

youth involvement

**it's
YOUR
move
prevent
AIDS**



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
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Introduction

The keys to designing effective HIV Prevention efforts often lie within communities themselves. Youth are an essential component of these efforts, not only because youth are an integral and important part of the community, but because they are affected so greatly by the epidemic. Messages and programs designed to prevent HIV infection among young people are likely to be the most powerful if representatives of the “consumers” help design them.

Involving youth can present special challenges, and this report is an effort to prepare groups to face those challenges. The report relies on lessons learned about youth involvement during the first three years of the Prevention Marketing Initiative (PMI) Local Demonstration Sites Project, and on previously published information.

The PMI Local Demonstration Sites Project was funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as part of a national communication campaign designed to prevent sexual transmission of HIV among Americans under age 25. In five sites around the country—**Nashville, Newark, Northern Virginia, Phoenix, and Sacramento**—youth have been included as

HIV AND YOUTH

Rates of HIV infection are still rising in American youth. People 13-21 years of age now represent one fourth of all new HIV infections in the United States,¹ where at least 40,000 people become infected with HIV every year.²

In 1993, AIDS became the leading cause of death for Americans aged 25-44.³ Because of the long time between HIV infection and AIDS diagnosis, it is likely that many of those diagnosed with AIDS in their twenties were infected with HIV in their teens.

1 Rosenberg PS, Biggar RJ, Goedert JJ. (1994) Declining Age at HIV Infection in the United States. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 330, 789-790.

2 Office of National AIDS Policy. *Youth and HIV/AIDS: an American agenda. Report to the President*, The White House, March 1996.

3 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Update: mortality attributable to HIV infection among persons aged 25-44 years—United States, 1994. *MMWR* 1996;45 (6):121-125.

active members of specially constituted HIV prevention coalitions. The coalitions at the PMI sites use behavioral science and social marketing to plan and implement what CDC has termed “prevention marketing” programs.

From the outset, CDC considered the involvement of youth essential to the PMI planning process. Working for youth, with youth, was part of the original mandate that CDC gave these groups. As each site has moved through the stages of program planning and design and into implementation, the importance of youth participation has been underscored, and the goals and the realities of youth involvement have become clearer. Each site’s experiences have been unique. Some general youth participation themes have emerged, however, and they guide the material presented in the following sections:

- **Setting Goals and Planning for Youth Involvement**
- **Selecting and Recruiting Youth**
- **Enabling Youth and Adults to Work Together Effectively**
- **Sustaining and Monitoring Youth Involvement**

It is the hope of CDC and the dozens of people involved in each of the PMI Local Demonstration Sites that these experiences and insights will be useful to others who want to work with youth on an HIV/AIDS prevention plan or program, or on any other issue of deep concern to a community.

Setting Goals and Planning for Youth Involvement

Young people add energy and insight to a community coalition, but involving youth in a meaningful way requires some preparation.

When a group decides to involve youth in planning, designing, and implementing an HIV prevention program, two fundamental realities should be acknowledged:

- youth can be different from adults in profound ways, and
- youth differ from each other

To ensure these realities are constructively incorporated into the effort, it helps to develop a detailed plan for involving youth. The plan should spell out:

- objectives of youth involvement
- roles and activities or tasks for youth
- selection criteria
- recruitment strategies
- structure for involvement (e.g., membership on committees, advisory bodies)
- personnel needs (e.g., who will manage youth recruitment, involvement)
- training requirements (for adults; for youth)
- budget implications (e.g., materials, incentives, transportation)
- strategies for monitoring and sustaining youth involvement

Each of the PMI Local Demonstration Sites Project coalitions developed a written Youth Involvement Plan, and found it helpful. Interestingly, some of the coalitions included young people from the outset, even before a formal plan was developed, because the participation of youth in a program focused on their well-being simply seemed logical.

Having a plan can help throughout the program planning and implementation stages. For example, sustaining youth involvement over time was a serious problem in some sites. In other sites, assuring that youth made significant contributions to the program was difficult. When the going got tough, being able to refer to a plan and revisit original goals and objectives allowed PMI sites to reaffirm their commitment to youth involvement and to get back on track.

Defining Objectives by Pinpointing Benefits

Setting realistic objectives for involving youth is the most important step in a Youth Involvement Plan because all the other steps flow from it. Objectives should explain why youth are being brought into the group and list the roles youth will be expected to play. The objectives will have ongoing implications for the age and other characteristics of youth who can participate appropriately in your program.

As the PMI sites discussed their objectives for involving youth, they focused on expected benefits. These included benefits to the youth themselves, increased effectiveness of the prevention efforts, the positive effect of a youth voice on the coalition, and larger community ownership of the program.

YOUTH HAVE DIFFERENT...

...levels of readiness for planning activities

Young people vary widely in their knowledge about HIV, capacity for grasping theoretical principles (such as the tenets of social marketing), attention span, and maturity.

Implications: Recruitment strategies and task assignments must take these differences into account. Additional training time and special presentation techniques may be needed to help young group members understand and participate in the program.

...styles of communication

Across ages and ethnic groups, youth use many styles of slang. Humor and banter are powerful tools for them.

Implications: Communication with adults will require understanding and adjustment on both parts; communication training may be essential.

..."cultures" of work

School provides task-oriented, guided learning experiences designed to motivate youth. A job brings in money. In contrast, participation in a program planning effort may seem unproductive and unrewarding.

Implications: Alternate structures (like "prevention clubs") may be necessary to engage youth. The style of some planning meetings may have to be adjusted.

...schedules and constraints

The typical young person is in school during the day. He or she may also have a job, be a parent, or lack ready access to transportation.

Implications: If youth are going to participate in the same activities as adults, timing of meetings may have to be changed and transportation and child care may have to be provided.

BEYOND YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

Whenever adults work hand-in-hand with youth, there are opportunities for influence and growth. At a minimum, an HIV/AIDS prevention program should work to establish an atmosphere of mutual learning for the "community" of ages.

AIDS prevention programs have the opportunity to go further and foster youth development or youth empowerment. However, when a program begins to include the benefits of youth involvement to youth among its primary objectives, it takes on a new dimension. This

added responsibility should be accepted only with a clear understanding of what it means. It means, for example, a different level of training, of mentoring and counseling, and a rethinking of resources. It can mean a new or parallel agenda for program goals and tasks.

An analysis of the costs and benefits of youth involvement will help clarify a program's youth involvement objectives. Throughout the life of the program, it is wise to revisit these objectives and the commitment of group members to the level of youth participation they chose.

Including Youth in Many Roles and Tasks

Young people can be included in all phases of an HIV prevention program activity:

- If youth are the target audience, young people should be involved in the **research** that feeds into program planning. Talk to them directly about what they do and why. Pretest proposed prevention messages and materials with youth to make sure that the materials speak their language. Conduct focus groups or one-on-one interviews to give young people a chance to make specific suggestions for improving prevention materials. With proper supervision, young people can also help conduct research. For example, they can collect data about the accessibility of condoms in the local community.
- Involving youth in **program planning** is another way to benefit from their energy and insight. Young people can be members of subcommittees charged with specific planning tasks or members of the overall planning team.

During PMI's first year, the coalitions in the five sites were occupied with planning, which entailed organizing themselves, conducting research, and selecting their target audiences. While young people helped perform these tasks, it became clear that planning was both difficult and occasionally boring to them. Providing training in specific prevention subject areas helped somewhat, but, especially for some younger teens, "sitting at the table" was a lot to expect.

As a result, all of the communities attempted to identify appealing tasks for youth coalition members. A number of the sites recognized that having youth as spokespeople would give credibility to the program, and so their Youth Involvement Plans designated a special media/community outreach role for young members. They also knew that youth trained for this responsibility would gain valuable experience. Issues Management was a related area that offered a good match between project needs and youth interests. Issues Management involved staying attuned to any controversy that might arise, and acting as part of a quick response team when necessary.

When projects move from the planning phase to program implementation, different, less theoretical and less tedious tasks emerge. This presents new opportunities for youth:

- Youth can be involved in the *delivery of program messages and services* as peer trainers/counselors, media spokespeople, and program advisors.

This role allows youth to act as powerful links to their peers as program messages and services are disseminated. The **Phoenix** site, for example, anticipated this role by designing “PMI Kids,” a program effort to train youth as effective opinion leaders and peer outreach workers.

Tailoring Selection Criteria to Program Objectives

Once a community coalition has determined its objectives for youth involvement and outlined the activities in which the youth will engage, it can begin to list the criteria for selecting youth to participate. PMI sites were required by CDC to involve young people in program planning, but site coalitions were free to decide the specifics, such as how many youth to recruit and how old they would be. The selection criteria and recruitment strategies adopted by the PMI coalitions are detailed in the next chapter.

Designing a Structure for Youth Involvement

Promising “representation” to a particular segment of the community might simply mean assuring its members that they have equal status or voting rights. In two of the PMI sites, youth representation initially evolved this way, without separate youth structures.

In **Newark**, the first paid committee staff person was a recent college graduate, and therefore a “youth” herself according to CDC’s definition (under 25 years old). Thus, bringing peers into the group offered little initial challenge. Interestingly, Newark was the last site to develop an official Youth

Involvement Plan. By the time it did so, many lessons had been learned and youth members were able to help develop strategies for continued vigorous participation.

In **Phoenix**, several university students were recruited early on to carry out research or to contribute other project-related expertise. Recruitment was based on their potential contributions to the project rather than on their membership in the target audience *per se*. Once again, youth participation evolved without any specially designated effort.

In other sites, PMI coalitions felt from the start that involving youth required special organizational structures. While they retained youth representation on the overall planning committees and subcommittees, these sites added separate youth advisory groups with up to 30 members. The new structures gave young participants a chance to get to know each other, to discuss issues, and to learn in a more familiar and congenial environment. In addition, having adjunct youth groups permitted a greater number of youth to participate in PMI. Young PMI participants could develop their own agendas and pursue activities that were especially relevant to them and within the broad scope of the HIV prevention effort, but beyond the very focused behavioral objectives of PMI.

Eventually, all of the PMI sites recognized that their commitment to youth involvement meant adjustments in organizational structure. The extent of these adjustments varied considerably, and the PMI experience demonstrates that there is no single perfect structure. The sites tried to balance the need for appropriate representation with the needs of youth for a supportive and stimulating experience. In some of the sites that elected to create youth advisory groups, the decision grew partly out of a somewhat unspoken “youth development” perspective on PMI’s objectives. In other sites, the decision was founded more on a practical concern about how to sustain youth involvement and interest in the project. However, asking parallel groups to discuss or decide on the same issues always presented the danger that one group or the other would miss out on good discussions or that they would come to different conclusions. Setting up separate youth advisory groups also created a temptation to create “make work” activities. Ultimately, the success of any of these structures had much to do with other factors—who was recruited, who was coordinating youth activities, and how well participants were prepared for their responsibilities.

Managing Youth Involvement

The scale of a program’s activities and the number of youth involved will dictate what level of management and coordination is needed. For example, if a community group anticipates involving only one or two youth, it

may be sufficient for one of the adult members of the group to mentor and supervise them. On the other hand, if the group envisions a 15-member youth advisory body, then it may need to hire a part- or full-time staff member to manage this aspect of the effort. The level of management needed will, of course, have budgetary implications.

Because of the significant numbers of youth involved, most of the PMI sites hired a half-time consultant to help manage and motivate youth.

Finding the right person for a youth consultant position is important. In **Nashville**, for example, the PMI site was able to identify a charismatic coordinator who had experience working in a local youth-serving agency. When youth members were later asked what motivated them to join PMI and to stay involved, many cited the leadership of this individual.

Each site also established a subcommittee to address youth involvement issues. Most of the communities found they needed more intense attention to youth involvement issues than they had originally anticipated.

The box on this page outlines the scope of work of a typical PMI youth coordinator. What isn't included in that outline, however, is just as important. In working with youth, the need for leadership, role modeling, and listening is central.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF A PMI YOUTH COORDINATOR

- recruit youth advisory team member
- coordinate logistics for youth participants
- organize and facilitate youth advisory team meetings
- participate in Planning Committee meetings and act as liaison to schools, parents, and other youth-serving organizations
- work closely with youth advisory team representatives who attend the adult Planning Committee meetings to ensure comfort and readiness
- work with youth to determine how they would like to be recognized in the community for their participation in PMI
- solicit donations from local businesses and organizations for give-away prizes at youth meetings
- monitor the needs of the youth participants

Selecting and Recruiting Youth

It is a major challenge to select and recruit young people who can participate effectively in HIV prevention activities. In fact, recruitment is not a one-time task, but an ongoing one that builds on the systematic planning described in Part 1. The objectives established for youth involvement and the potential tasks outlined for youth participants provide the basis for developing selection criteria. Knowing which youth are appropriate will also help determine where and how they can best be recruited. Benefits to youth participants should be thought through and articulated; they provide the basis for motivating youth to join the program.

Approaching selection and recruitment in this way will help answer the questions that young people will raise about the nature of the work involved, the level of commitment they are expected to make, and the amount of responsibility they are expected to assume. Young people who have clear and realistic expectations are more likely to sustain their involvement in HIV prevention planning and other activities.

Establishing Selection Criteria

Just as criteria would be established for any kind of formal job or training program, there should be explicit criteria for selecting youth who will participate in an HIV prevention program. A first step in establishing these criteria is to review the youth involvement objectives and proposed tasks that have been identified. For example, if an HIV prevention program decides that youth will participate as full members of the planning committee and as consultants in technical areas, the youth recruited will have to have a certain level of cognitive maturity; an interest and perhaps a background in HIV prevention; and even specific technical skills. If a program identifies media relations or the role of “community spokesperson” as appropriate for youth members, youth with strong verbal communication skills or public speaking experience will be better prepared than others. In some cases, however, skills or experience are not as important as diversity of representation. Training can help fill gaps where skills might be missing.

Selection criteria can be organized into four broad categories: descriptive, skills-based, constituency-based, and target-audience based.¹

1. Categories adapted from Marmor TR, Morone JA. *Representing Consumer Interests: Imbalanced Markets, Health Planning, and the HSAs*. Milbank Memorial Fund Quarterly Health and Society 1980;58(1):125-165.

Descriptive criteria include variables describing an individual's age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, developmental maturity, gender, educational or income level, and so forth. A program might seek specific attributes (for example, teens in a certain geographic area, or a certain age appropriate to the role envisioned for them). Or, a program might seek diversity in these attributes (for example, a balance of ethnicities and income levels).

Skills-based criteria might include individuals' background experience working on HIV prevention programs, on youth programs, or in peer-to-peer situations; their interest in social marketing or related areas; their skills in working with adults or in a committee/team environment; or written and verbal communication skills. Every program requires some type of skills, starting with the basic ability to cooperate in a group project. These will be more or less important to a program, however, depending upon its objectives for involving youth. If few skill requirements are set, then a greater level of training should be anticipated for those recruited.

Constituency-based criteria are based on membership in other identified groups. For example, boys and girls clubs, religious youth groups, other prevention programs, or the YMCA might serve as filters for youth who are in a sense pre-selected for certain skills, abilities, or attributes. Constituency-based criteria, therefore, offer a short-cut in the recruitment process.

Target audience-based criteria use the same segmentation variables for selecting youth participants in program planning and delivery as those used to define eligibility for receiving the program's services. Target audiences can vary by program objective, location, and other characteristics.

In determining selection criteria, the program should also ask such questions as:

- What resources are available for training, orientation, and coordination?
- Can the program compensate appropriately for skills that may be lacking, if, for example, the criterion of geographic coverage is given higher priority?

Some trade-offs between criteria may be necessary. For example, modest resources may mean either limited geographic representation or selection of youth who can provide their own transportation.

The PMI Experience

The PMI sites generally found it most useful to use a combination of categories in establishing their criteria. Most sites initially took into consideration the attributes of their target audiences, and added selection criteria that reflected their youth involvement objectives. Importantly, the sites found that

as time went by, their criteria for participation needed to be re-thought. This re-thinking led to additional rounds of youth recruitment. The brief examples below outline the selection criteria used by two sites, and show to what extent these did, or did not, reflect the target audience of the program.

Northern Virginia

Target Audience for Program. 15-19 year old African Americans.

Selection Criteria for Youth Participants. The program began with the descriptive criteria of its target audience, and then added other criteria. It aimed to recruit African Americans in the 15-19 age range, both males and females, who were diverse in terms of sexual orientation, HIV status, religion, and geographic area. In addition, the program sought youth with strong communication skills, the ability to work independently, and the ability to attend monthly meetings.

Sacramento

Target Audience for Program. Sexually active 14-18 year olds living in 15 zip codes identified as high-risk areas.

Selection Criteria for Youth Participants. The program sought 14-18 year olds who were peer leaders or were interested in gaining peer leadership skills. Diversity was also a goal; criteria were established for finding youth from various cultural backgrounds, living in both urban and rural environments, and attending various types of schools (e.g., public, private, and alternative institutions). Sacramento focused on young people in the high school age range as most convenient, but made this a “loose” requirement—interested youth who were outside this range were not turned away.

Spelling Out Costs and Benefits

Recruitment is not simply a process of finding youth, but also a process of motivating their commitment to a new activity and explaining responsibilities up front so that expectations are clear and participation can be sustained over time.

A recruitment strategy should be based upon a realistic list of potential benefits and costs to the youth themselves. Participation in HIV prevention efforts might intrinsically benefit youth in any number of ways, both tangible and intangible. For example, participation can provide them with the opportunity to gain skills, learn new information, make potentially valuable contacts in the community, make new friends, develop social and business skills, and gain a greater sense of self-worth through their contributions to the community. Peer educators tend to convince themselves as well as others, become more effective over time, and develop into young adult leaders in

society. If the role of youth in a program grows to entail shared responsibility for reaching ultimate group goals, the benefits of participation are also likely to deepen. The best way to assess these incentives and to know how to present them during recruitment is to discuss them with youth themselves.

At the same time, program planners owe it to youth to think through what the costs of participating might be to them. The average teenager has myriad competing interests for his or her time. Some youth will have to curtail other extracurricular activities. Others will have costs of child care and transportation to consider. Some of the barriers to a youth of participating in a program cannot be overcome. With a little creativity, however, many can be reduced or eliminated. Again, the key to surmounting these barriers is understanding youths' own perspectives on what these costs are, and what the solutions might be.

This makes it essential to promote a program to youth by emphasizing its possible benefits to them, describing any incentives that are also being offered, and clearly outlining the costs. The chapter entitled "Sustaining and Monitoring Youth Involvement" provides a further discussion of benefits and barriers and how they change over the course of a program.

Recruiting Youth Members

Recruitment is labor intensive and challenging. A group may decide upon one strategy and then have to develop another one because of turnover, changing objectives, or unexpected barriers as the realities of working together emerge. Planners should understand from the beginning that recruitment is an ongoing process because participation will probably have many peaks and valleys. Given the nature of this age group—their changing schedules from season to season, their swiftly changing commitments, and their passage to new phases (college and/or work, for example)—turnover is inevitable. The "valleys" in participation should not be viewed as signs of failure, but rather as opportunities to reassess what kind of participation is most relevant and workable.

Who Will Be Responsible for Recruitment?

Program planning committees may have several recruiting options open to them. These range from making recruitment one of the responsibilities of a paid staff person, to relying entirely upon volunteers in a subcommittee organized for this purpose, to hiring a youth involvement consultant.

Using the Regular Paid Staff. If the task of coordinating youth recruitment is limited enough, it can be added to a staff member's ongoing duties. This is particularly true if the planning committee decides to recruit only a small number of youth. Some groups may decide to initiate recruitment efforts

using existing staff, but then find that the task becomes overwhelming when combined with that person's day-to-day responsibilities. Using a volunteer subcommittee or a paid youth consultant are options then.

Subcommittee Volunteers. Some programs organize a youth involvement subcommittee and make this group responsible for initial recruiting efforts. The committee may consist of several volunteers, with one or two serving as co-chairs. These volunteers have the commitment and make the time, and are often willing to show patience and perseverance in the recruitment process.

Using a Consultant. A paid consultant, hired because of his or her experience working directly with youth and with youth organizations, and his or her understanding of their needs, lifestyles, and developmental levels, can help devise an efficient and effective recruitment strategy. Using a consultant also allows other staff members and volunteers to stay focused on their roles and responsibilities and not become overburdened. A consultant whose special focus is on youth can also help to keep this issue in the forefront of the planning process.

What Strategies Will Be Used?

Strategies used in recruitment will vary based on youth involvement objectives and selection criteria, and the time and other resources available. Adults involved in the prevention program should ask themselves:

- How many youth should be recruited?
- Who will be responsible for the recruitment process?
- What resources will be needed (e.g., staff, facilities, funds)?
- What supporting materials will be helpful in recruiting youth or providing background for their parents?
- How much time will the initial recruitment process take, and what kind of time commitment is necessary to conduct ongoing recruitment activities?
- Will easily accessed networks suffice for recruitment purposes?

Many planning committees begin by tapping into their own internal recruitment resources and readily accessed networks. Planning committees may consist of representatives from various parts of the community (e.g., service providers, school officials, AIDS activists, religious leaders). Some committee members work with youth daily and can easily access various existing networks. They can also provide insight into the effectiveness of the strategies outlined by the committee. Other committee members have colleagues, friends,

or relatives who coordinate youth programs and are able to provide names and phone numbers, make introductory phone calls, and vouch for the program's credibility.

Networks and personal contacts are always crucial. On the other hand, relying on the familiar or convenient can have its dangers (see box). The chance to recruit a group through very little effort can make adhering to selection criteria difficult. Contact with a limited, familiar network can also produce a somewhat homogeneous group, when that might not be desired. However, the use of this "constituency" approach can be successful.

SOMETIMES THE BEST NETWORKS CAN BACKFIRE

Although all of the PMI sites used their "contacts" to some degree to help recruit youth, the informality of this approach can sometimes create unexpected problems.

In one site, for example, a young woman who was the girlfriend of a committee member's son was recruited.

Understandably, during committee meetings, she felt reluctant to openly discuss the sexual attitudes and behaviors of her peer group in the presence of her boyfriend's mother.

In general, basic recruitment strategies include:

- Using formal contacts with organizations represented on the planning committee.
- Using informal contacts through committee members—their colleagues, their children, relatives, and friends of children.
- Getting help from intermediaries—program directors of youth organizations, youth programs, schools, churches, or other groups with access to an appropriate pool of youth.
- Getting formal help from youth themselves—peer-to-peer counselors for example, who have direct outreach to other youth from the appropriate population segment(s).

- Getting informal help from youth who are already involved in the program—asking for word-of-mouth promotion of the program, seeking participation of friends and neighbors.

Some programs may want to ask potential youth members to go through an actual application process. Others seek nominations of youth from other organizations. Some ask applicants to come for an informal interview with committee members. Some element of formality in the application process, however, helps emphasize the responsibilities expected of participants. A committee may even want to ask youth members to sign “contracts” outlining what the committee expects of them, and what they can expect in turn from the experience.

What Recruitment Materials Will Be Helpful?

Written materials, no matter how basic, should be part of the recruitment. Even a simple flier acts as official documentation of the project, establishes its credibility, gives strategic information about the program and what involvement means, and serves as a reference after the initial encounter.

Written materials serve different purposes for the different groups who read them. Youth will want to know the benefits and the requirements of participation. Parents will want to have reassurances about the program’s credibility, about logistics, and about safety issues in order to give permission for their children to participate. Recruitment intermediaries will need to know more details about criteria for selection so that they can help identify appropriate participants.

Different formats should be used to suit the needs and interests of the various recipients. For example, parents and program directors may be more likely, out of habit, to read a letter with attachments. Youth are motivated by something less bureaucratic and more entertaining. Photographs, graphics, and limited text may speak more convincingly to them.

USING PRINT MATERIALS TO SUPPORT RECRUITMENT

Each PMI site segmented its different audiences and devised simple materials to help with recruitment.

For example, in **Newark**, *audiences* included: youth, parents, planning committee members, social service agencies

Materials included: application form, list of questions, fliers, letter to planning committee members, letter to social service agencies, parental/legal guardian consent form, youth contract form, youth medical release form. All of these materials were developed in English and Spanish.

The PMI Experience

Northern Virginia aimed to recruit 20 youth. The Planning Committee established a Mentoring and Recruitment subcommittee, which worked with a paid youth coordinator who had experience with youth organizations and grassroots community involvement. Together, the subcommittee and the consultant contacted youth service organizations, schools, teen pregnancy and other youth programs, health departments, and community-based organizations. They sent letters and a fact sheet on PMI to these groups soliciting their recommendations. The subcommittee members also spoke with guidance counselors and made presentations at various schools on PMI and the benefits of getting involved.

Identified youth were then sent a letter inviting them to an information session. During this session they reviewed a video to learn more about the program, and then exchanged questions with committee members. As youth confirmed their interest in participating, they were encouraged to recruit other youth and help facilitate information sessions for new recruits.

All of the youth recruited were part of the program's target population of 15-19 year old African Americans, as planned. However, most were top students, high achievers, very articulate, and planned to go to college. They did not really represent the at-risk group that the program hoped to reach. The Northern Virginia experience illustrates one dilemma of the recruitment process—a dilemma that should be clearly addressed in the initial youth involvement planning process: Those who are at risk and most disadvantaged are often least able or likely to participate in a program geared to benefit them, precisely because of their disadvantages.

In spite of using a network approach to recruitment, **Sacramento** managed to engage a quite diverse group in terms of ages, socioeconomic background, ethnicities, and perspectives. However, some months later participation gradually fell off and a second wave of recruitment was conducted somewhat differently. A part-time youth coordinator was hired (with suggestions for the job description provided by still-active youth). Fliers were distributed to teachers, the PTA, prevention programs, group homes, and so forth, seeking nominations of potential members. The youth also distributed PMI information at "Friday Night Live," a school-based substance abuse prevention program. The youth coordinator also visited classrooms and other youth programs, conducted presentations, and talked to young people about PMI. This one-on-one approach yielded the best results.

The **Phoenix** coalition and staff originally aimed to recruit a very small number of youth with program-relevant skills. They began by soliciting potential names from committee members who had formal contact with young people. The staff coordinator also called youth councils for recommendations of those who might be interested, and recruited two youth members at HIV confer-

ences. When Phoenix reached the point of assessing the availability of existing programs for its target audience and the receptivity to such efforts on the part of the larger community, the site hired a graduate student with research skills to assist. This student remained with the site as a paid intern, helping in different capacities related to research.

Working with Youth Is a Legal Matter

As adults prepare to recruit and work with youth as “equals” in HIV planning efforts, they should keep in mind their very different roles in the eyes of the legal system.² Working with minors (those under 18) means being conscientious about certain kinds of protections. At a minimum, planners should keep in mind the following:

- ***Parental consent forms are a must.*** A standard parental consent form should be discussed with parents or guardians, completed by them, and filed. Communication with parents is essential to gain their understanding and support for their children’s participation. In addition, their signature on a consent form relieves program planners of unexpected liabilities in connection with young people’s participation.
- ***Emancipated youth are different.*** Planners should be familiar with the guidelines and parameters in their state for working with “emancipated youth,” if relevant. These are young people who have been legally released from the supervision of their parents.
- ***Auto insurance should be reviewed.*** If the program has any plans of using volunteers’ cars to transport youth to meeting sites or activities, potential drivers should make sure they have adequate and appropriate automobile insurance for this purpose.
- ***Background checks are a good idea.*** Planners must ensure that any adults working closely with youth have not been found guilty of crimes such as child abuse, sexual abuse, violence, or robbery.

2. English A. Adolescents and HIV: Legal and Ethical Questions. In: Quackenbush M, et al., editors. *The HIV Challenge: Prevention Education for Young People*. 2nd ed. Santa Cruz (CA): ETR Associates; 1995. p. 259-285.

Enabling Youth and Adults to Work Together Effectively

In our society, adults and youth do not usually work side by side as equals. Hierarchical relationships seem more natural to us. Parents and children, teachers and students, scout leaders and scouts—these are familiar roles. When adults and youth decide to depart from familiar, vertical relationships, everyone is likely to experience some apprehension. Along with this apprehension come all of the stereotypes and misconceptions that different generations inevitably harbor about each other. A program that attempts to bring generations together productively should acknowledge the fact that both the young people and the adults may need some preparation.

Preparing Youth to Work with Adults

For young people, working as equals on HIV prevention program planning with adults from the broader community can be a daunting prospect. Orientations, trainings, and briefings and debriefings can all help to get youth up to speed on the issues and increase their confidence in working with adults.

Getting Youth Members Started

Early meetings and orientations are important opportunities for making youth feel welcome and valued, for creating bonds among all the members, both youth and adult, and for preparing youth for their roles and responsibilities. An orientation can be conducted one-one-one or in group sessions, preferably with parents present. The session should:

- provide background information on the program
- describe the organizational structure—the committee and how youth activities are integrated within it
- present the existing youth involvement plan and explain its rationale
- discuss the program's expectations of youth
- review benefits and incentives offered to youth by the program
- explore transportation and any other logistical needs (such as child care, if appropriate)
- distribute parental/legal guardian consent forms (for those under 18)
- discuss youth's expectations and concerns

A number of the PMI sites chose innovative ways to help get youth involved. In **Sacramento**, the site made its first meeting a two-hour pizza party so that potential participants could interact with each other and a few steering committee members. About half of the youth showed up at a subsequent six-hour orientation.

Newark paid special attention to the importance of building relationships among a group of youth from different backgrounds. The site had the resources to run a two-day retreat, which combined content workshops with sessions on interpersonal skills. Areas covered included basic information about the transmission and prevention of AIDS, the underlying premises of PMI, social marketing concepts, other PMI “lingo,” and the roles and responsibilities of the youth group. Personal skills-building included sessions on group dynamics and assertiveness to prepare youth to express themselves confidently around a table of adults. The retreat also provided many opportunities for the participants to socialize informally.

Providing Formal Training to Youth

As discussed in the first chapter, there are numerous possible roles for youth in HIV prevention. Whatever activities are selected, youth will probably require some degree of training and support. They are likely to need help participating in and conducting meetings, and assistance in developing a clear grasp of program subject matter. Whenever youth participants face a new task, they should be adequately prepared.

In all of the PMI sites, young people received half-day training as media spokespersons to prepare them for the challenges and potential hazards of speaking to the press. An advertising/social marketing company with media expertise trained the youth in how to respond to media inquiries, how to present a program’s key messages, and how to handle questions.

Formal training in survey research techniques were required when, as a one-time activity, **Newark, Sacramento, and Northern Virginia** requested help from their youth participants in conducting local “condom audits.” The goal of the audits was to identify barriers that teens confront when they try to obtain condoms. Some youth members conducted telephone interviews with clinics and service providers throughout the city; others carried out personal interviews with their peers; still others visited various commercial stores to interview clerks, observe the display of condoms on the shelves, and assess prices and packaging. The sites first provided training to the young people in how to use survey instruments and how to conduct interviews. Role-playing in group meetings was a successful training technique.

Special training is a good idea whenever youth are asked to help conduct meetings or workshops or even make presentations. For example, youth in one of the sites felt their meetings had become informal and unproductive, and after requesting advice in this area, adopted Roberts Rules of Order to help them interact efficiently.

Providing Briefings and Debriefings

Whether young people participate in two-day conferences out of town, or two-hour workshops locally, they should be briefed not only on what to

expect, but also on expectations regarding their own roles and responsibilities before, during, and after the activity. A productive way to remind youth of their roles during a workshop, for example, is to simply state, “we are hoping to gain (X) from youth participating in this workshop, and we are hoping to provide youth with (Y) benefit from the experience.”

The importance of “advance warning” is illustrated by the example of one 16-year old male who, after participating in a half-day PMI workshop on behavioral research, complained, “That was worse than being at school. Now I can imagine what it must feel like to sit through a college lecture.” Unfortunately, the youth had missed a pre-workshop briefing explaining the rationale and structure of this workshop, and his initial excitement about the project was considerably dampened by the workshop experience.

Debriefings are helpful in that they provide an opportunity for youth to describe their experience, review follow-up responsibilities, ask questions, and clarify any areas of confusion. Their feedback can be used to make future meetings more effective and engaging.

Preparing Adults to Work with Youth

Adults need to be prepared to work with youth as much as youth need help in working with adults. For example, adults may have fears or biases about working with young people. They may believe that:

- Young people will find the work (and possibly the company) boring.
- The pace of work will be slowed.
- Young people will be unruly and rude and will disagree with group decisions.
- Young people cannot master the skills necessary either to do the work or to interact effectively with adults.
- Young people do not belong in decision-making roles.

In short, adults may believe that including young people will result in many “minuses” and very few “pluses.”

If working across generations is presented as “politically correct,” adults may be especially reluctant to admit that they have such attitudes, and may simply become resentful and irritable when youth participation is attempted. Discussing and coming to consensus on the objectives of youth involvement before youth are brought on board should minimize negative adult reactions. It may also help to have adults who regularly work with youth share their expertise. Learning about effective strategies for working with youth can sensitize and prepare adults.

Thinking about New Roles for Adults

Adults can transform their own attitudes and ways of working with youth by focusing on the new roles required of them in a shared working environment.

- as co-equals on planning committees
- as co-chairs of subcommittees
- as co-facilitators of workshops
- as trainers of youth
- as mentors of youth

These roles require adults to try out new behaviors. Sometimes, just the opportunity for adult members to brainstorm informally or to air frustrations is enough to enable them to adopt the necessary behaviors. At other times, specific training is helpful.

These new roles also require adults to readjust some old attitudes. For example, sharing a meeting with youth means youth should be expected to be heard as well as seen; it means their opinions and questions will be treated with respect; and it means youth, like others, will have the opportunity to object to ideas or suggestions if there is a sound basis for this. It may mean shifting meeting times to accommodate their schedules, or providing food to accommodate their active metabolisms.

Adults who facilitate sessions attended by both adults and youth need to be conscious of the developmental levels of those present. Facilitators should frequently ask participants if there are any questions. This will encourage youth to speak up, and allow the facilitator to clarify any misunderstandings or difficult concepts.

In training mixed groups of youth and adults, trainers should think about:

- asking youth to preview materials to ensure clarity
- spending more time on an icebreaker
- encouraging people to share their expectations of the training
- reviewing—and correcting any misunderstandings; of the training objectives and how the training will be accomplished
- reducing the amount of time spent on lectures; if there is a need for lectures, multiple mini-lectures of about 15 minutes in length are better than a few longer lectures
- increasing the number of interactive, hands-on training methods (role plays, skits)
- providing adequate opportunity for feedback throughout the training to make sure content is being understood
- allowing sufficient time for questions and answers

Providing Formal Training to Adults

When the PMI sites received their mandate from the CDC to include youth on their planning committees, many were unsure where to begin. Adults in three sites (**Nashville**, **Northern Virginia**, and **Sacramento**) elected to participate in a formal training session conducted by national technical advisors to the project. The training objectives of the one-day session, *Preparing for Youth Involvement*, were to:

- outline the developmental milestones of youth at given ages
- clarify personal and group attitudes about youth and working with youth
- identify factors that may affect young people’s ability to participate effectively in PMI
- identify benefits and barriers related to youth involvement
- brainstorm on effective ways to involve youth

Understanding developmental issues is key. For instance, it is inappropriate to expect 14-year-olds to manage a research project. However, it might be appropriate for a college student to work with project staff to design and test a research instrument, as actually happened in **Phoenix**. And, it would be appropriate to pretest research instruments with 14-year-olds participating on the committee, as happened in **Northern Virginia** and **Newark**.

Nashville’s experience helps illustrate the danger of taking youth’s capacities too much for granted. After a number of months, the committee noticed that youth participation had started to dwindle. Members looked for possible problems and found that young participants were taking longer than expected to gain an understanding of PMI materials and to feel comfortable in meetings.

Providing Sensitivity Training to Adults

In **Northern Virginia**, the committee asked youth members to design and conduct their own sensitivity training for adult members. Young people had a chance to be the “experts” in an important workshop. During the sensitivity training, the youth used techniques such as role-reversal skits to help adults see their behavior as youth see it. The training was entertaining and relied very heavily on humor to bring out common cross-generational assumptions and de-fuse sources of potential friction (see box on the following page). Two consultants and a young committee member who had experience in peer education assisted the youth in designing the training.

The sensitivity training also addressed common misconceptions adults have about youth. The young people who facilitated this session helped adults interpret young people’s dress and slang. For example, they pointed out that a person who dresses in “grunge” (jeans with holes in them, second-hand or oversized clothes) should not be perceived as economically disadvantaged or as a member of a gang. Grunge is simply in fashion, and can, in fact, be

quite expensive. Other misconceptions had to do with the informality and humor of youth. For teens, qualities that seem rude to adults are often ice breakers and ways of expressing closeness.

Facilitating Positive Change—Giving and Taking Feedback

Both the process and the products of youth-led activities and activities in which youth and adults participate as equals will be different from what would be expected from adult-only situations. Planners and committee members need to be prepared for these differences. Adults and youth should give each other constructive feedback on their work and their group experiences. This can be accomplished through written questionnaires, informal phone or face-to-face discussions, or group discussion. Adults should be honest but helpful in evaluating the effectiveness of youth in different roles. In one PMI site, for example, several youth members facilitated a workshop for the entire committee. Evaluation forms revealed that adults considered one young trainer's behavior aggressive and a little demeaning. These reactions were discussed directly during a debriefing with the individual, who was able to incorporate some specific suggestions into the next workshop session.

ROLE REVERSAL AND HUMOR AS TOOLS FOR TRAINING—THE PMI EXPERIENCE

As part of a sensitivity training session, adult and youth participants in Northern Virginia "played" each other in a humorous skit showing how adults can ignore and insult youth without realizing they are doing so. The adults (played by youth) make a number of *faux pas* in dealing with the youth (played by adults). For example:

- The time of the meeting has been changed and youth are not advised. Therefore they all arrive late.
- There are no seats for youth, and they are nonchalantly told to sit on the floor.
- An adult asks, "Why are these kids here?" He is told, "One of them is the daughter of our committee chair."
- Although the youth have missed part of the meeting, they are left to try to catch up with the discussion as best they can, with no effort to explain what they have missed.
- Whenever young people try to talk, they are either interrupted or not taken seriously.
- At the conclusion of the meeting, the young people are thanked in a patronizing manner.

Sustaining and Monitoring Youth Involvement

No magic formula exists for keeping youth at the table to support HIV prevention or other community programs. The energy level of young people is intense and demanding, and their interests tend to change over time. Even the most committed youth will move on in a short time to college or jobs, so turnover is a constant issue. Program planners should remember that the world of a young person is full of competing interests, and design a practical mix of strategies for structuring and monitoring youth involvement.

A number of principles are central to sustaining youth involvement:

- keep participation meaningful
- offer appropriate benefits and incentives
- address actual and perceived barriers
- offer a supportive environment
- monitor the level and nature of participation

Keeping Participation Meaningful

The Need to Feel Relevant

Adults may tolerate sitting through long meetings and contributing marginally to a slow-moving process, but youth are likely to want quick, visible results. Tell young people that their participation is helpful, and provide them with concrete, useful tasks.

One PMI site allowed young people to play leadership roles on committees and subcommittees, and even made one young person a co-chair. Assigning key roles highlighted the value of a youth perspective, gave individual young people exceptional visibility and status, and encouraged youth members to feel their contributions were relevant and welcome. PMI youth also perceived roles such as media spokesperson, key informant, data gatherer, and qualitative data interpreter to be very meaningful.

The Need to Be Active

The planning stages of any program are crucial, but may seem theoretical and dry. Youth attendance may grow spotty, necessitating repetition of material for those who have missed it. Youth who hang on during this phase tend to be “achievers”; diversity among young participants can be lost. It is important to keep young members active in tangible ways during slow periods. Activities can be directly related to the program being planned, or they can be linked to similar efforts in the community.

In **Northern Virginia**, for example, the Mentoring and Recruitment Committee worked together with the Youth Advisory Board to identify opportunities for youth to volunteer at local AIDS service organizations. Young people serve as “buddies” to persons living with AIDS, helping deliver dinners and providing other support. In **Newark**, young people made presentations at State of New Jersey HIV Prevention/Community Planning Group meetings and presented to other peer educators at the World AIDS Day Conference. Youth in several sites have participated in HIV/AIDS fund-raising efforts such as car washes. **Sacramento** youth became involved with the NAMES Project.

The Importance of Having Fun

A program is much more likely to sustain youth interest if it recognizes that young people seek opportunities to have fun, to interact, and to “be themselves.” Breaks for food, music, gossip, and relaxation should be interwoven into any activity. For example, a long conference can be made entertaining by arranging “extracurricular” activities such as shopping or sightseeing. Tasks that require team work and creativity are ideal for balancing needs for relevance and sociability. Several PMI sites capitalized on young people’s creative instincts by asking them to design promotional T-shirts.

The Goal—Sharing Ownership

The very real pressure to keep youth active sometimes results in the development of parallel groups for adults and young people. Although the groups may have overlapping agendas, they can begin to feel separate. Youth who attend both full committee meetings and youth advisory group meetings may feel they are covering the same information over and over again without “doing” anything. Adults and youth need to maintain a shared understanding of their goals, and that their activities remain meaningful *to each other*. When a program aims to share ownership with youth, it will probably succeed best if it combines opportunities for youth to contribute actively to established overall goals with opportunities to “do their own thing.”

Offering Appropriate Benefits and Incentives

Youth are drawn to a program by an array of tangible and intangible incentives from which they derive perceived benefits. They remain involved if these benefits outweigh the costs of being involved, such as time away from a job or sports, or the hassle of finding transportation. Keep in mind that the value of an incentive lies entirely in the eyes of the person who receives it. “Knowing your target audience” is therefore key. Talking with young group members helps them become aware of their own values and motivations for joining the community effort. This dialogue should be the basis for devising and revising the incentives that will help sustain youth involvement.

Tangible incentives—those that can be touched, or counted, or are in some other way “material”—are the easiest to discuss. They can include monetary stipends for participation, reimbursement for transportation, food at meetings and a safe environment in which to socialize, T-shirts, certificates of participation, training in public speaking, academic credit, and opportunities to travel or make presentations or produce skits.

Planners should keep in mind that many adults participate in community planning processes as part of paid employment, or are rewarded in other ways by their employers for representing the agency or company. Youth participants, on the other hand, may be losing the option of a part-time job. A monetary incentive, even if relatively small, can be a deciding factor in sustaining active youth involvement.

In **Nashville**, youth members discussed among themselves whether a stipend would be appropriate. They decided to put off receiving any remuneration until three months after orientation, in order to show their commitment and demonstrate a contribution to the program. They decided a fair stipend would be \$100 per month as long as a participant attended 80 percent of the activities. As the months progressed, meetings were increased to two or three times a week, so the planning committee agreed to increase the stipend in order to make it competitive with an after-school job.

In monitoring whether incentives are effective, planners should be aware of other events going on in young people’s lives. For example, during months when students are involved in proms, exams, and sports, expectations about their involvement should be reduced or the rewards for their activities should be raised.

The timing of incentives can matter a great deal. For example, giving costly rewards, such as stipends or free travel opportunities, early on can set high expectations for the future. If the program is unable to meet these expectations, youth may drop out. Too many rewards too soon may also focus undue attention on the tangible benefits of participating, and de-emphasize some of the less tangible benefits, which are potentially more significant.

The value to youth of different incentives will also change over time, and should be monitored. For example, in one site, gift certificates for a local mall were offered as a benefit to youth who participated in special projects that were more time-consuming than serving on a committee. But after three months, hanging out at this particular mall was no longer “cool.” The incentive had lost its value and had to be changed.

Intangible incentives are more difficult to talk about, but may be the most important ones in capturing a youth’s attention and commitment. Intangible benefits are usually directly linked to the activities, tasks, and hu-

man relationships offered by a program. Examples range from the opportunity to help fight the spread of HIV to the anticipation of getting into a good college. When young members in **Phoenix** and **Nashville** were asked what motivated them to join the PMI process, they cited intangible benefits, such as the sense of being appreciated or listened to by adults, the opportunity to become acquainted with important community figures, and a better understanding of group processes.

Some incentives have both tangible and intangible aspects. For example, opportunities to engage in different activities may have immediate benefits to youth, as well as longer-range importance in their lives. The PMI sites gave special thought to arranging such opportunities. For example, PMI youth have served as panelists and facilitators at national conferences, providing both a free excursion and career-relevant experience.

If the incentives that youth initially recommended are failing to maintain high participation levels, the group should ask some simple questions:

- Are the activities and tasks providing the rewards youth expected? Could these tasks be changed?
- Does the structure of the program encourage the relationships and the level of involvement youth anticipated? Could this structure be varied if necessary?
- Do the interactions among youth, and between youth and adults, foster the benefits youth anticipated? Can these interactions be improved?

Addressing Actual and Perceived Barriers

The best way to identify barriers to youth participation and strategies for reducing or eliminating them is to ask the young people themselves. Unfortunately, not all participation barriers can be overcome, and knowing which can be addressed is not always easy.

Many obvious barriers to regular participation are likely to be logistical. As one PMI program person moaned, “Transportation, transportation, transportation!” Giving stipends for public transportation or taxis is a straightforward way to eliminate this kind of barrier.

As a general rule, incentives offered to one individual as a way to reduce barriers should be offered to all who qualify. However, some barriers are individual, and require special arrangements. For example, in one site, a young person who had been deeply involved in PMI began to spend more time preparing for college midterm exams and seeking additional funds to support her college education. The committee valued her involvement and discussed how they could reduce the time and monetary barriers to her par-

ticipation. They found a way to arrange for her to receive college credits for some tasks, and they also gave her a small stipend.

In **Northern Virginia**, another story had a less happy ending. Much to the committee's surprise, many young people recruited from a high school for parenting mothers dropped out after only one meeting. Free child care and babysitting stipends were provided, but the chief barrier to participation turned out to be concern and opposition on the parts of the grandmothers. One teen mother mentioned that her mother was concerned for the safety of the granddaughter, saying, "What do you know about these folks that you're willing to leave your baby with?" Some teen mothers simply feared their own mothers would not support involvement in the program. One said her mother is constantly reminding her, "This child is your responsibility, it's a tough lesson, but you'll have to make sacrifices....participating in after school activities is something you'll miss out on." Community members decided that these barriers were too great to resolve, and predicted that sustaining the program participation of teen mothers would be unlikely.

In **Newark**, where all of the youth participants live in high-risk areas and face the sometimes life-threatening dangers of a modern urban environment, the site found that "normal life" can be a barrier to involvement. Participants included a teen parent, a youth on probation, youth exposed to substance abuse at home, and youth living within homeless families. The youth consultant quickly found that crisis intervention, referral to appropriate services, case management, and support were necessary to sustain the involvement of these teens. She provides ongoing support herself, and the chair of the youth subcommittee—also the director of a local neighborhood club—has made the services of this community-based group available to the youth as needed.

Barriers, like benefits, change with time. For example, while youth may have found meeting days, schedules, and locations manageable during the school year, this may change during the summer. Youth may not necessarily volunteer this information, so periodic discussions with them about the "costs" of participating is helpful.

Offering a Supportive Environment

Adults communicate support for youth when they behave in an helpful or affirming manner during routine group activities. A willingness to make structural adjustments to sustain youth involvement may be even more convincing as a statement of support. Finally, keeping track of youth participation and its motivation shows that adult members really care about youth involvement.

Mentoring as a Mechanism for Sharing and Support

Another powerful type of support is a commitment by adult members to mentor individual youth. Mentoring can provide youth with the individual support that a youth coordinator may not be able to provide, and can also help build rapport between youth and adults. Mentoring gives adults more insight into youths' attitudes, interests, and abilities, and can lead to friendships and a warmer atmosphere in the group.

Volunteering as a mentor might involve:

- providing a youth with transportation to meetings
- briefing a youth before meetings
- explaining concepts and theories as they come up
- serving as a resource person and trouble-shooter as problems arise
- serving as a liaison to other planning committee members
- being a listener

In **Northern Virginia**, youth and mentors worked together to plan and coordinate a community-wide orientation for parents and youth on PMI. Youth facilitated the entire program, which allowed them an opportunity to demonstrate a broad range of abilities—from presenting research findings, to serving as moderators, to providing artistic performances.

In **Sacramento**, the group took this mentoring relationship beyond the PMI program *per se*. Youth decided they would benefit from knowing more about the jobs that adult members did, and planned to meet at least once in a three-month period with their respective mentors to tour their workplaces and have lunch. It is important for both adults and youth to agree on basic guidelines for what the mentoring relationship might mean, and then they can decide if they want to build further on these activities. Several of the sites let youth choose their mentors.

Preparation and ongoing debriefing of mentors will help define this role and assuage any apprehension adults might have about it. One preparatory exercise is to have adults participate in a role-play in which they respond to the needs of youth under various circumstances. Simple guided discussions can also help prepare volunteers to serve as mentors. In preliminary discussions, adults can explore skills necessary for mentoring, the responsibilities it entails, and further supports available for mentoring through the program. Regular conversations about the mentoring experience with the mentor's supervisor and the young person's parents or legal guardian are also a good idea.

An important caution is that mentoring is not meant for everyone. Being a mentor—a trusted guide, counselor, or coach—will only be appropriate for some adults. A person with time constraints and limited patience is not likely

to be a good candidate. Being mentored may only be appropriate for some youth. It is best to offer this as an option to both adults and youth. The opportunity can be rewarding for the right adults, and the rewards to youth can reach far beyond the immediate program experience.

Monitoring the Level and Nature of Participation

Throughout this report, repeated reference has been made to the importance of monitoring a program to find out what is working and what is not, so that problems can be identified and resolved. Monitoring should be an explicit part of a program. Planners should spend time focusing on what they will monitor, and how they will monitor it. There are no right or wrong ways to assess youth involvement, but systematic assessment and periodic review of the results will help ensure that difficulties are addressed.

What should a program that emphasizes youth involvement monitor?
Some of the indicators might be quite simple and obvious:

- How many youth have been recruited?
- How many youth regularly attend various types of meetings?
- How many youth are substantively involved in activities? Substantive involvement must be defined by the group. The Youth Involvement Plan should be a good guide.
- What does the group think of the level or quality of this involvement?
- What meetings do youth attend?
- What subcommittees are they involved with?
- What is the nature, quantity, and tone of comments offered during meetings?
- What is the level of questioning and involvement during briefings and de-briefings?
- What is the general demeanor of youth (general interest, tone of voice, etc.)?
- Are promised incentives or benefits being given to youth?
- Are any barriers to involvement consistently faced by several youth? If so, are they becoming a reason for dropping out?

In general, the point is not to set up some complex rating system or to conduct a formal evaluation of involvement, but rather to reflect on what the goals for participation really are, and to determine whether the group thinks these are being met. The initial Youth Involvement Plan should list participation objectives, and participation indicators can be monitored over time by reports from a youth coordinator or mentors, guided observations, discussions, and simple surveys.

Some of the PMI sites are experimenting with surveys at periodic monthly youth meetings. One site has initiated the use of a Comments Box that allows

any member to drop off a brief note anonymously whenever convenient. A few sites are exploring the merits of incorporating a “speak out” session for youth as part of their monthly planning committee meetings. Other sites have already included an “issues and concerns” item on their meeting agendas. This is meant to give all community members, youth and adults alike, the opportunity to raise any issues that they might have regarding the project and/or their individual involvement.

A Final Reflection

Embarking on a shared community program with local youth will bring all of the participants unexpected rewards. Not the least of these is the potential for a more effective program. These rewards will not come without challenges and without costs, however. The PMI experience has brought these into vivid focus. It has also brought home the fact that every group must work out its own goals, its own step-by-step processes for bringing adults and youth together, and its own creative solutions to problems. We hope that other groups will find the experiences of the Prevention Marketing Initiative Local Demonstration Sites Project useful as they prepare to launch their own collaborative adventures.

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Any item with a CDC NAC ID# can be obtained free of charge through the CDC National AIDS Clearinghouse by calling 1-800-458-5231.