ELO Expanded Learning Opportunities

Two-Minute Tips

This Week's Topic: Soliciting Youth Voice

Your program's young people can be one of your greatest assets to developing and improving your ELO program. Authentically including their voice helps deepen their buy-in and engagement.[1] There are many ways to solicit and apply their voice in your program. Young people are capable of providing helpful input if given developmentally appropriate tools.[2] By providing space for young people to give feedback about the program, and making changes or decisions based on their suggestions, you are helping them learn valuable teamwork and leadership skills.[1] When young people feel included in program decisions they are more likely to have a strong sense of program ownership. This sense of ownership builds peer accountability to program norms and increases the likelihood that they will attend your program.

Practice Tips

Here are a few quick tips to effectively solicit and apply youth voice in your program.[2]

Planning

Develop a plan for how you want to involve young people. Ask yourself: What are 1 to 3 things we really want to know more about? When is the best time during the program to ask youth to share their thoughts with us? How will we use this information? Once you know your goals, write questions to ask youth based on what you want to learn from them.

Asking Strong Questions

Ask open-ended questions and ask follow-up questions if/when youth offer feedback. Consider questions like: What is something staff could do to make our program even better than it is now? Are there things you'd like to learn about or do here? Follow-up questions can be simple. Example: Can you say more about that idea? What would that idea look like here at the program?

Approach

Consider the developmental stages of your participants and think about how to best support them in giving feedback. For young children, drawing a picture or a short group discussion, where you take notes, might be best. For older youth, writing, drawing, small and/or large group discussions where youth take notes could all be effective ways of documenting youth voice.

Be Accountable to Youth

Explain to youth why you're asking for their feedback and what you plan to do with it. Later, when you implement something based on their feedback, verbalize that to them. This enforces a dynamic where youth feel respected and heard by staff. Example: "Okay, many of you said you wanted to learn more about oceans. Today we're going to read a book about orcas. Then in our art activity we'll work on drawing pictures of orcas in their natural habitat."

Tips in Action!

Watch how Blazing Trails gathers youth voice through youth project planning time on Wednesdays.

Want more two-minute tips?

Check out: https://depts.washington.edu/cqel/expanded-learning-opportunities/

There you will find the latest tip, and an archive of past tips.

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[1]Youth.gov. (n.d). *Involving youth*.(n.p.) Retrieved from https://youth.gov/youth-topics/positive-youth-development/how-can-youth-be-engaged-programs-promote-positive-youth-development

[2]Ibid.