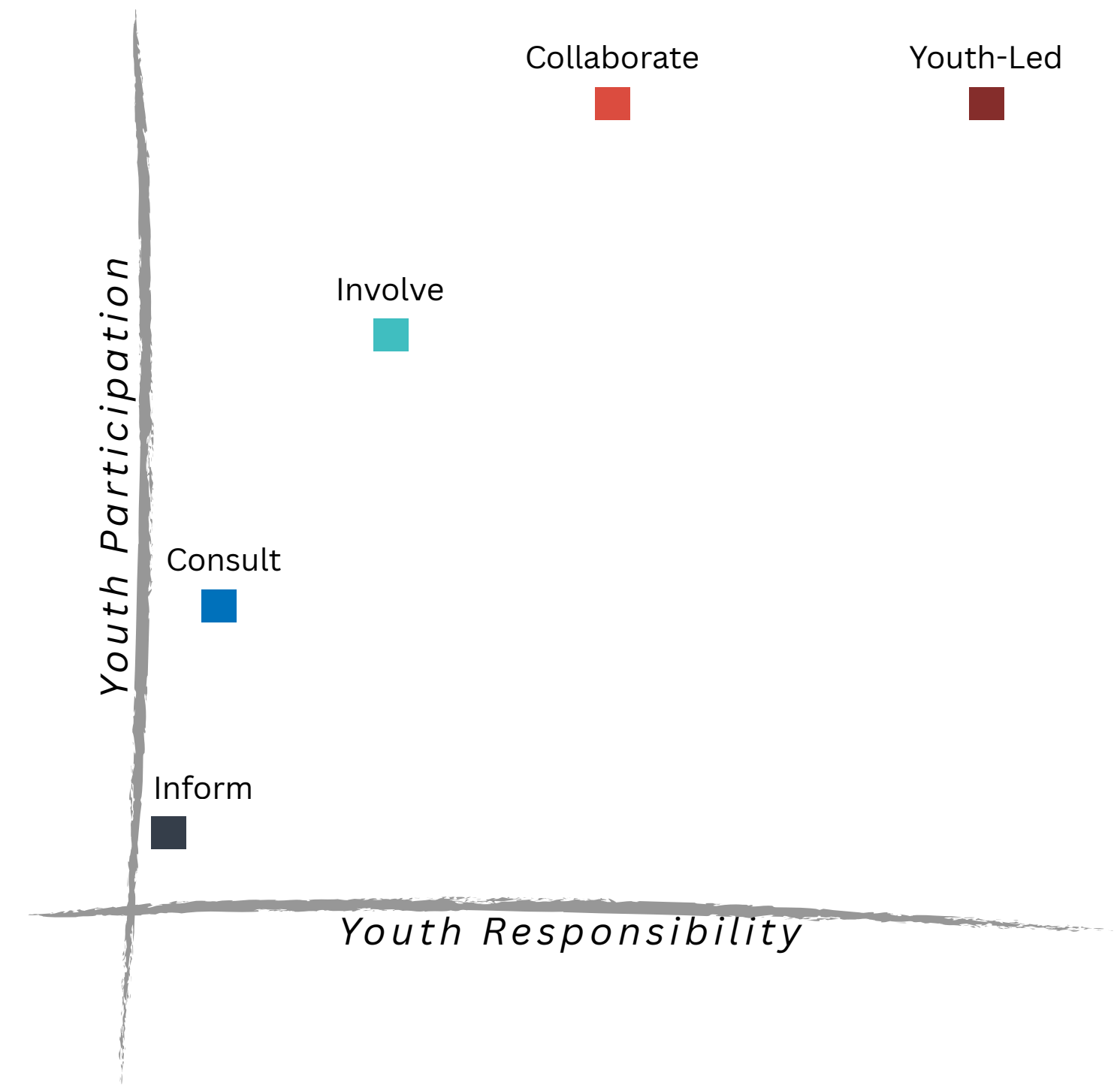
YOUTH-LED

Newcomer youth drive the planning, design, and implementation of the project, and take responsibility for all aspects.

Example

School counselors at a local high school engage a group of newcomer youth students to create and run an orientation for newly-arrived newcomer youth. The group leads in every aspect, including planning, communication, decision-making, implementation, and impact evaluation.

Adapted from [AECE](#), [UNICEF](#), & [David Driskell](#)



INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION



Please share responses in the chat

- Considering the Levels of Youth Engagement, what are ways you been able to empower newcomer children and youth in programs and services?
- What are some of the biggest barriers you have experienced in engaging newcomer youth voices in program design and development?





Practical Strategies for Incorporating Newcomer Youth Voice in Programs & Services



MAKE SPACE TO LISTEN TO NEWCOMER YOUTH INPUT REGULARLY

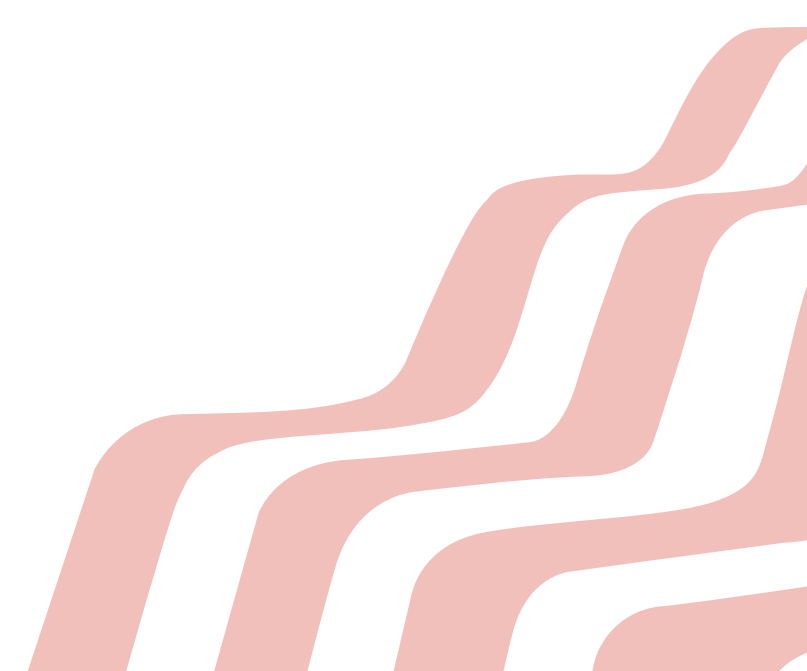
1. **Offer multiple ways to share** ideas and feedback
 - Group discussions
 - Individual check-ins
 - Spontaneous drop-ins
 - Anonymous suggestion boxes
 - Surveys
2. **Review & analyze feedback**
3. **Follow through with an action plan** based on feedback
4. **Share changes** offered by newcomer youth & **give them credit**





PROVIDE INCENTIVES TO ENCOURAGE NEWCOMER YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

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





DEVELOP LEADERSHIP SKILLS OF NEWCOMER YOUTH

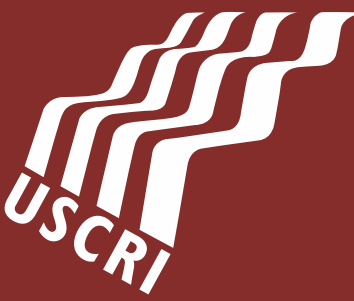
1. **Share & invite** newcomer youth to leadership opportunities
 - Clubs
 - Faith based communities
 - Civic engagement (camps, workshops)
 - Youth advisory councils
2. **Mentor & train** newcomer youth leaders
3. Encourage newcomer youth to **recruit & mentor others**



ORGANIZE A NEWCOMER YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL

1. **Recruit a diverse group** of newcomer youth advisors from various backgrounds and experiences
2. **Create opportunities** for newcomer youth to vote for and hold leadership positions on the advisory council
3. **Partner** with newcomer youth to establish project goals, objectives, and expectations
4. **Provide training, mentorship, and leadership opportunities** to support newcomer youth's contributions to the council and project
5. **Solicit & incorporate feedback** from council members to strengthen programs, services, and overall project outcomes

CENTERING YOUTH VOICE IN TIMES OF REDUCED FUNDING



■ Shift organizational norms

- Offer staff flexible schedules to accommodate youth availability
- Have strategic conversations about incorporating youth into existing programs
- Create volunteer and internship opportunities for newcomer youth

■ Partner with existing programs and opportunities in the community for newcomer youth

- **Map** existing community-based programs and services for newcomer youth
- **Develop & maintain relationships** with partner organization
- **Offer support** to non-refugee-specific community organizations



PRACTICAL STRATEGIES RESOURCE



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 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 that can be used to meaningfully include newcomer youth voices and support the development of 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 including: 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 feedback
- 4 Share changes offered by newcomer youth & 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/or appropriate

refugee-youth.org

The production of this material was supported by Grant #108B0004 from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). Its contents are solely the responsibility of the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) and do not necessarily represent the official views of ACF.

DEVELOP LEADERSHIP SKILLS OF NEWCOMER YOUTH

- 1 Share & invite newcomer youth to 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 communities being served
- 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 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.

refugee-youth.org

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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

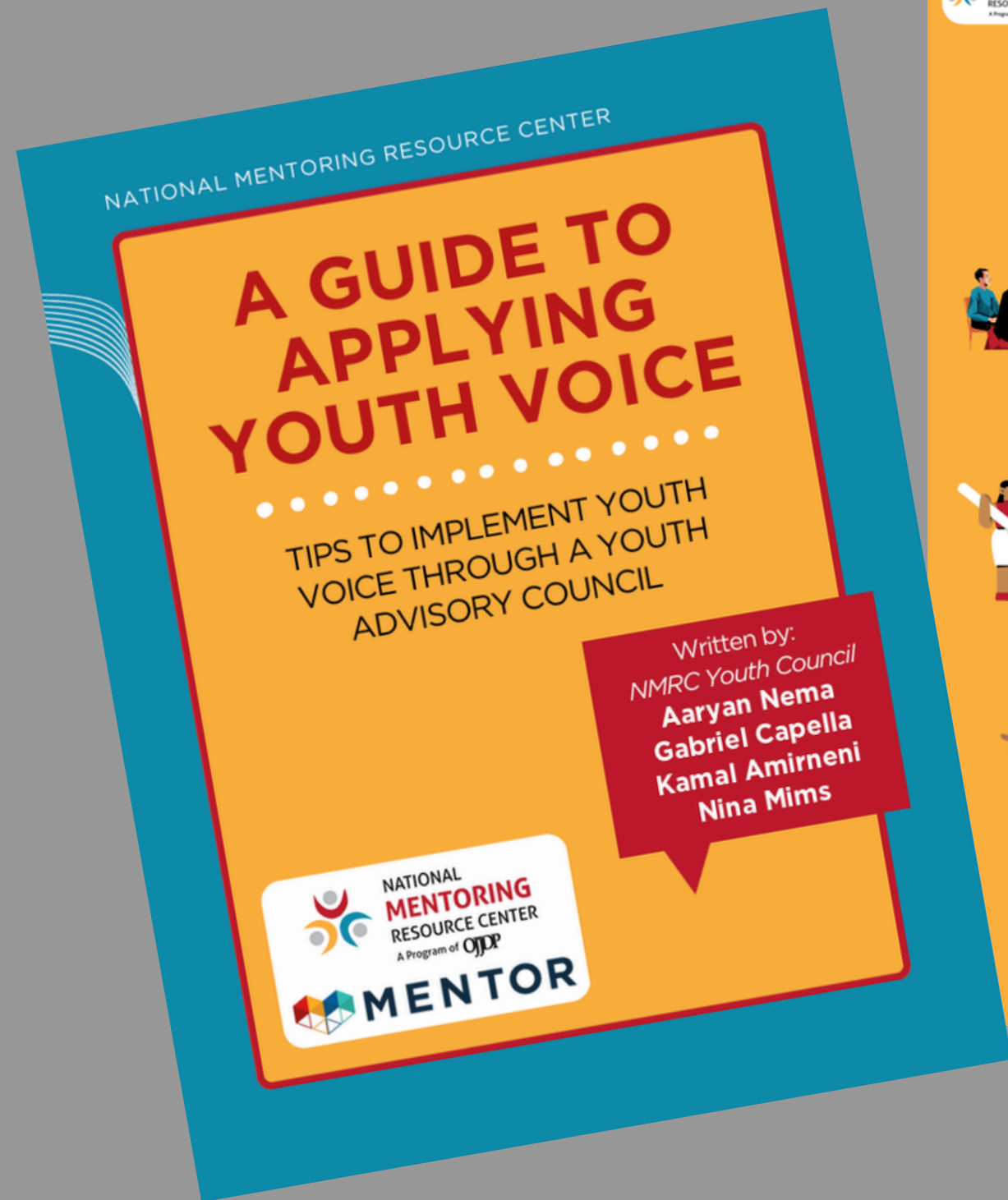
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Access these handouts at <https://www.refugee-youth.org/training-library/>

A GUIDE TO APPLYING YOUTH VOICE

Tips to Implement Youth Voice through a Youth Advisory Council

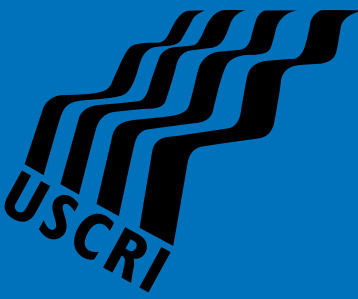


Source: [National Mentoring Resource Center](#)



Panel Discussion

PANELISTS



Timon Gurung

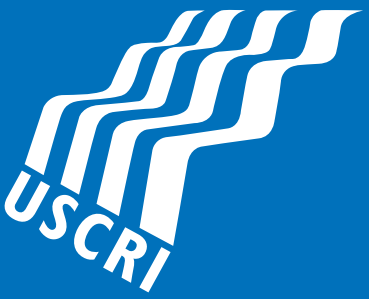
ELL/Refugee Resilience Expert &
Speaker, CoolSpeak



Julia Nett

Youth Development
Professional

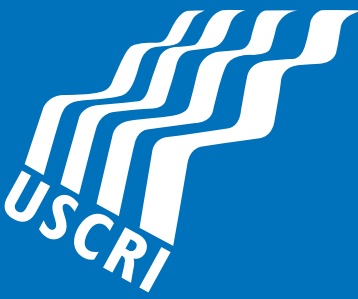
PANEL DISCUSSION



Looking back on your own journey, what inspired you to advocate for newcomer youth? What support or opportunities do you wish existed at that time?



PANEL DISCUSSION

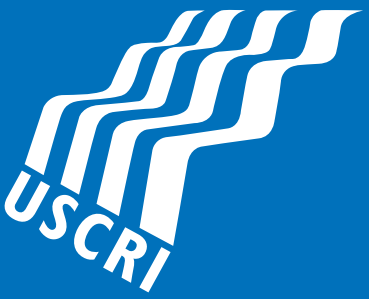


Looking back on your own journey, what inspired you to advocate for newcomer youth? What support or opportunities do you wish existed at that time?

Can you give an example of a time when you saw or experienced engaging newcomer youth voice in action?

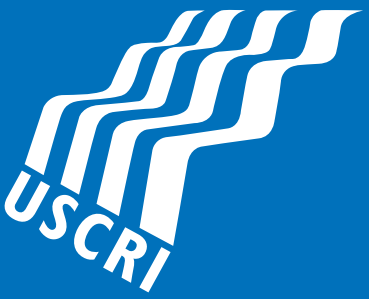


PANEL DISCUSSION



How have you been able to advocate for or develop trauma-informed, culturally responsive programming for newcomer children and youth? What recommendations do you have for providers?

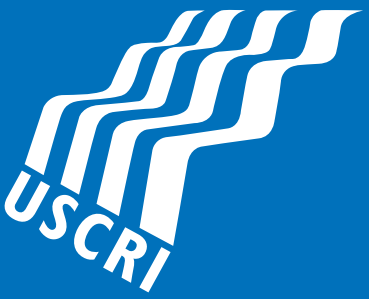
PANEL DISCUSSION



How have you been able to advocate for or develop trauma-informed, culturally responsive programming for newcomer children and youth? What recommendations do you have for providers?

From your personal experience, how can providers do a better job of creating an environment where newcomer youth's perspectives are heard and included?

PANEL DISCUSSION



Based on your experience, what does authentic youth partnership look like in practice beyond surveys or one-time consultations? What are the components that make a youth-centered, youth-led program successful?



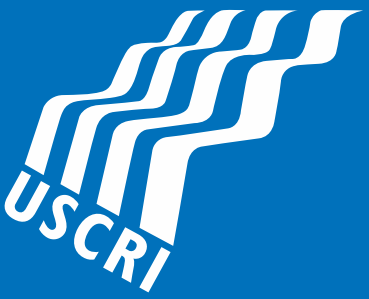
PANEL DISCUSSION

Based on your experience, what does authentic youth partnership look like in practice beyond surveys or one-time consultations? What are the components that make a youth-centered, youth-led program successful?

How do you balance organizational requirements, timelines, or funding constraints with meaningful youth engagement?



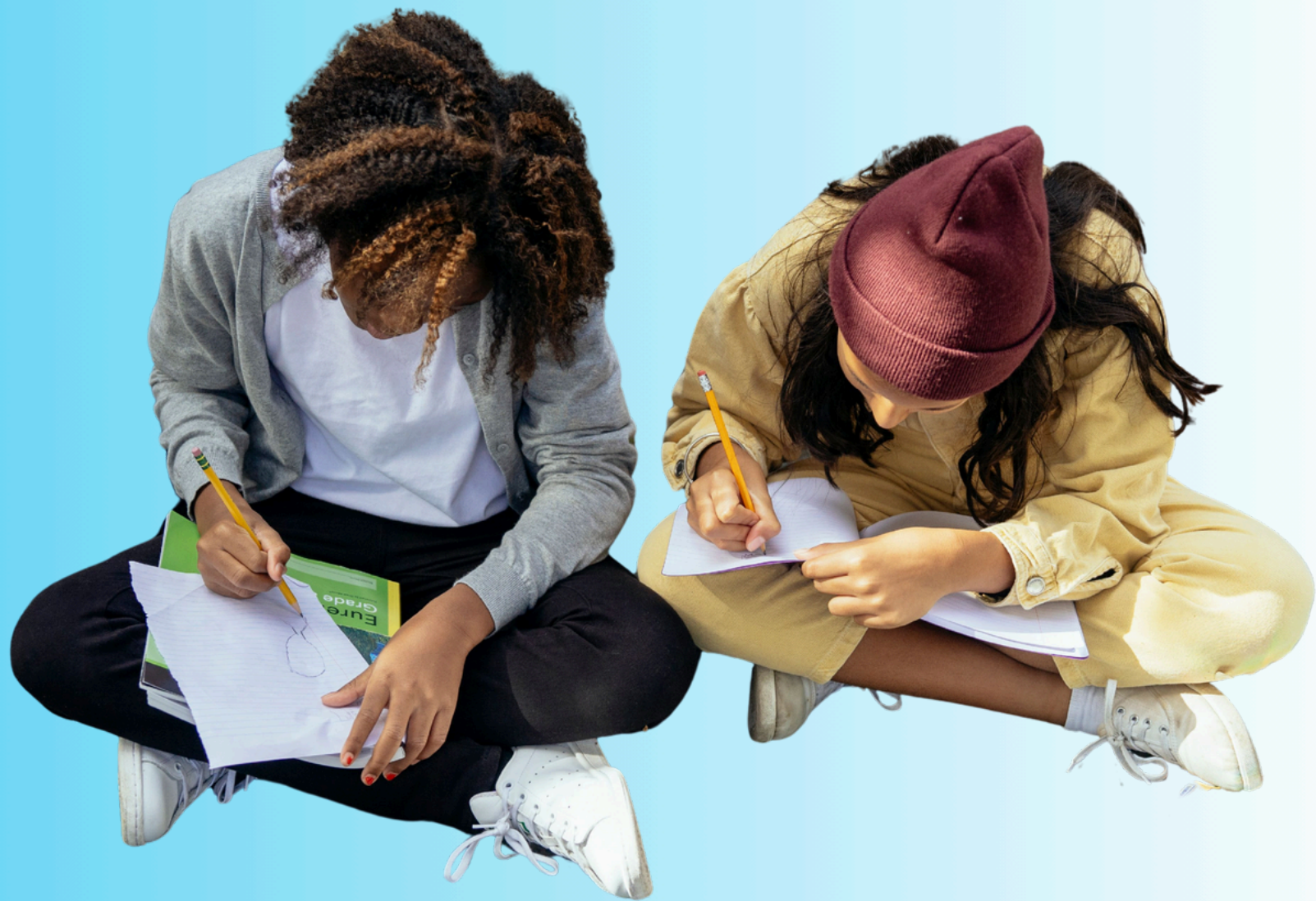
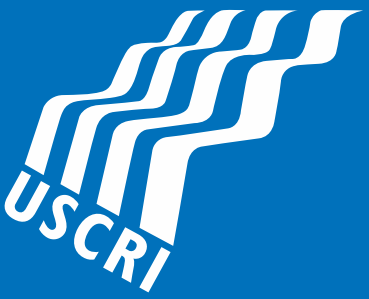
PANEL DISCUSSION



If you have been involved in or worked with a youth advisory council, what were some of the accomplishments of council?



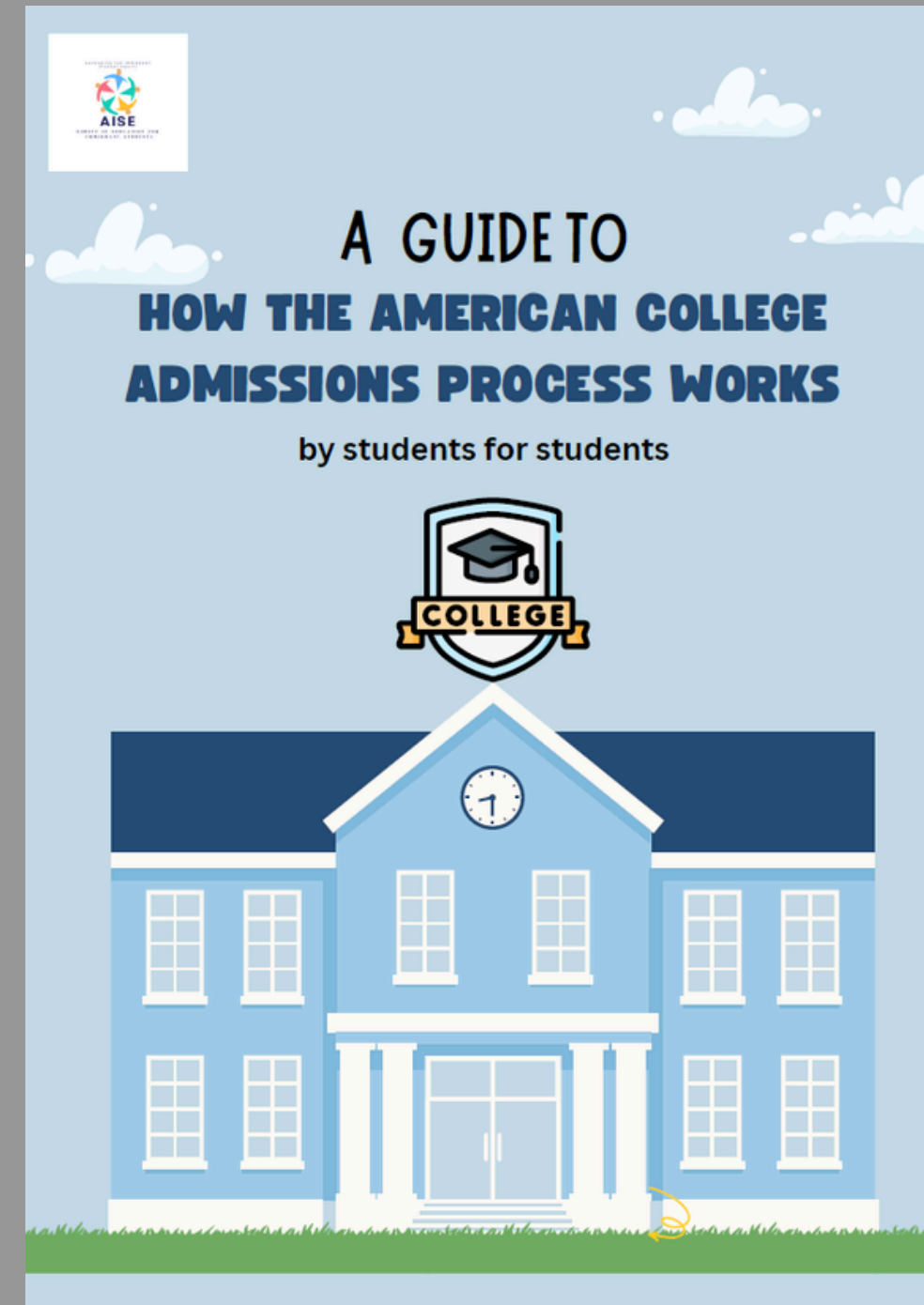
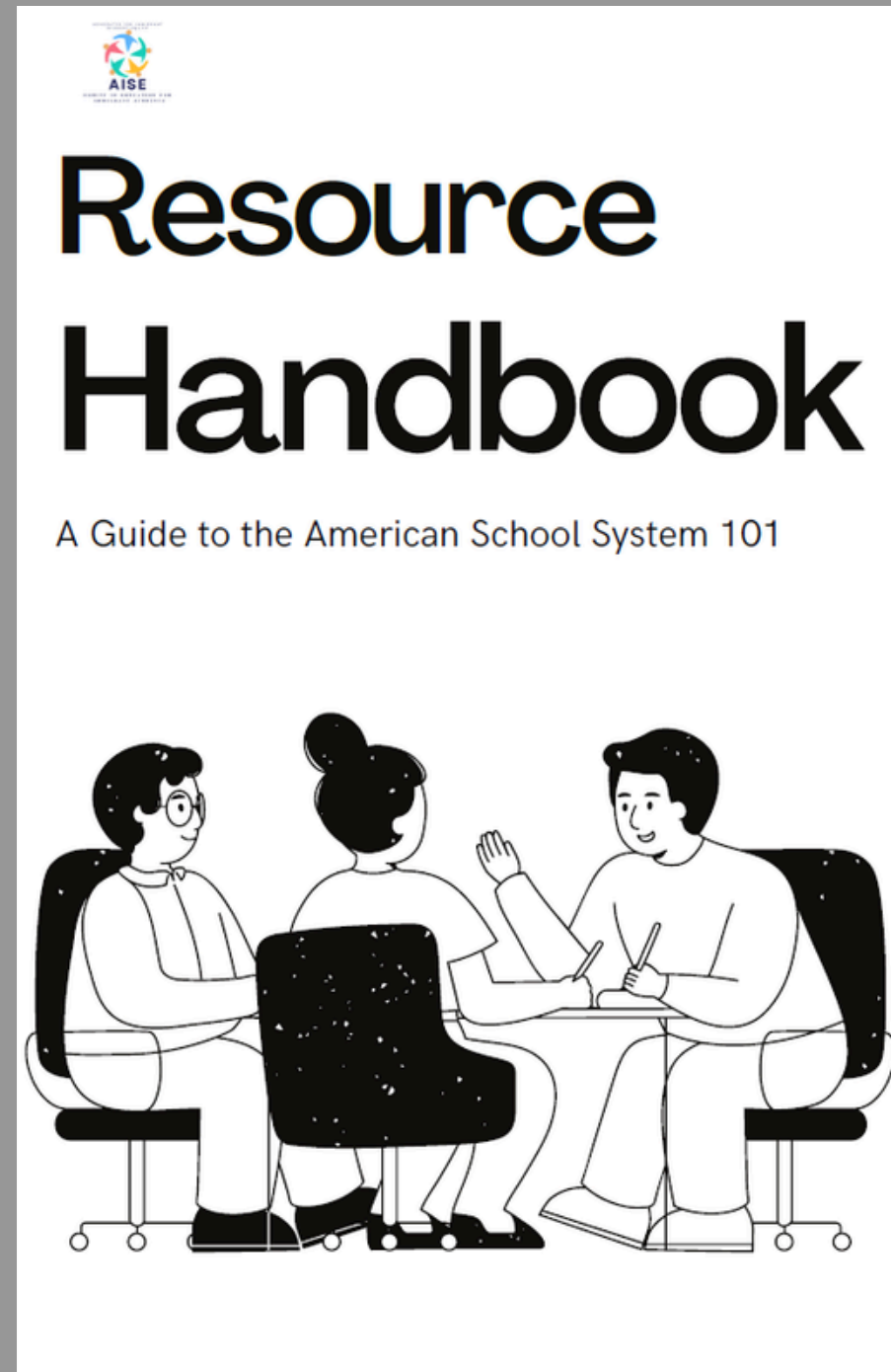
PANEL DISCUSSION



If you have been involved in or worked with a youth advisory council, what were some of the accomplishments of council?

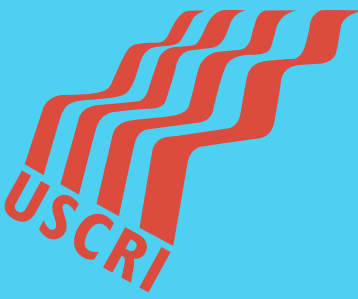
What is one piece of practical advice that providers can implement today to better engage newcomer youth voice?

JOSEPH'S RESOURCES



Source: Advocates for Immigrant Student Equity

TIMON'S WEBSITE



1-888-300-1880 info@coolspeak.com

f X @ y d 0 Items

coolspeak.
The Youth Engagement Company

SPEAKERS PROGRAMS VIRTUAL LEARNING COOLTRIPS EVENTS STORE BLOG BOOK COOLSPEAK

Timon Gurung

BOOK TIMON MEDIA PACKET

"Taking Action Turns Fears Into Courage."
ELL/Refugee Resiliency Expert & Speaker

Born in a Nepalese refugee camp, Timon Gurung is a well-known youth motivational speaker and leadership facilitator. Drawing from his own refugee experiences, he knows firsthand the challenges adapting to a new country. He turned his initial fear of communication into a deep passion for it and now inspires students to do the same, so that their stories are heard and their impact is felt.

As a first-generation college graduate with a degree in communication, he embodies the "American Dream" and teaches students to see challenges as hidden opportunities. He currently serves as a Program Coordinator and Success Coach at Engaged Leaders, Inc., where he is helping immigrant and refugee students develop leadership skills, decision making skills and character. Timon champions personal responsibility and proudly highlights the vital role immigrants and refugees play in shaping society.

BOOK TIMON MEDIA PACKET

NEXT SECTION ↓



<https://coolspeak.com/youth-motivational-speakers/timon-gurung/>



Conclusion & Resources

PRESENTATION TAKEAWAYS

- **Determine** what levels of youth engagement are appropriate for your organization, program, and audience
- **Create opportunities** for newcomer youth to share feedback regularly and act on it
- **Provide incentives** to encourage newcomer youth engagement
- **Invest** in newcomer youth leadership development
- **Initiate strategic conversations** about shifting organizational norms
- **Discuss collaboration** with existing community based organizations

REFLECTION

Based on today's training, share one thing you will do differently to support newcomer youth and families in your community.



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REFUGEE YOUTH RESOURCE CENTER

Improving outcomes for refugee children, youth, and their families through resources, education, and provider support



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

- ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION | [Strategies for Youth Engagement](#)
- ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION | [Youth Engagement Strategies Continuum](#)
- UNICEF | [Why Participation Matters](#)
- UNICEF | [Model of Youth Participation](#)
- ANDREAS KARSTEN | [Different Models and Concepts of \(Youth\) Participation](#)
- LAURA FURR COUNSELING | [Authentic Youth Engagement Foundations](#)
- URBAN INSTITUTE | [How Human Service Agencies Can Authentically Young People in Improving Youth Safety Net Programs](#)
- NEWMAN'S OWN FOUNDATION | [Empowering youth Leaders: 5 Strategies to Inspire Youth Engagement](#)
- JOBS FOR THE FUTURE | [Five Standard for High-Quality Youth Leadership Opportunities](#)
- SEARCH INSTITUTE | [Four Strategies for Elevating Youth Voice and Leadershipm in Youth Development Programs](#)
- EDUCATION NORTHWEST | [Four Principles for Meaningfully Incorporating Youth Voice into Programs and Services](#)
- AFTER SCHOOL ALLIANCE | [Youth Voice Toolkit](#)
- NATIONAL PARTNERSHIP FOR STUDENT SUCCESS | [Amplifying Youth Voice: Strategies for Helping Youth Have Their Voices Heard](#)
- GERISON LANSDOWN | [A Framework for Monitoring and Evaluating Children's Participation](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCILS

- NATIONAL MENTORING RESOURCE CENTER | [A Guide to Apply Youth Voice](#)
- LEAGUE OF OREGON CITIES | [Empowering Youth: Building Effective Youth Advisory Councils](#)
- NATIONAL YOUTH LEADERSHIP COUNCIL | [8 Steps to Establish a Thriving Youth Advisory Council](#)
- UMASS CHAN MEDICAL SCHOOL | [Youth Council Toolkit](#)
- YOUTHPower LEARNING | [Youth Advisory Councils: Eight Steps to Consider Before You Engage](#)
- UNITED NATIONS | [UN Youth Delegate Programme](#)

Join us for an upcoming
training workshop!

Addressing the Mental Health of Refugee Youth & Children, Part III: Supporting Newcomer Children & Youth Experiencing Suicidal Ideation and Self- Harm

TOPICS ADDRESSED



Early warning signs of
mental health crises
among newcomer
children and youth



Key approaches in
preventing and preparing
for mental health crises



Core strategies for crisis
response, including de-
escalation and safety
planning



Case scenarios to apply
the information learned

Wednesday,
July 29th, 2026
2:00-3:30pm ET

Register here:

[https://refugees-
org.zoom.us/webinar
/register/WN_FEDm
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w#/registration](https://refugees-
org.zoom.us/webinar
/register/WN_FEDm
p9c8SliHRdTvdHjgL
w#/registration)



WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

Service providers working with refugee children
and youth (resettlement agencies, child welfare,
schools, health/mental health providers, anti-
trafficking organizations, and others)

*CATCH UP ON PART I & II

If you missed **Part I**, access the webinar and
slides [HERE](#), or if you missed **Part II**, access
the webinar and slides [HERE](#).

Thank You!

Contact Us:

refugeeyouthrc@refugees.org