

New-to-YouthScape Facilitation Guidelines

*Using a community-friendly approach to facilitating
By YouthScape HRM Team*

Within YouthScape HRM's network of individuals and organizations, we are fortunate to have so many wonderful facilitators and event organizers wanting to contribute to our work to build stronger, safer, healthier, more resilient and inclusive communities through meaningful youth engagement. These individuals range in age, skills and levels of experience.

YouthScape regularly taps into this network to bring on additional facilitators for our events so that we are able to support our participants fully and ensure we have the time necessary to build relationships and work more closely with new participants.

While we value the facilitation experiences they bring with them from other circles or networks, over time we've discovered the importance of being really clear with these new-to-YouthScape facilitators about what **our** approach is and what is expected of them in this new role, within our Initiative.

The guidelines below include tools and expectations for creating community-friendly spaces and documents and are meant for anyone facilitating YouthScape activities. They have been created with the feedback we received from community members of all ages.

YouthScape HRM's Definition:

Creating a Community-friendly Approach

Helping participants of any age, skill-level and background feel welcome, safe, included and supported in the discussions and activities. Before they can participate fully, they need our help to get to know others, relax and feel safe in the space we've created and they need to be fully informed on any new topics before they are asked to discuss them.



YouthScape staff facilitating a community-friendly reflection session for the Mavericks.

Tips to Creating a Community-friendly Space

As an event organizer or facilitator, creating a community-friendly space for your group to get to know each other, work as a team and learn from one another is vital to the overall success of your meeting or event. Your goal is to create a welcoming and relaxed environment where people can meet and work together, all the while feeling safe, supported and encouraged by organizers and facilitators.

Some issues to consider:

◆ New Participants

Try to put yourself in their shoes and ask yourself the following questions...

- 1 - If I were new to this group, what would I hope to see upon **entering a new space** with new people?
- 2 - Would warm and friendly greeters at the door help to let participants feel welcome and know where to go?
- 3 - Would a colourful agenda on the wall help them feel a bit more relaxed about what's to come?
- 4 - Would it be helpful to offer participants a snack when they arrive to ensure that everyone starts on a full tummy?

◆ Setting the Tone for Safety and Respect

Participants may be quite diverse, coming from different communities and backgrounds and having different levels of knowledge with any topic you hope to discuss.

As an event organizer or facilitator, it is important that you start off by acknowledging that participants may have different levels of comfort with certain topics and that some participants may disagree with each other's opinions. The goal is not to all think alike, but to respect each other's point of view.

Creating Community Standards together can be helpful when you're facilitating full-day workshops and events, or if you'll be working with a group on a more long-term basis. Even if you are facilitating an evening event however and have less time, you can spare 5-10 minutes at the beginning to help participants brainstorm what respect will mean in the space you are sharing.

Creating a fun and colourful poster on flip-chart paper to outline what the group expects of itself will help them remember the guidelines they've agreed to.

◆ Language is SO IMPORTANT!

Language can bring us together or divide us. We've heard from so many community members, who were previously unengaged, that language was a barrier to participation before they attended YouthScape activities and events. Because we have built a strong reputation on our ability to break down barriers to allow more community members to get involved in their school, neighborhoods and communities, we intentionally create a space where language brings us together.

We are **all** capable of saying what we need to without using unfamiliar words, technical terms, acronyms and buzzwords. However, even with the best attempts, facilitators and participants alike can let a word or term slip into the conversation without realizing others may not understand the meaning at all, or in the same way as they hoped.



YouthScapers being crafty with their advice to Youth Service Providers

As facilitators, we need to plan for this possibility when organizing events and do what we can to create a common language for participants of all ages.

How?

- ◆ At the beginning of your event and throughout, please encourage participants to feel comfortable pausing the conversation and asking for the group's help in understanding a new term or acronym. When someone does ask a question, smile and offer a supportive comment like, "Great question, thanks for bringing that up Billy."
- ◆ Create a Wiki together! (What's a Wiki, you ask? Great question, you're getting the hang of this!) This involves getting some flip-chart paper and markers and allowing the participants of all ages to talk about what a term means to them and together build a definition to put on paper. This flip-chart should then be posted on the wall where they can refer back to it if they need to. This activity usually takes about 10-15

minutes per term and participants will need a facilitator's support with this activity to ensure they fully understand the word as it is being used in your discussions or space.

- ◆ Pay attention to your participants' facial expressions and body language. If they look confused, they probably are. Avoid calling on them in front of everyone in case this embarrasses them. Instead, simply pause the conversation and clarify what's being discussed. Then, ask if anyone has any questions before you continue.

Choosing Fun and Interactive Activities

To keep your event moving along in a fun and interesting way for participants of any age, especially in full-day workshops or longer programs, ensure your plan for the day allows for some fun!

Participants of all ages will enjoy activities that allow them to get to know each other, share ideas and perspectives with each other and that bring out their fun and creative side. There is a wealth of activities to choose from. YouthScape staff will work with you to find the activities that best meet the needs of the participants you're engaging with, while bringing out the very best in you as a facilitator. Because, we've learned that the more sincerely you enjoy the day you have planned, the more infectious your enthusiasm will be!



We choose activities that allow an individual's creativity to emerge!

*"Speaking **at me** for hours and showing me PowerPoint presentations isn't the best way to inspire me or hold my interest. I have ideas to share, if someone allows me to share them. I wish more workshops were like YouthScape, where I get to talk with everyone as equals, have my opinions heard and have fun doing it."*

~YouthScape Participant, 21 years old

Tips to Creating Community-friendly Documents

YouthScape HRM has sought out and received feedback from community members to make our writing a little easier to read and more community-friendly. They have taught us to use fewer words, a more conversational tone and terms that are clear or can be explained in a line or two.

Before proceeding with a document, ask yourself a few questions...

- 1 - If I were new to this group, would I understand this document? If not, what needs to be explained?
- 2 - Could I have said the same thing with fewer words or would it lose the message if I did?
- 3 - Is the document laid out in a way that is easy to follow? Is there space between bullets and paragraphs? Are the headings bolded or italicized?
- 4 - Are there photos or clipart to help support the message visually and break up the text?

Using a more community-friendly approach to language may take a little longer initially, but the long-term benefits will have a greater impact on participation and engagement within your organization, group, business or family.



*YouthScapers are an important part of our editing process
and are encouraged to let us know what they think*

Participant Feedback



Your age:

Your community:

	1 Disagree	2 Not Sure How I Feel	3 Agree
1. This session was a good use of my time.			
2. This session has inspired me to want to get involved in my school or community.			
3. This session has shown me how to use my interests and skills to give back.			
4. This session make me want to get involved with YouthScape.			
5. I would recommend this session to a friend, classmate or co-worker.			

6. How has this session changed you or helped you see things differently? Will you do anything differently as a result of this session?

7. My favorite part of the day was . . .

8. A suggestion that I have for next time is . . .

Thanks for your feedback!