



## EVENT GUIDE: Strategies for Youth Engagement & Leadership

### Introduction

The Children & Nature Network (C&NN) helps empower the next generation of leaders in the outdoors. We strive to support and increase the leadership and diversity of young people benefiting from and contributing to meaningful connections to nature, outdoor activities and outdoor-related careers. As part of this effort, we identify and implement strategies for engaging youth and their perspectives in the planning and facilitation of events and initiatives. We invite you to do the same.

The following strategies and practices will support youth engagement and leadership in your next event, enhancing the experience for all. Choose activities that are most feasible for your event; you can select a few, or include them all. Youth in the context of this guide refers to young adults ages 18 to 28, but many of the practices can be applied to a wider age range.

## 1. Establish a culture that values and honors the unique perspective and voice that diverse young leaders bring to the outdoor industry and children and nature movement

- **Share Your Commitment to Youth** - State your commitment to youth voice and presence in your event marketing and communication materials.
- **Amend Your Processes** - Integrate youth voice as a criteria in session RFPs and your review process. Possible questions for inclusion: 1) Does your presentation include youth and young leader representation? If so, please describe. 2) If not, would you be interested in pairing and collaborating with a young leader who can speak to your specific topic?
- **Connect with Youth** - Build partnerships with youth-serving organizations who can support the participation of young leaders in the event.
- **Reduce Financial Barriers** - Recognize that financial barriers are often more significant for young leaders and offer complimentary or discounted event registration in support of their participation. Also consider compensating youth for their time and participation.

## 2. Place youth voice at the center of event planning, program design, and communications

- **Invite Youth Representation** - Invite youth to participate on your core planning or steering committee from the start.
- **Incorporate Youth at all Stages of the Process** - Recruit youth to review session proposals.

- **Amplify Youth Voice** - Scan your event program. Are there options for young leaders to share content, share perspectives, emcee, or to introduce a plenary speaker?
- **Host a Youth-led Panel** - Curate a panel dedicated to youth perspective; an example could be a panel on the barriers, opportunities, and examples of innovation they see in the outdoors and outdoor industry.
- **Align Youth Perspective** - Align presenter topics with youth experience by 1) pairing youth with presenters to co-present, 2) scheduling a calls between presenters and youth to provide youth perspective to sessions, and 3) encouraging youth to write a blog or create social media stories regarding topics being covered at the event.
- **Collect Youth Impressions** - Host a meeting for youth following your event to reflect and provide feedback on their experience and the effectiveness of including youth at the event.

### 3. Build the leadership skills of young leaders through training and mentorship

- **Mentor Youth Leadership** - Host calls to mentor youth participation and leadership on conference committees, and to keep youth connected during the event and to encourage peer-to-peer learning and mentorship.

### 4. Build awareness, capacity, and opportunities for peer networking and mentorship

- **Host a Youth Social** - Attending an event with a majority of participants who are of an older generation and potentially not racially diverse can be daunting. Schedule a social dedicated for young leaders to connect.



## Assessing Progress

The following questions can serve as indicators for assessing youth engagement and leadership in your event.

REFLECTION	NOTES
<b>A Culture of Inclusivity</b>	
Is youth engagement and leadership integrated into your event messaging?	
Are youth involved in shaping your event program?	
Is youth perspective and participation incorporated into criteria for session proposals?	
<b>Initiating Youth Engagement</b>	
Have you invited trusted partners from the community as a means to connect with youth?	
How many sessions are facilitated or co-facilitated by youth?	
Do you provide scholarships to support youth attendance at your event?	
Do you honor youth time and expertise? (incentives, stipends, etc.)	
<b>Sustaining Youth Engagement</b>	
Are youth mentored in their conference participation and leadership?	
Are there opportunities for peer-to-peer connections for youth?	
Do you have a plan or strategy for engaging youth after the event?	
Are youth involved at a decision-making level or represented on planning committees?	



## Case in Point: Colorado

**Colorado Parks & Wildlife (CPW)** was committed to engaging youth perspectives in the planning and facilitation of its annual Colorado Partners in the Outdoors Conferences. The Children & Nature Network (C&NN) had trained young leaders in Colorado through its Natural Leaders program, using the outdoors as a platform to provide leadership development and community engagement training, mentoring, and peer-to-peer learning for diverse young adults. CPW and C&NN partnered over three years to identify and implement strategies for engaging youth perspectives in the conferences. As a result, Colorado-based Natural Leaders served on planning committees to bring youth perspective to the events and presented at sessions in 2018, 2019, and 2020, sharing opportunities and challenges from their own work in building a diverse outdoor community. Strategies, practices, and assessment questions in this document are a reflection of lessons learned from the CPW-C&NN partnership and from conversations with youth involved in Colorado Partners in the Outdoors Conferences.



“ *By weaving youth perspectives, talent and leadership into their conferences from the very start, Colorado Parks and Wildlife created more meaningful, diverse and forward-looking experiences for all attendees. —CJ Goulding, Community Leadership Development Manager, C&NN* ”

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