



STRATEGY BRIEF

SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITIES

What does it mean to **value youth partners as assets?**

To improve — and ultimately transform — the child welfare system to ensure it is responsive to the needs of youth and their families, many agencies recognize they must partner with youth who currently are in foster care, or young adults who spent time in foster care as youth. Doing so is a [critical strategy](#), both for systems change and as a step toward healing the trauma the youth may have experienced as a result of their experience in foster care. In many cases, youth engagement — in the form of youth advisory boards, peer mentoring, other formal staff positions, or other youth-adult partnerships — is a [federal requirement](#).

Agency staff that view youth and young adults through a myopic lens of consumer may undervalue the importance of youth engagement and expect youth to be grateful when an agency gives them a voice. In fact, youth and young adults with lived experience — acting as full partners — provide tangible benefit to agencies, their staff, their providers, and other stakeholder groups. Agencies that have engaged youth effectively find their approach leads to better systems improvement and transformation efforts. Youth who have personally experienced the child welfare system understand it in ways others cannot. They should be considered and treated as assets because “those closest to the problem are closest to the solution.”¹ As such, **youth advocates represent the best hope for developing meaningful and lasting changes to the child welfare system’s most intractable problems.**



What does it mean to value youth partners as assets?

Valuing youth advocates as assets means investing in them — compensating youth fairly for their time spent on partnership work and for their expertise, and helping them build professional tools and skills for their future lives after advocacy.

This brief is one in a three-part series developed in partnership with experienced youth and family advocates from [Family Voices United](#),^{2,3} a collaborative project among Casey Family Programs, [Children's Trust Fund Alliance](#), [FosterClub](#), and [Generations United](#). Other briefs in the series include:

- [How can agencies prepare to share power through authentic youth engagement?](#)
- [What are some practices for recruiting and working with youth advisory boards?](#)

Compensating youth fairly

Youth advocates should be equitably compensated for their time and expertise, just as an agency would reward any other consultant. If resources for youth engagement work are limited, agencies may need to request additional state or local funds, supplement budget allocations with grants or other philanthropic support, and/or engage fewer youth so that the youth partners involved can be fairly compensated. Consider the following questions in defining and determining fair compensation:

What are the youth being compensated for?

If they are making a lone appearance or providing feedback in a one-time meeting, an hourly or daily rate is appropriate. However, if they are developing intellectual property, such as a workbook or curriculum,

consider whether an hourly or daily rate adequately recognizes their contributions. Can they receive residual income or be acknowledged as authors?

If the rate for youth is different from the rate provided to other consultants, why?

It is acceptable to factor in other benefits the youth are receiving from the engagement, but it is still important to determine an appropriate monetary amount. Many organizations pay youth in the form of a fixed stipend. If you use this approach, spell out exactly what work is covered by that stipend, and commit to paying an hourly rate for work above and beyond the agreed-upon tasks. Generations United recommends an hourly rate of \$100 an hour.

What are the needs and preferences of youth regarding how to receive payment?

Make sure that compensation does not create a barrier to diverse participation. For example, checks may be difficult to cash for youth who have limited access to banking, including those who are undocumented. Youth receiving public benefits may face limits to how much reportable income they can receive. Be flexible and offer a range of options such as housing stipends, cash, gift cards of the youth's choice, or electronic payment services like CashApp or Venmo. FosterClub shares more about [a youth-friendly payment approach](#).

How can you ensure that long-distance travel does not create a burden?

If youth or young adults are being asked to participate in special engagements that require travel, their expenses (flights, hotels, ground transportation)

At some point you realize, the only people who really know how to fix the system are the direct consumers. Engaging young people with lived expertise isn't a choice; it's something we have to do if we want to grow and progress in our work.

— JOSHUA CHRISTIAN,

LEAD, ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES YOUTH ENGAGEMENT TEAM

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should be paid directly by the agency whenever possible. Be sure to hold and guarantee rooms on the credit card of the agency, as such financial holds can create hardships for youth. If all meals and other expenses are not prepaid during the trip, per diems and transportation allowances should be provided in advance. In addition to providing up-front funds, be sure to alert youth to the specific expenses the funds are expected to cover, estimated amounts, and how each expense will need to be paid. (Do they need to carry cash? Will some expenses require a credit or debit card?) Remember that travel will be a new experience for some youth partners. Consider travel partner support so the youth does not have to make the journey alone. When possible, allow extra time during trips for the youth to experience the local area and socialize together.

What other forms of compensation can remove barriers to participation?

Local meetings, in-person or virtual, also can present hurdles for some youth. Recognizing this, some organizations offer to reimburse child care expenses, cover meal delivery for the youth's family during meetings, and reimburse mileage or public transportation. Special transportation arrangements may need to be made for younger youth whose caregivers or providers will not or cannot support transportation. Help ensure that youth have access to reliable technology and Internet access for full participation in virtual meetings.

How are you informing youth about the implications of compensation?

Make sure youth understand what is considered reportable income, how their compensation will be reported to the IRS (monetary amounts of more than \$600 must be reported on a 1099 in most cases), and how the money will be taxed.

Helping youth prepare for life after advocacy

A young adult's window of time to participate on advocacy or advisory boards is limited. Most youth will "age out" of these opportunities by the age of 25 or 26, making room for other young adults whose experience of the child welfare system is more recent. It is important to impress on youth partners that these leadership opportunities are not a substitute for more sustainable pathways to independent adulthood, such as education, internships, and other forms of employment.

Show youth advocates that you see and recognize their value as people, beyond their identity as current or former youth involved with the child welfare system. The knowledge they possess and skills they develop while on an advisory board or performing advocacy work are transferable to many other professions that do not rely on this identity. Here are some ways agencies and organizations can demonstrate this recognition of value while helping youth build successful futures:

We are just as valuable and bring as much to the table as someone employed by the agency. The conversation about compensation is important. It shows how the agency actually feels about youth. I don't want to miss out on contributing because I'm not getting paid what I'm worth, but I have a lot going on. It has to be worth my time.

— ALEKS TALSKY,

ALUMNUS OF FOSTER CARE, BOARD MEMBER FOR THE NATIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR CHILDREN'S LEGAL REPRESENTATION, WISCONSIN

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interns information about opportunities with other organizations. “I don’t feel the need to be territorial,” says Pitcher. “We all care about these young people. If they get value out of something another organization is doing, awesome.” Interns reflect on each project they complete, identifying the transferable skills and knowledge they developed. All-Stars create a portfolio of their learning. By the time their internship

is complete, they have a resume, professional photos and bio, business cards, an elevator speech, and a business website. Toward the end of the six-month program, they develop a formal transition plan. After the internship, support staff remain available to the youth to review resumes, provide letters of reference, and connect youth to additional educational or employment support resources.

To learn more, visit [Questions from the field](#) at [Casey.org](#).

- 1 Criminal justice reform advocate Glenn E. Martin used this as the guiding principle for starting [JustLeadershipUSA](#), as documented in [The First Four Years](#).
- 2 Content of this brief was developed with members of the Knowledge Management Lived Experience Advisory Team during four meetings in 2021: May 6, June 1, June 25, and Oct. 22. This team includes youth, parents, kinship caregivers, and foster parents with lived experience in the child welfare system, and who serve as strategic partners with [Family Voices United](#), a collaboration between FosterClub, Generations United, the Children’s Trust Fund Alliance, and Casey Family Programs. Team members who contributed to this brief include Aleks Talks, Aliyah Zeien, Ryan Young, Rimy Morris, Jessica Cardenas, and Amanda Cruce.
- 3 This brief was informed by interviews with Bree Bradley, Aliyah Zeien, Antonica Frazier, Jarvis Spearman, and Keedy Bradley, Louisiana Elite Advocacy Force on Oct. 7, 2021; Rimy Morris, Indiana Youth Advisory Board, and Megan Tribble, Foster Success, on Oct. 8, 2021; Joshua Christian and Ryan Young, Administration for Children & Families Youth Engagement Team, on Oct. 18, 2021; Angel Petite, Erich Pitcher, and Leah Woodcock at FosterClub, on Aug. 3, 2021; and Samuel Martin, SDM Consulting, on May 10, 2021.

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