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Engaging with Young Adults:
An analysis of strategies and techniques

Situation

Generational Characteristics

While developing programs intended for today's young adults, it is important to acknowledge the generation's characteristics. Since we are defining young adults as the ages between 18-26 years old, this generational cohort is known as Generation Z with a few of the older young adults being millennials. The societal changes these young adults are experiencing with their peers include social justice movements, issues of violence and the advancement of technology. Facing several important milestones as they transition to adulthood, some of the pressing concerns for these young adults are money, time management, life skills, and not feeling ready (Campbell et al., 2016, Pittman, 2003). They also struggle with the stigma of continuing with trends that may be perceived as childish by other generational groups. Programs developed for young adults should deal with these issues, as this generation is interested in long-term social change. This white paper discusses strategies and techniques for engaging young adults through meaningful program development.

Solution

Generating Interest

The internet, personal referrals and social media are the best resources to make young adults aware of program opportunities. According to Pew (2016), 88% of young adults use Facebook. It is important in early adulthood to obtain life skills and experiences through training and employment. The types of programming that are likely to generate the most interest are paid internships and video-based learning. Some young adults are detached from these types of programs, but providing incentives toward gainful employment experiences influences participation (Skemer, 2017).

Participation

Despite the-many definitions of engagement, there are two major approaches. The first focuses on the psychosocial aspect of engagement, while the second is concerned with the person's tenacity and involvement (Alrashidi et al., 2016). According to the National League of Cities (2010), both approaches should be incorporated into the four critical elements for successful engagement: setting, structure, strategy and support. In other words, there should be an inviting climate that offers varying activities and provides meaningful opportunities. This helps to build the youth-adult partnerships while supporting the engagement and participation in activities. Additional involvement from family members provides extra encouragement and reinforces learning. The structure of the program should meet the needs of both the organization and the interests of young adults.

The Theory of Planned Behavior states that "the main driver for behavior is the intention to perform the behavior." This is a useful framework for designing behavior change, because it focuses on the methods of how interventions are expected to change behavior. The most successful methods, according to Steinmetz et al., 2016, are motivational appeals, persuasion

and increasing skills. If we can access what the academic and career goals are for a particular young person early in the interaction, then we can provide interesting programs that keep them engaged in the process (Hossain, 2015). A game theory approach to engagement uses the theory of rational choice. In this approach, the decision-maker has to choose from a set of actions. "The action chosen by a decision-maker is at least as good, according to her preferences, as every other available action." (Osborne, 2000). Thus, participation has to spark excitement and be different than what occurs in their daily lives (Larson, 2000).

"The individual nature of technology has helped Generation Z become comfortable and accustomed to learning independently." Structuring programs with Frank Lyman's learning approach of think-share-pair combines the traditional collaborative nature of millennials with Generation Z's individualistic nature (Seemiller and Grace, 2017). In this approach, people are able to think and reflect independently, then come together with their peers to discuss ideas. They then share their ideas with the group and discern how their opinions and beliefs compare. "We must [also] look at emerging technologies as not just relevant and beneficial but absolutely imperative to foster the natural ability and traits of today's students." (Jones, 2007) Keep in mind that the lives of today's young adults are entrenched in the internet, and technology is viewed as an extension of themselves.

Conclusion

Engaging with young adults requires incentives and meaningful experiences that will be a benefit to both the organization and to the young adults. Instead of spending a few hours at a community kitchen, young adults would rather participate in an initiative to eradicate hunger (Seemiller and Grace, 2017). Successful programs need to initiate ways for young adults to be involved by performing meaningful roles in decision-making as a way to connect, engage and impact their communities.

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See annotated literature review on next page for references.

Annotated Literature Review

Using Google Scholar, Research Gate, Wiley Online Library, and ERIC Institute of Education Sciences, research was conducted on articles related to strategies and techniques for engaging emerging young adults as it pertains to positive youth development. Search topics included engaging with young adults associated with Generational research, Social and Behavioral Sciences research and Education. The main themes introduced were framed around the generational characteristics, participation and generating interest among this cohort.

Main Themes - References Crosswalk

Theme	Reference
Generational Characteristics	**(Campbell, 2016), (Pittman, 2003), (Seemiller and Grace, 2017)**
Participation	**(Alrashidi et al., 2016), (Larson, 2000), (National League of Cities, 2010), (Osborne, 2000), (Steinmetz et al., 2016)**
Generating Interest	**(Hossain, 2015), (Jones, 2007), (Pew, 2010), (Pew, 2016), (Skemer, 2017)**

Alrashidi, O., Phan, H. P., Ngu, B. H., (2016). *Academic Engagement: An Overview of its Definitions, Dimensions, and Major Conceptualisations*. (Vol. 9, No. 12). Canadian Center of Science and Education. doi:10.5539/ies.v9n12p41.
This paper is an overview of student engagement highlighting the two major approaches: one being a students' psychosocial engagement, and the other is described by the tenacity and involvement. While discussing the relationship to the students' performance in school, the authors shed light on the varying terms and definitions of engagement. They note that previous research shares similar themes, linking students' participation and identification with school-related activities, and engagement and a students' investment in learning.Throughout all of the research, the term "engagement" is a positive and proactive term that encompasses a student's participation and investment in school and school-related activities for the enhancement of performance.

Campbell, A., Crockett, N., Schwartz, A., Scruggs, J., Valinor, J. (2016). *Asking the Experts: Engaging Youth and Young Adults in Enhancing Program Design.* American Evaluation Association.
The authors in this presentation discuss ways to improve program design with a main focus on youth participatory action research (YPAR) for outreach and engagement. They note that youth can raise new, complex issues, and the norms and traditions change as youths become a part of the decision making. YPAR is a part of a health and wellness initiative to assist Tennessee youth and young adults ages 16-25 with, or at risk of developing, a mental health disorder. Regarding the transition to adulthood, they found the main challenges young adults face are money, time management, life skills and stigma. Young adults experience stigma by the use of stigmatizing language and the expectations of becoming an adult, meaning the perception of continuing with things that are childish. They found that access to resources, support, and community programs are helpful in the eyes of young adults who are transitioning to adulthood, and that social media was a popular resource.

Hossain, F., Terwelp, E. (2015). *Improving Outcomes for New York City's Disconnected Youth: Lessons from the Implementation of the Young Adult Literacy Program.* MDRC.
This report presents the findings of a study conducted on five Young Adult Literacy program sites to explore the variables that enable or challenge the success of program implementation. The findings were based on the observance of internships, staff interviews, focus groups and review of program participation data. The results found that most sites reported having no issues with recruitment, and the characteristics of the host organization played a role in shaping the implementation of the program. The author added that a paid internship was an incentive that increased participation and retention. However, most sites struggled with engagement and noted that it is necessary to make the connection between the student's career and academic goals with the internship early in the program.

Jones, V., Jo, J. H., Martin, P. (2007). *Future Schools and How Technology can be used to support Millennial and Generation-Z Students.* In *ICUT 2007 (Proc. B), 1st Int. Conf. Ubiquitous Information Technology* (pp. 886-891).

In this paper, the authors look at generational cohort changes and how technological-savvy millennial students need a different approach to learning. A generational cohort is defined here as a group of people born within the same time span, sharing a common social history. The majority of students today are millennials and are more comfortable and proficient in technology than their instructors. The internet plays a substantial role in their lives. Further, the authors point out that traditional teaching and learning methods have to evolve to be appropriate for the future. Finally, introducing Ubiquitous Agents (UAs) as a new technology to use in a school setting helps enhance the classroom experience for today's students. Education needs to become more individualistic, and UAs offer alternatives for today's advanced technological culture.

Larson R. W. (2000). *Toward a psychology of positive youth development*. The American Psychologist, 55, 170-183. doi:10.1037//0003-066X.
This author describes the psychology of positive youth development of young adults. He explains that western culture youth experiences moments of boredom. In order for initiatives to develop, intrinsic motivation in association with engagement in the environment is needed continually over time. The author conducted a study on adolescents' daily experiences; this study showed that participants in voluntary activities reported high intrinsic motivation and concentration. Contrarily, participating in schoolwork reported low intrinsic motivation with high levels of concentration. Another underlying presence of the success with positive youth development is the use of language. The use of conditional language can provide a window into what the youths are actually learning.

National League of Cities (2010). *Authentic Youth Civic Engagement: A Guide for Municipal Leaders.*
This document is a guide to help cities promote youth civic engagement. They introduce the Authentic Youth Civic Engagement (AYCE) framework as a way to introduce young people to become more involved and fulfill meaningful roles in public policy and decision-making.

Establishing a climate of respect for young people and effective partnerships with adults is a means to tackle relevant issues and effect change. The AYCE framework presents and reinforces the four critical elements for success: a setting, a structure, a strategy, and support. An assessment tool helps guide leaders to make decisions on incorporating the idea into their city, highlighting what can increase the chance for success.

Osborne, M. J. (2004). *An introduction to game theory* (Vol. 3, No. 3). New York: Oxford university press.
In the Introduction to Game Theory, the theory of rational choice is outlined with the decision-maker having a set of actions to choose from. If each set of actions is chosen based on preference, then the possibility of the decision-maker's outcome depends on the preference indicator function $u(a) > u(b)$, meaning, the analysis of the decision-maker's outcome is based on the decision-maker's preference. "The action chosen by a decision-maker is at least as good, according to her preferences, as every other available action." One action is only preferred over another if the outcome is greater for "a" than it is for "b".

Pew Internet & American Life Project. (2010). *Social media & mobile internet use among teens and young adults.*
This report was part of a series of reports managed by the Pew Research Center and highlights the attitudes and behaviors of internet and social media use among the millennial generation. Most of the data presented here was drawn from surveys taken in 2009. This report found that 81% of adults between the ages of 18 and 29 are wireless internet users, and internet connectivity is increasingly moving away from desktop and into the wireless environment. The authors mention that understanding an individual's technological environment is a clue to understanding how that person connects with others and accesses information.

Pew Internet & American Life Project (2016). *Social Media Update 2016*.
This report documents the ways in which Americans use a variety of social media platforms and how they seek out information and interact with others. In addition to tracking specific platforms, they have also measured the impact and meaning of social media. They found that Facebook continues to be America's most popular social networking platform, and 88% of adults between the ages of 18-29 use Facebook. The authors also take an extensive look into the current shape of the social media landscape of America.

Pittman, K., Irby, M., Tolman, J., Yohalem, N., & Ferber, T. (2003). *Preventing Problems, Promoting Development, Encouraging Engagement: Competing Priorities or Inseparable Goals?*. Based upon Pittman, K. & Irby, M. (1996). *Preventing Problems or Promoting Development?* Washington, DC: The Forum for Youth Investment, Impact Strategies, Inc.
This paper gives an outline of the shifts in the development of young people. The authors incorporate the idea of young people being decision makers and participants. Based on research, this paper does not present research findings, but it is a synopsis of key ideas. The goal is to foster emerging thinking around a well-adjusted focus on preventing problems, promoting development and encouraging engagement.

Seemiller, C. and Grace, M. (2017). *Generation Z: Educating and Engaging the Next Generation of Students.* About Campus, 22: 21–26. doi:10.1002/abc.21293
This article points out the characteristics of Ggeneration Z, a generation that has grown up with access to information more than its predecessor and have been shaped by the advancement of technology, issues of violence, and social justice movements. However, they are like the generation before them, as they focus on college as a way to acquire skills and learn. They prefer applied and hands-on learning, as the author tells us, using videos as a way to seek information. "The individual nature of technology has helped Generation Z become comfortable and accustomed to learning independently." The learning approach of Generation Z is different than that of teamwork-oriented and collaborative natured millennials. The author suggests that we should not throw out teamwork scenarios, but be mindful of Generation Z's learning approach when planning. When it comes to community engagement, this generation is more interested in long-term social change. Instead of spending a few hours at a community kitchen, they would rather participate in an initiative to eradicate hunger.

Skemer, M., Sherman, A., Williams, S., Cummings, D. (2017). *Reengaging New York City's Disconnected Youth through Work: Implementation and Early Impacts of the Young Adult Internship Program.* OPRE Report 2017-22. Washington, DC:
Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
This report is a summary of the implementation and impacts of an internship program in New York City. The Young Adult Internship Program (YAIP) is a temporary paid employment program for disconnected youth, offering additional support services. Participation rates were high and 86% of youth completed the program. In this summation, the authors note that it is important in early adulthood to obtain life skills and experience through training, education and employment. However, many young people in America are detached from these opportunities. This program is a way to re-engage with these youths by providing the support and incentive towards gainful employment experiences.

Steinmetz, H., Knappstein, M., Ajzen, I., Schmidt, P., & Kabst, R. (2016). *How effective are behavior change interventions based on the theory of planned behavior?: A three-level meta-analysis.* Zeitschrift Für Psychologie, 224(3), 216-233. doi:10.1027/2151-2604/a000255.
This meta-analysis contributes to the controversy surrounding the usefulness of the theory of planned behavior (TPB) when designing and implementing behavior change interventions by reporting the results of studies that conducted TPB-based interventions across different domains. This study also discusses the effectiveness of behavior change methods (e.g., goal setting, persuasion, motivation). In addition, this study analyzes the modes of delivery. They found that focusing on one behavioral change method was more effective than using multiple methods to improve the success of intention. The most successful methods according to the study are motivational appeals, persuasion, and increasing skills.