

Using Hart's Ladder – Ages 12 to 18

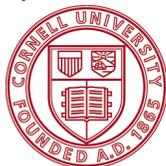
Youth in this age group move from concrete to abstract thinking. Increasingly, they are able to differentiate between how things are and how they may be. Youth prefer seeking out their own solutions rather than accepting solutions from adults. If a project is meaningless, they often lose interest since increasingly they feel the need to be part of something important. Their peers have great significance, and belonging to a group may feel like a high priority. Encouraging friends to work together, and allowing for plenty of “hang time”, may ensure success with this age group. What kinds of decision-making and planning can youth ages 12-18 dig in to? You may find that it's more difficult to get youth this age interested in your gardening project if they don't have some decision-making power. “Why are we doing this garden anyway? What's the point of me being here?” If the project has little meaning for them they aren't going to stick with it or have a very good time either. Youth at this age can take most everything seven to eleven year olds have been doing to the next level. Think of ways to switch the traditional adult/youth roles: can young people be the project leaders and adults offer input and advice? Are there ways to genuinely have this connect to what is meaningful to teenaged youth, with adults serving as their “coaches?”

Planning the Garden

- Start at the beginning and bring young people up to speed.
- Keep an open mind. Adults often make assumptions about teens, and teens often are frustrated about these assumptions and how they are viewed by adults. Begin with a clean slate, and listen to what they have to share. Increasing participation with teenagers often means starting with as few assumptions as possible.
- Present more about where the idea for a garden project originated and not all great ideas you have! For instance: the community center wants to use the empty space between the building and the sidewalk for something that will benefit the community center. What are their ideas for what would be most beneficial for the community center and for the teens that routinely visit it?
- Be sure the reason behind the project is a meaningful one. Are you beautifying a neighborhood, providing a resource for play or relaxation, growing produce for a local food bank, creating an entrepreneurship opportunity?
- Lay all the cards on the table: communicate all the knowns and the uncertainties, and any restrictions that are known.

Deciding what the garden will be and what it will look like

- Allow youth to generate their own vision of the what the garden will be: what will people do in the garden, who are those people, what types of plants will be grown, how will those plants be used, will the garden have a theme, how big should it be, what non-plant elements are needed.
- Teenagers are increasingly able to think abstractly and will be able to focus on phases. What can we do this season, how can we build on it



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next season. What can we do with the budget we have? What can we do if we raise an additional \$500? That said, everyone needs to see some results of their hard work. Consider working with teens to set up a framework that allows for some “instant gratification,” as well as opportunities to grow over time.

- Teens may enjoy beginning with an internet search of what others around the nation are doing. You may want to provide a framework by giving a list of some sites to begin with.

Figuring out the details

- Be available to support the final stages of planning but avoid jumping in with quick fixes or possible alternatives.

Funding, supplies, and donations

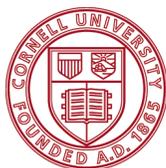
- Don't underestimate young people's ability to work with a budget or generate creative fundraising ideas.
- Give youth room to problem solve about these issues but be available for questions or to provide resources.

In the Garden

- Installing the garden: Just like in the planning stage, involving youth from the beginning is important. Let them take the lead on organizing supplies, tools, and strategizing how to make things happen.
- Maintaining the garden: Who decides what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, and who will do it?
- Does the garden need “leaders” or “rules?” How are they determined and enforced?
- Encourage young people to create a medium through which decisions continue to be made. With adults, this usually looks like a monthly committee meeting. What works for teens? An on-line forum through which they share ideas? Meeting on Saturdays for pizza and talking about issues that arise? Encourage them to consider ways to build in opportunities for consistent and regular contact around decision-making needs that arise.
- Uses of the garden: Are young people deciding what happens in the garden? Do they have a say on what happens to any consumables they grow?

Possible Activities

- Conduct a needs assessment. If your garden project is a result of an expressed community need, allow youth to go to the source to figure out how that need was identified and why a garden might be a good solution. Provide support in terms of contact names and the opportunity to role-play interviews but leave the questions up to them. If your project is the result of an area of land needing to be developed in some way, allow youth



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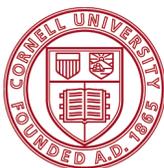
to decide if they can make use of it to support their program or interests or if they'd like to talk to other "stakeholders" about possible uses for the area.

- During the planning stage provide resources: plant catalogs, transportation to visit other gardens, and introductions to people.
- Provide an introduction to budgets and how they work and then transfer management to the youth in your program. This way they can be realistic in their planning and fundraising goals.
- There are limitless opportunities for teens to connect with community members. Consider a fun forum through which teens get together regularly for pizza (or other food), while meeting with various community members that can contribute ideas, funding, enthusiasm, and different perspectives that teens will benefit and learn from.

One faith-based program makes sure that there were always the "four F's" at every youth meeting, no matter what the activity is: fun, food, fellowship, and faith. Although the latter isn't necessarily appropriate for every program, the first three F's certainly can be. In addition, teens often welcome opportunities for altruism and generosity, and grow spiritually from the chance to care for others. Connecting service learning and community action to the project offers boundless possibilities for program offshoots.

For more ideas about youth community action visit:

<http://nys4h.cce.cornell.edu/resources/Pages/YouthDevelopmentResources.aspx>



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