Training Considerations: Tips to Design and Implement an Effective and Engaging Workshop for Youth Leaders

Prepare participants and manage expectations in advance.
Communicate with participants in the weeks leading up to your workshop. Convey the agenda and expectations clearly. Share suggested and/or required reading.

Conduct a training needs assessment.
Ask questions of your training cohort to learn more about their knowledge and skills gaps. Then design materials, content, and curriculum tailored to your trainees’ needs and interests.

Consider a youth trainer.
Trainings led by an experienced youth facilitator are the gold standard. Youth often prefer to learn directly from other youth. In situations when this scenario isn’t possible, select trainers who have worked with youth before and who approach them as valued contributors. Trainers should also consider engaging capable youth advocates as co-facilitators, activity leads, or in other ways.
Engage participants in the training and instill a sense of ownership.

In any training, but especially when training youth, participation enriches the learning environment. Population Reference Bureau’s (PRB) recommendations to engage participants include:

- Ask for their input before finalizing the agenda.
- Establish expectations or ground rules as a group.
- Lead a debrief of each day and, based on participant feedback, adjust plans for subsequent days if needed.
- Ask a participant to open each day with either an energizer or a summary of the previous day’s content.

Proceed slowly through your workshop content.

When training youth, it’s important to allow more time for questions and interaction than you normally do. Slow down! Youth may not realize they can ask questions unless you allow the space and time for them to do so. PRB also often hears from youth that they value time on coffee/tea breaks to build their professional networks, reflect with other participants on the workshop content, and make connections. Likewise, you may wish to build in more unstructured time for open-ended discussions and critical conversations. Remember, you aren’t just off-loading information, you are building capacity, and different people learn in different ways!

Make your curriculum fun and informative.

Whether modifying the PACE Policy Communication Toolkit materials for use with youth or creating new ones, make your youth-friendly materials engaging and fun. You may want to incorporate more activities than you would for other audiences and include opportunities to practice new skills, such as through roleplays. Also consider incorporating mixed media (video, social media, art, or dance) into your training materials.

Provide an overview of general content first before diving into the details.

It’s best to not assume youth participants in your training all have the same level of knowledge on a subject. For example, if you are providing an adolescent family planning and reproductive health policy communication training, start with a presentation on family planning and reproductive health basics, such as facts on puberty, healthy menstruation, and methods of contraception and how they work before diving into how to be an effective advocate.
Be open to modifications.

Ask participants to complete daily evaluations so you can modify workshop plans as needed. On the final day, administer a workshop evaluation to obtain feedback from your participants to improve the workshop in the future. Ask specific questions about whether the workshop content was appropriately tailored for them as a young person. One great way to involve youth in the training is to form an advisory committee of participants with the responsibility to review evaluations and share suggestions with the trainers.

Think long term.

When planning your capacity-building work, don’t let the workshop be the end. Consider in advance what you hope participants will do after the workshop and plan for how you’ll be able to support them. After the workshop, follow up with participants and continue working with those youth whenever possible. Explore how to plug them in to future opportunities. Youth want to be heard, invested in, and engaged with for the long term.

Sessions of the PACE Policy Communication Toolkit Recommended for Training Youth Advocates

Research often has profound implications for policy, but without effective communication between researchers and policy audiences, the significance of research findings may be lost. The PACE Policy Communication Toolkit is designed to assist researchers and other technical experts to bridge the gap between research and policy. When youth advocates have the tools and skills they need to succeed, they can be—and often are—great leaders in strengthening political and financial commitments to family planning and reproductive health and multisectoral approaches.

The Toolkit’s components can be adapted to support the increasingly valuable role that youth leaders play in inspiring policymakers and holding them accountable to their commitments. The Toolkit’s content should be revised to address youth leaders by:

- Incorporating examples of youth-led policy communication.
- Building in more time for peer learning and activities.
- Following the tips provided in this document.

With these revisions, all sessions can be made relevant for youth audiences.
Improve the Effectiveness of Youth Capacity-Building Efforts with the Youth Leaders Module

The sessions in the Youth Leaders Module are specifically designed with and for youth. The module targets youth leaders as the primary audience and is intended to be used within the setting of a formal training or workshop, led by an experienced facilitator.

To plan a successful workshop with youth, identify what skills are most relevant for your participant group. A three- to four-day training is required to complete all sessions in the Youth Leaders Module and the core presentations from the PACE Policy Communication Toolkit. The content included in the first two Toolkit modules—From Research to Policy and Strategic Communication—provide the conceptual underpinning for how to communicate data and evidence to policy audiences. When training youth advocates in data-driven policy communication, these modules can be adapted based on the guidelines provided here to form a strong conceptual base for the sessions in the Youth Leaders Module.