



# A Field Guide to Program Planning in Youth Development

## GET READY

Program planning in youth development is like working through a maze. Sometimes we do it quickly and easily. Other times we run into dead ends and have to retrace our steps to find new paths. So it is with program planning in youth development. Some programs run smoothly. Some programs have minor but fixable glitches. Others wander with continuous course corrections. Some stall out before anything starts. In the context of youth development, programs are planned in partnership with youth and other community members. Youth needs and assets are at the center, and achieving positive outcomes is the ultimate goal.

Use this guide to help you plan your youth program. You will need the following information to get started. It will help you ground your program with data.

- Participation data, such as [county diversity reports](#) and 4-H Dashboard (YDIntranet › Program Evaluation and Research › Data Collection)
- Census data and/or [MN Kids Count county fact sheets](#)
- [MN Compass](#)
- Data from [Community Commons](#) or [DataUSA](#)
- Map of your county and/or tribal nation
- [County](#) or [tribal nation](#) goals and/or mission/vision
- Any completed needs & assets assessments (such as GOT VIVA)
- UMN Extension Center for Youth Development logic model (YDIntranet › Click on “View the Minnesota 4-H Logic Model” in the right-hand menu)

Following is my Program Plan for \_\_\_\_\_

## STEP 1: LOOK OUTWARD AND INWARD

The first step in program planning is to look beyond your current program to see what is going on in young people’s lives. Use data to respond to the following.

- Think about your community. What stands out as the main issues and assets related to youth populations?

## STEP 2: VISION

Once you've taken a look at the needs and assets of your community, take a look at the MN 4-H Youth Development Logic Model. Considering both your community's needs/assets, and our overarching program goals, take some time to answer the question, "what is your vision for the youth program you work with?" As you think about this, consider what is or could be your program's unique niche in the community. What does or could it provide that other youth-serving organizations do not? Think about the difference your program should be making in the lives of youth.



### STEP 3: CREATE YOUR PROGRAM PLAN

You're ready now to develop a plan. Work through each section below thoughtfully.

#### Needs and Assets

- Decide on which youth needs and assets from Step 2 you will use to ground your program plan.



- Who cares about these youth needs and assets? These are potential partners/resources for your program plan.


#### Program Goal & Strategy

- Create a program goal related to those needs/assets. This goal should describe what impact you want to make on youth, considering our state Learn and Lead program goals. Doing this will help your program reflect both a state-wide and local vision.
- What will your main strategy be for achieving this program goal?

#### Growth and Access

- How many youth are currently in your program? How does this compare to the youth population in your program area and the needs/assets you identified above?



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- How does the program currently reflect the racial, cultural and socio-economic profile of the community?
  - Which audiences are currently not accessing 4-H but you think should be?
  - How are youth currently able to become part of the program? These are access points to your program. What other access points could you create?

### **Growth Goal & Strategy**

- Working from the needs and assets you identified, create a goal for how many youth you will aim to serve one year from now, as well as which audiences you will target for increased access.
- Create a list of strategies you will use to advance this goal. These strategies should describe what you will do, develop, create, or enhance in order to make an impact.

## Retention

- What is your current retention rate for youth and volunteers?
- Where/how are you losing?



### Retention Goal & Strategy

- Create a goal for what you would like your retention rate to be next year.
- Create a list of strategies you will use to advance this goal.

## Barriers

- What are the barriers to new youth and families participating and staying engaged in your program?



- What can you do, within your circle of influence, to remove those barriers?

## Resources

- What resources do you have already to implement your program plan?



- What resources do you need in order to improve and grow your program?

## Sustainability

Sustainability refers to maintaining something at a certain level over time. What does sustainability look like in your program long-term?

**Pick two or three** of the following factors of program sustainability and answer their corresponding questions.<sup>1</sup> If these factors don't suit your program, identify some that do.



- **Environmental support** (supportive internal and external climate for your program). What can you do to ensure there is support for your program in your community?
- **Communications** (strategic communication with stakeholders and the public about your program). What main messages can you communicate about your program and its impact?
- **Partnerships** (cultivating connections between your program and its stakeholders). How can you build partnerships across a variety of sectors (public, private, culture-specific, etc.) to help carry out common goals and cultivate larger community ownership of the program?
- **Program adaptation** (actions that adapt your program to ensure its ongoing effectiveness). How can you make sure your program is flexible and able to adapt to changing needs and audiences?
- **Program evaluation** (assessing your program to inform planning and document results). What plan can you put in place to monitor and report your program's effectiveness?
- **Organizational capacity** (internal support and resources needed to effectively manage your program). What can you do to increase your program's capacity to accomplish goals?
- **Funding stability** (consistent financial base for your program). How can you ensure there are multiple sources of funding for your program? What could you use these funds for?
- **Strategic planning** (processes that guide your program's directions, goals, and strategies). What can you do to continually set and follow a strategic direction that aligns with the larger internal (organizational) and external (community) environment?

<sup>1</sup> Center for Public Health Systems Science. (2018). Program sustainability assessment tool. St. Louis: Washington University in St. Louis. Retrieval from <https://sustaintool.org/>



#### **STEP 4: EVALUATE YOUR PLAN**

Now that you've built your plan, use these questions to help you refine it and find a starting place.

##### **The “What”**

- What did you notice about the plan? What stands out to you as strong?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- What is missing?

##### **The “So What”**

- Does this plan fit with how our organization does things? How does this plan align with our logic model? Your vision?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- How will this plan help grow and improve the local 4-H program?





## The “Now What”

- Based on your plan, what is one thing you could start doing?
  
- What is one thing you could continue doing?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- When you consider the plan, are there things you could stop doing?

## QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS?

Jennifer Skuza; [skuza@umn.edu](mailto:skuza@umn.edu); 612-624-7793  
Jessica Russo; [pier0239@umn.edu](mailto:pier0239@umn.edu); 612-624-7625  
Rebecca Meyer; [meyer178@umn.edu](mailto:meyer178@umn.edu); 218-726-6467