Culture in Evaluation # 9: Youth

The aim of this tool is to facilitate your evaluation work with young people by identifying generational characteristics and describing how you can best capitalize on their energy, talent and enthusiasm for your tobacco control efforts.

The Youth Population of California

While there is no real consensus on what ages constitute “youth”, this guide defines the term as including both adolescent (age 12-17) as well as young adult (age 18-24) populations. Over 7.2 million youth comprise 22.9% of California’s total population—5.5% are young adolescents aged 10-14, 5.7% are older adolescents aged 15-17 and 11.8% are young adults aged 18-24 years (CHIS, 2007). These young people constitute a large generation, second only to Baby Boomers (Sweeney, 2006).

About Making Generalizations

As with other cultural groups, the individuals who comprise this group are not homogenous. They differ in ethnic origins, lifestyles, beliefs, attitudes and preferences. So at best, this guide can only offer a number of generalizations about ways to work with and involve young people in evaluation.

Generational Characteristics

Young people, especially teens, are still finding their way in life. They are subject to an influx of changes, uncertainties and pressures while attempting to navigate developmental transitions from childhood into adulthood (Caskey & Anfara, 2007). As they enter the workplace, they encounter the societal expectations of older generations who adhere to a different set of norms (Spiegel, 2010). Collaborations with youth can be mutually beneficial if you understand what they value and how to keep them motivated.

Identified as Generation Y, The Net Generation, Millennials, Gen Y and Generation Next, they are typified by the following traits:

+ They are optimistic, have a volunteering spirit and want to positively impact the world around them (Spiegel, 2010).
They tend to be highly competitive achievers who are quite confident about their abilities. They expect to be given responsible roles at the outset, yet they need continual feedback, structure and supervision (Allen, 2008).

They are extremely tech savvy as well as street smart. They know how to access information but often lack critical thinking and good writing skills (Feiertag & Berge, 2008; Reeves, 2008; Sweeney, 2006).

Having grown up in the age of connectivity, this generation is sociable, inclusive and enjoys working collaboratively. They operate best in an informal environment where output rather than face time is the measure of productivity (Raines & Arnsperger, 2010).

They seek projects that constitute professional development opportunities. Repetitive or menial tasks are viewed as an affront to their sense of self-worth (Sweeney, 2006).

They want their ideas and identities to be treated with respect, despite their youth (Raines, 2002). They admire leaders who exhibit integrity and capability, and look to them for mentorship and assistance (Allen, 2008).

They require transparency. They want to know what the boss knows and expect to be treated like others within the organization with more seniority, age or ability (Silbert-Geiger, 2010).

**Role of Tobacco**

Because adolescence is a period of experimentation and testing boundaries, it is a critical time when youth are prone to try tobacco products. Nearly all first use of tobacco occurs before high school graduation (Al-Delaimy et al., 2008). Individuals who begin using tobacco early on are more likely to continue to use it over time and to a greater degree (Elders, 1994). They are also at increased risk of developing long-term health consequences. Even more problematic, tobacco use is often a precursor to other risky youth behaviors such as alcohol, marijuana and other drug use (Elders, 1994).

Despite having the lowest youth smoking prevalence rates among all 50 states, youth in California remain a priority population for tobacco control efforts since they are aggressively targeted by the tobacco industry. In fact, the dramatic 12-year decline in youth tobacco use in effect since 1993 was reversed in 2005 when rates began stalling or even climbing (CHIS, 2007). As of 2007, overall youth smoking prevalence rates declined, with young adolescents at 0.8%, older adolescents at 8.6% and young adults at 14.7%. However, among young males smoking prevalence plateaued in the youngest group and increased in the young adult (age 18-24) population to a rate of 19.4%. The latest tobacco fad, particularly among college age men, is hookah use; in 2005 20.2% of young adult males reported having used it (Al-Delaimy et al., 2008). Overall tobacco use rates are even higher when chew, or smokeless tobacco, is factored in.
Young people are an important market for the tobacco industry because they are a source of new (and potentially lifelong) customers. In 2005, the tobacco industry spent over $13.5 billion on advertising and promotions in magazines and stores, on billboards and at sporting or entertainment events (NCI, 2008). Tobacco companies use the music industry to reach teens through song lyrics, concerts and festivals (AP, 2010). Tobacco use is portrayed as glamorous or “cool” in movies and on television. Youth are drawn in by promotional items and samples marketed specifically to teens and young adults. They are also exposed to smoking imagery on the internet through virtual teen smoking groups and posts on social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook. The video-sharing website YouTube is also being infiltrated by tobacco-related marketing such as stealth advertising—where people are hired to make review videos about specific cigarette brands—and a new category of posts called “smoking fetish” videos—which promote sexy behavior with cigarette use (Kim et al., 2010).

Research shows that tobacco advertising preys upon the desires of youth for acceptance and enhanced self-image and “creates the perception that smoking will satisfy these needs” (NCI, 2008; DiFranza et al., 2006). Such advertising makes smoking seem more prevalent to youth, more acceptable and more the norm (Elders, 1994). One study found that as much as a third of underage experimentation with smoking was attributable to tobacco marketing efforts (Pierce et al., 1998).

Involving Youth in Evaluation Activities

Involving youth in the designing and implementing of evaluation can help your program reach its goals and improve the validity of your results. Depending on what you are trying to do, young people can play a number of different roles. If you are investigating youth populations, you might want to involve them to a greater degree in the evaluation process, whereas if they serve only as data collectors or take part in community presentations with adult populations, their roles might be narrower in scope. When thinking about how deeply to involve them, carefully weigh the benefits and drawbacks of doing so.

Degrees of Youth Involvement

In outlining how young people can contribute to community evaluation research, Checkoway & Richards-Schuster (2003) defined four levels of potential youth involvement:

- The most extractive method is to utilize young people as subjects from whom you hope to obtain information about youth issues in order to reach them better. However, limiting their role to mere data sources without input into evaluation parameters or results may lead to your missing key insights because the wrong questions were asked or the significance of some data was misinterpreted.

- At the next level of involvement, young people serve as advisors. Recognizing the value of their unique perspective, you might ask them to advise on data collection instruments and the best places and times to find participants. Thus,
with a minimal investment on your part, you can obtain advantageous insights that improve your data quality (Powers and Tiffany, 2006).

- In a collaborative process where youth are treated as partners, they are given a voice in the decisionmaking and acquire skills while contributing to the evaluation design, assisting in the development of data collection instruments, collecting and perhaps even interpreting the data. Although this approach requires the time and effort to build relationships and develop their skills, the youth will be more invested in carrying out the work.

- The highest level of involvement is an evaluation process led by young people with adults playing a supportive rather than a directive role. In this approach, youth feel empowered to make their own decisions and formulate research that is of practical interest and use to them.

**Connecting with and Recruiting Youth**

To find young people who may be interested in getting involved in your evaluation activities, you can connect with organizations that serve youth or go to locations where they hang out. Schools and clubs are naturally a prime source for students, but you’ll need to gain permission and access from teachers and administration. Other connection points are churches, afterschool activities, non-profit organizations, Friday Night Live programs, sporting events, local youth councils, social networks, malls, libraries and parks. With the many other agencies and activities young people can be involved with, finding enough volunteers can be difficult. To get around this, you might try partnering with other organizations that already have youth on hand. Another strategy is to minimize scheduling conflicts by holding longer but less frequent work sessions.

**Ways to Motivate Youth to Participate**

Young people have a lot going on in their lives. In order to attract them to your program’s efforts, frame the issues you work on in ways that appeal to their sensibilities: Tobacco kills people; secondhand smoke causes asthma in children; the tobacco industry preys upon teen vulnerabilities and markets “cool” images to entrap generations of kids addicted to the over 100 toxic substances in cigarettes; tobacco litter is an environmental hazard that is poisoning our parks, beaches and waterways. To find out which messages are most compelling to youth in your community, talk to teachers or staff of service organizations that work with youth or ask a few young people directly.

This goal-oriented generation is motivated by opportunities to make new friends, grow personally and make a difference in the community. Understand how Millennials learn best and then lay out tasks in terms of what’s in it for them. Use promotional items, food, celebrations and trips to inject fun into what you do. Offer community service hours, awards, training, skill-building opportunities and college recommendations as incentives (Lemp, 2010). Create avenues for youth participants to interact with the
community, share evaluation results, communicate to decisionmakers and media, and see the tangible impact their efforts are making (Silbert-Geiger, 2010). Including budding change-makers in program activities will help build the self-esteem and self-worth of your volunteers, which is especially critical for adolescents.

Keep youth volunteers motivated by finding meaningful ways for them to contribute and grow in your organization. Include young volunteers in trainings. Allow for some social time at every meeting so it’s not all about work. Provide opportunities for youth to discuss their personal experiences with the issue at hand (CYAN, 2010). Develop positions or titles for each member of your youth coalition. Create youth leaders who can mentor newer members of the group. Acknowledge their ideas, opinions and feedback and celebrate every success. Connect with other tobacco prevention youth and plan joint activities where they interact (Silbert-Geiger, 2010).

Harness the creative energy of young people working with you. Tap into their desires to be in the limelight and make positive change by hosting video, public service announcement (PSA) or poster contests to develop media and materials about smoke-free living. Winning entries can be posted on YouTube, Facebook and/or your organization’s website. Invite volunteers to create a Facebook page for your project and ask them to take the lead on maintaining it and responding to posts. Learn to communicate via social networks like MySpace, Facebook, Google, Ning or LinkedIn and create an online community to hold discussions with young people as well as others (Silbert-Geiger, 2010).

**Things to Be Aware of**

While young people can bring a lot of enthusiasm, creativity and volunteer power to your project, there are a number of considerations you should take into account:

- You must obtain signed parental consent for adolescent involvement. Travel arrangements for those too young to drive is an additional factor in scheduling meetings and events.
- Students tend to be involved in a lot of activities. They can often be unreliable, late and lax about returning calls or emails (Lemp, 2010). Set up a peer contact network to make sure everyone gets important messages about when and where to meet. Use the mode of communication that youth respond to best: texting, Facebook wall posts or email rather than phone calls.
- This generation often lacks self-directed focus or a comprehension of the steps it takes to achieve something (Speigel, 2010). So lay out the specifics of what needs to get done and how their tasks fit into the larger picture of your efforts. Use rubrics and provide examples of the quality you expect.
- Millennials need constant (even daily) feedback (Feiertag & Berge, 2008). To them, a lack of feedback translates as: “You are doing something wrong” (Raines & Arnsparger, 2010). Convey your expectations early on and check in with them frequently to monitor their progress. Don’t wait for them to come to
you when they hit a roadblock. Give constructive yet specific feedback about what you need. This can constitute a significant investment of staff time, so make sure it’s a good trade-off for your organization.

- Because young people oftentimes don’t have a good sense of boundaries or respect for hierarchy, their communication style can be perceived as too direct or challenging authority. In actuality, they seek supportive relationships with talented leaders who are willing to be open to their ideas (Raines, 2002).

- Stay up-to-date on events and issues that are affecting youth by reading magazines that they read, visiting social media sites, and watching news and TV programs geared to young audiences. Knowing the latest TV shows or new musicians they might tune into can help bridge the communication gap and hip you to inside jokes (Silbert-Geiger, 2010).

- Understand that texting is a social norm for the Net Generation. If they text during meetings or conversations, don’t take offense. They have grown up in an environment where multi-tasking is a necessity and instant communication is required (Silbert-Geiger, 2010).

Planning an Evaluation of Youth Populations

Before starting your evaluation, it is important to understand youth culture. A little extra work done up front to identify key players, beliefs and norms of this group can improve your evaluation and save you time in the long run.

- Collect demographic information about youth in the community in order to identify the characteristics of who you are dealing with. Knowing the various subgroups (e.g., LGBT, ethnic groups, Goths vs. jocks, etc.) may give you clues about how to access them or where to look for key informants who serve them.

- Start with county statistics to get information about the size and demographic make-up of the total youth population. Then conduct key informant interviews with teachers or organizations that serve youth. They can help you to determine the various subgroups within the population and ways to gain access to them.

- Facebook can also be used to search for and collect information about populations or locations. Looking into the interests, educations, histories and activities of “friends” can give you clues about the subgroups that exist in your community and schools (Silbert-Geiger, 2010).

- Once you have identified key youth leaders, conduct interviews or focus groups with them and invite them to participate in your evaluation activities. These leaders will be able to tell you what will and won’t work when interacting with young people. Ask them how adults and researchers are likely to be perceived by youth and the best ways to engage them.

- Learn about the cultural norms of the young, such as how they dress, interact and communicate with each other. Also try to find out what the current trends are and what youth are interested in.
+ Find out where young people like to hang out, both physically and on the internet. These places can serve as potential spots for recruiting participants. Make a map of important gathering places and mark the locations of youth service providers and schools.

+ Learn the routines of youth in the community. What times are they in school? What do they do after school? On the weekends? When do their sports teams practice and play games? When would they most likely be available?

**Establishing Community Connections**

It is critical that you include community members and participants from your target population in your planning efforts in order to foster connections. It is also important to develop relationships and gain the trust of participants so that you get detailed and accurate information.

+ Work with insiders — Connect with organizers of youth events and leaders of youth organizations. Developing relationships with these people can help you gain access to participants. By partnering with leaders who are already known and trusted, young people may be more willing to take part and be honest in their answers.

+ Connect with youth — A great way to connect with young people is to make site visits to places where they hang out. Attend youth-oriented community events, school-sponsored activities, concerts and sporting events where you can introduce yourself. Become a familiar face and get to know people.

+ Share interests — Young people have an innate ability to detect insincerity. For that reason, it is important to follow through on what you say you'll do, and develop a genuine interest in their lives. Find real points of shared interest and show that you want to get to know them, not just use them for your evaluation. One way to do this is to follow their Facebook updates and post comments on their walls. This shows that you monitor and care about what's going on with them.

+ Bring them on board — Incorporate young community members into your evaluation team or create an advisory committee composed of youth to advise you during each phase of the evaluation. As much as possible, develop interdependence and power-equivalent relationships so that youth feel like valued assets to the project.

**Evaluation Activities Youth Can Participate in**

There are a variety of ways that youth can contribute to the evaluation process—from helping to formulate research questions and data collection instruments; recruiting subjects and accessing hard-to-reach populations; collecting public opinion survey or observation data; entering raw data; interpreting data; to reporting findings to stakeholders.
Developing and Using Data Collection Instruments

The first thing to do is determine which type of data collection method(s) will both fit the comfort level of the youth you’re working with as well as obtain the data you need for your specific evaluation purposes. The evaluation tool titled *Types of Data Collection Activities and Their Uses* on the TCEC website is a great resource for determining which method(s) to use.

Creating or Adapting Instruments

Before developing your own instrument, determine if one already exists on your topic. You may be able to adapt it for use with youth populations with a few key considerations:

- Adapt the instrument to reflect youth values, interests and issues they face.
- Try to use the language that young people use. Avoid wording that will be intimidating or a turn-off. Use a readability calculator to determine grade-level comprehension of your text. Employ graphic design elements to lead readers through the document, as young people tend to skip reading the directions.
- Understand what questions or data points might seem sensitive or intrusive to young populations. If you need to ask, keep those questions towards the end of the instrument. In surveys, start with less sensitive questions in order to build rapport with the subject first.
- Keep the instrument as short as possible while still getting the information your project needs. Delete questions that are not relevant to the population of interest.

Pre-testing Instruments

It is very important to pre-test data collection instruments with your target population before using them. One way to do this is to use the instrument with a small sample population and then ask several respondents about each question—what they thought it was asking and if the response choices were clear, distinct and comprehensive. They can help you determine if there are alternative ways to word or ask questions that are more youth-friendly. Ask if there are any questions that should be added or deleted. Pay close attention to their feedback and adapt your instrument accordingly.

Training Data Collectors

To train young data collectors, develop a written protocol that explains the purpose of each question or data point and how to collect and record the data. This document can serve as a reference during training and out in the field. In the training allow plenty of time to go over the protocol and practice exactly how to collect and record the data (in case they don’t read the instructions). Youth tend to learn best by doing, so have the team practice implementing the instrument in groups and then in pairs so you can observe and provide feedback to each member. Keep practicing until they reach an acceptable level of inter-rater reliability (everyone collects and records the data in the correct way).
Collecting Data

In order to obtain data from youth populations, be sure to utilize methods and approaches that will encourage young people to share their candid opinions and knowledge with your data collectors. That means knowing whether a focus group setting is better suited for the type of information you seek than a survey, or whether a face-to-face interview would be better than an internet survey. After that, it comes down to creating the right atmosphere of trust, purpose and rationale for participating as well as using inviting language that will be clearly understood by your subjects. Youth may feel more comfortable sharing candid responses with people their own age, which would enhance the reliability and completeness of the data (Powers & Tiffany, 2006). So keep that in mind when forming your data collection teams.

Communication Methods

Today’s youth are tech savvy and spend a majority of their free time using the internet and text messaging to communicate. For this reason, a good method for surveying this population is through online services like SurveyMonkey. You can send out links to a survey via email or spread the word and recruit participants through blogs, social network postings or websites that youth frequently visit. Another way to reach a large number of young people is to conduct paper-based surveys during school hours.

If you are surveying youth populations, be sure to explain that your survey is not a test and it will not be graded, that their answers are entirely anonymous and they are not to write their names on it. If you are present with them, read the survey aloud to make sure that everyone understands the questions in the same way and walk around the room while students are completing it in case they need additional clarification (Grant, 2010).

Incentives for Participation

Youth may not be readily willing to participate in your research without some sort of incentive. Here are some low-cost strategies that might increase youth participation rates:

- Offer downloads for music, ringtones, cell phone applications, movies, television show episodes or games.
- Give coupons to fast food restaurants or coffee shops.
- Conduct a raffle for an ipod, gift cards to places such as Bestbuy or itunes, movie tickets or a cash prize.
- Offer extra credit to youth if the survey is completed during school hours.

Disincentives to Participation

A potential barrier that may prevent youth from participating and/or providing honest answers to your data collection is the issue of legality. Because California minors are not legally allowed to use any type of tobacco product, young people may be hesitant to answer sensitive questions honestly out of a desire to protect themselves from
disapproval or repercussions. Using surveys (especially online) rather than face-to-face interviews is one way to minimize participant reluctance. Explaining that their names will not be recorded or connected to their responses can help too. Assure them that individual answers will not be reported to parents or school administration. Finally, starting with less sensitive questions can build rapport between the research and the subject, which may increase the likelihood of obtaining honest answers on more sensitive questions later.

**Evaluation Results and Dissemination**

When it comes to interpreting your results and sharing them with various stakeholders, youth input and participation can be particularly useful. Project directors report that policymakers in particular are often more responsive to smoke-free proposals when youth are involved in the presentations (Lemp, 2010). Even if the focus of your evaluation was not youth populations, getting their perspective on the meaning and implications of your findings may provide new insights you would not have otherwise considered. Here are some ways young people could be involved in this part of the evaluation process:

- Consult with youth and youth leaders when interpreting results in order to validate your conclusions. Also, observe participants to see if your results seem to be true.
- Create review panels comprised of stakeholders to examine your findings.
- When writing your report, keep in mind your most important audience and use the language, format and reasoning that will resonate with them. For youth audiences, get right to the point, make it visually interesting and don’t use technical language.
- Disseminate results to those who participated in the process. This would include any stakeholders who were involved in the design, implementation or analysis stages, including your research subjects. Share your findings at school events such as assemblies or parent meetings, church youth groups or other community events where you can get your issue heard by a large number of people who might be affected by the issue. Results could also be posted online to websites and social networking forums to reach a broader audience instantly and extensively (Silbert-Geiger, 2010).
- Let young people help present the results of the evaluation and/or share authorship of the report (if appropriate).

**Conclusion**

Involving youth populations in evaluation efforts necessitates knowledge about, and respect for, youth culture. Young people can bring valuable insights to each phase of evaluation, including planning, designing, collecting data, analyzing data and disseminating results. Their collaboration can ensure that data collection methods and instruments will work with young informants, that a representative sample is obtained,
and that evaluation results are meaningful, valid and useful. However, there are costs to their engagement. It can take a great deal of staff time to recruit, schedule, train, motivate, supervise and mentor young people. If your goal is only to extract what you need from them, interaction is likely to be limited. But if you intend to build a relationship, it takes a village, as the saying goes. The end result, though, could be a generation of new advocates for positive social change in your community. This can be a compelling reason for including young people in your work and guiding them towards personal and organizational success!
References


Additional Resources

**DEMOGRAPHIC STATISTICS**
There are a number of sites where you can find good statistics on the characteristics of your target population. Unfortunately, they may not all come from the same year. So be careful to cite the source and year of the data. Also, be sure to clarify in your text if the statistics are for the entire US, California or for your county.

**US Census Bureau**
For data on all of California or for your specific county, go to http://factfinder.census.gov and select your state or type your county in the top left box.

**CA State Department of Finance, Demographic Research Unit**
http://www.dof.ca.gov/Research/Research.php
► For demographic statistics by county, to search data sets for specific characteristics, and to find use as background and context for your activities.

**California Health Interview Survey (CHIS)**
http://www.chis.ucla.edu/main/default.asp
► For health statistics on your county, region and all of California.
EVALUATION RESOURCES

The SMOG (Simple Measure of Gobbledygook) Readability Calculator  
http://www.harrymclaughlin.com/SMOG.htm  
► A literacy assessment tool. Type (or paste) a document (or portion of) into this calculator to assess amount of education needed to understand it.

Tobacco Control Evaluation Center  
http://www.tobaccoeval.ucdavis.edu  
► Provides technical assistance, training and materials to help tobacco control projects funded by the California Department of Health Services with their evaluation plans and activities. Maintains a repository of data collection instruments to share with client organizations. Posts on its website a variety of “how-to” publications, archived webinars and mini trainings on evaluation topics including culturally competent evaluation.

TOBACCO RESOURCES

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids  
► Has data and a number of fact sheets on tobacco use among youth.

Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Office on Smoking and Health  
http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/  
► This site provides extensive coverage of tobacco education and prevention issues including: national, state and local tobacco control data, the State Tobacco Activities Tracking & Evaluation System searchable database, and resources for parents, educators, professionals and youth leaders.

County and Statewide Archive of Tobacco Statistics (C-STATS)  
http://www.cstats.info/  
► A service of the California Department of Public Health, California Tobacco Control Program, this source for local statistics on tobacco use has demographic information as well as tobacco use prevalence rates.


Smoke-free Movies  
http://www.smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu/  
► A web resource maintained by UC San Francisco full of research about tobacco portrayals and product placement in movies and how this affects youth.
**Strategic Tobacco Retail Effort (STORE)**  
- Resources for conducting tobacco retail licensing efforts, including sample youth tobacco purchase surveys and STAKE act observations.

**Tobacco Use Supplement to the Current Population Survey**  
- The Tobacco Use Supplement to the Current Population Survey (TUS-CPS) is an NCI-sponsored survey of tobacco use that has been administered as part of the U.S. Census Bureau's Current Population Survey. The TUS-CPS is a key source of national and state level data on smoking and other tobacco use in the U.S. household population. These data can be used by researchers to monitor progress in the control of tobacco use, conduct tobacco-related research and evaluate tobacco control programs.

**YOUTH RESOURCES**

**The California Youth Advocacy Network (CYAN)**  
[http://cyanonline.org](http://cyanonline.org)  
www.facebook.com/CYANfan  
www.youtube.com/CYANsocialmedia  
www.twitter.com/CYANonline  
- The California Youth Advocacy Network (CYAN) provides training, technical assistance, resources and materials on working with and incorporating youth, young adults and military members into tobacco control. You can find CYAN updates, tobacco control news, fact sheets and resources specific to youth on their website as well as on emerging social media technologies like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube.

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