



By - Youth, For - Youth
Framework

August 2011

Purpose

In 2006, For Youth Initiative (FYI) put into effect a governance policy. The purpose of this policy is to provide direction and understanding to the by-youth, for-youth framework in which the organization was founded upon and in which our work is grounded within. Since that time, the by-youth, for-youth framework of governance has grown in its acceptance as a worthy organizational model and has been adopted by many more youth-led entities across the City of Toronto. After utilizing the framework for over a decade, FYI believes that through our implementation we have created and developed expert knowledge on the framework's strengths, challenges, and inherent values. FYI knows it is important that we continually document our experiences, teaching's, and best practices so that critical knowledge will be transferred and carried on throughout the lifetime of the organization. As such, this document has been adopted from the FYI Governance Policy to be used as a teaching tool for staff members about the by-youth, for-youth model.

Our Belief

For Youth Initiative (FYI) operates within a by-youth, for- youth framework. This framework governs the day-to-day operations of the agency and is considered a fundamental part of the vision and philosophy upon which FYI was founded. FYI's focus is to increase the life chances of young people by providing them opportunities to meaningfully participate in impactful initiatives that lead to positive personal and systemic transformation. It is our belief that youth facing exclusion, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, violence, and other forms of systemic oppression, have the insight and potential to determine how to best face their challenges and achieve their goals. FYI believes that not only do youth have the potential to do this, but that it is their right to do so.

Ensuring Meaningful Youth Participation

In all of FYI's endeavours, full attempts are made to avoid tokenism. FYI is committed to involving youth, in meaningful and strategic ways, throughout the entire organization. This includes involvement in hiring processes, in board and committee membership, in the development, implementation, and evaluation of programs, and within civic engagement and advocacy initiatives. In all of these facets, youth are included not just as representatives, but are given the knowledge, tools, support and / or access they need to actively participate in the organization and in the community. Through equal participation at key decision making junctions within our organization, youth have a vital opportunity to broaden their perspectives, strengthen their leadership skills, and develop transferrable life skills for their healthy future development.

To ensure that FYI's participatory framework and vision of how to best work with youth is preserved throughout the lifetime of the organization, the following procedures and measures have been put in place:

Staff Hiring and Development

- Hiring committees at FYI always include at least one volunteer, placement student or program participant to ensure that the needs and concerns of the youth we serve are reflected in the hiring process. These individuals are provided with an orientation around the hiring process and are supported to provide their insight during the process.
- When hiring for a position, job candidates are chosen based upon a variety of criteria, including education, experience, and “non-traditional” qualifications. These non-traditional qualifications include volunteerism, leadership potential, representation, connection and standing within the communities FYI’s serve, demonstrated efforts to change their life (and/or the lives of others) despite past experiences, an individual’s levels of ‘success’ in past endeavours, which may be viewed in the context of particular personal, social, or cultural challenges, and not solely in comparison to the objective performance of others, and other factors specifically related to any certain position.
- FYI ensures that all staff, volunteers and students are fully oriented, trained and supported to maximize their potential while working at FYI. Through regular staff training and mentorship, junior staff, volunteers and placement students are given the opportunity to develop their skills and become prepared to take on more senior roles in the organization.

Board of Directors & Committee Membership

- The Board of Directors reserves a percentage of seats on the Board for youth members (over 18 years of age for legal purposes), and encourages the involvement of young people from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences.
- Board orientation and training are conducted to ensure that new and existing board members have the knowledge they require to be effective directors, as well as to feel they are making a meaningful contribution. Members of the board review policy and procedure manuals, documents, and other important information annually to ensure that they are fully accessible to youth participants.
- In addition to participation on the Board of Directors, FYI encourages youth to participate on open board committees, so that they may provide valuable insight into the committee’s work and so that they can develop transferable knowledge and skill sets.

Program Development, Implementation, and Evaluation

- FYI believes that young people are experts at best determining what programs and services are meaningful and relevant for them. For this reason, FYI participants and community members are given purposeful opportunities to be involved in the development and design of programs. This includes providing consultation, insight, and recommendations for grants and funding proposals.
- When implementing programs in the community, FYI strives to ensure that all youth have equitable access and involvement within the programs and services available and provided. This includes having programs that are: free of cost, locally provided, content relevant, and provided in space that is free of emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual harm.
- Mentorship is a fundamental component of FYI's by-youth, for-youth model and as such is incorporated into every program and service offered. Youth participants are supported in taking initiative and developing leadership skills so that they can ultimately become mentors themselves.
- As a learning organization, FYI strives to learn from our experiences and those of the youth who participate in our programs. Within this realm, the formal and informal feedback and recommendations made by participants is incorporated into all of FYI's program evaluations so as to ensure we are continually doing what we need to do well.

Civic Engagement & Advocacy

- In full recognition of the barriers to full and equitable participation faced by youth, FYI strives to create and / or find opportunities for young people to participate in decision – making and policy - making processes, so as for them to become agents of change on their own behalf.
- As needed, FYI, along with young people and community stakeholders, conduct advocacy campaigns and take initiative in acting on issues that are determined by community members and youth to be of key concern and importance to them.
- As a pioneer organization in utilizing the by-youth, for-youth model of governance, FYI recognizes we are in a unique position to challenge our stakeholders to adopt new modes of thinking and value the benefits of using this model, to articulate the realities of community and the nature of small youth-led groups, and to effectively advocate for an increased quantity and quality of resources required to meet the community's and the youth-led sector's needs.

It is important to note that this document presents examples of how FYI as an organization utilizes and values the by-youth, for-youth framework. It should not be read as a limit to the possibilities and benefits of the framework. Lastly, this document is intended to be read in conjunction with FYI's Core Organizational Skills and Values. Any concerns or questions regarding this document should be directed to the Director of Human Resources and Administration.