

Engaging Northern Youth

This document was created by Hoti ts'eeda's summer student program. Students engaged in a field research project in the summer of 2018 to ask youth in the Tłı̨chǫ region of the Northwest Territories the best ways to engage them. They developed some key findings to help health researchers and others involved in the health system better connect with youth.

Listening to the voices of youth is a key value to Indigenous communities. Research projects that can integrate youth successfully in planning and making decisions are likely to be more effective and produce better research findings.

AUTHENTIC RELATIONSHIPS

Youth are critical thinkers, and recognize when their participation is tokenistic. To truly engage youth, their thoughts and opinions need to be valued and they need to be given decision-making power over aspects of the research project that affect them. They value programs that put Indigenous people in leadership positions, especially youth. For example, they suggest that positions such as a youth advisor, advisory board or council representative on a health project would make the project more effective in engaging youth and incorporating their views.

Authentic relationships require research projects to be transparent and share information about the purpose and thinking behind a research project. By sharing and including the community in this process, researchers can build trust with the community and also ensure the foundations of their research projects are strong and not built on assumptions of what would benefit the community.

DISCUSSION

We found that informal, in-person discussion was the best way to engage deeply with Tłı̨chǫ youth. It was important to youth that they be allowed to slowly warm up to the deeper, more challenging questions, after informal discussion and getting to know the group. We recommend talking circles, accompanied by in-person interviews, as a key method in engaging and sharing knowledge with youth research participants.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Youth suggested that to engage larger numbers of youth, attaching events to existing in-person gatherings such as Youth Summits or community gatherings could be effective. They also suggested that research projects could hold open houses (with incentives such as snacks and prizes) to attract youth and share information about research projects.

TRADITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Land-based and traditional gatherings and activities were recommended as a good environment in which to discuss health subjects. Youth respond well to programs that incorporate being out on the land and engaging in traditional activities while learning about health.





Summer students Joni Tsatchia and Roxanne Kotchilea run a youth focus group at the 2018 Ełets'ehdée Gathering.

IN SCHOOLS

Integrating projects into schools and existing youth-focused activities and programs in communities is an effective way to engage youth. Adding additional responsibilities and activities to a youth's extracurricular life can be more challenging, while incorporating activities into a class or even lunchtimes can increase success. Youth suggested researchers could go into schools as guest speakers to introduce their projects and motivate youth to participate in research projects.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a crucial tool to raise awareness and engage youth. Youth do not want to receive emails or paper brochures about a project or program, and it is unlikely that they will read the content beyond the headline. Social media such as Facebook and Instagram can be very effective in engaging youth especially through online surveys and contests, both for data collection and knowledge sharing. Youth are already spending a great deal of their time on social media—integrating health content and questions into their pages is a way to meet youth where they're at.

INCENTIVES

Incentives are a great way to encourage youth to participate in research projects. Class credit, honoraria, prizes or something as simple as having snacks available at an activity demonstrate that their participation is valued and can incentivize youth to attend and engage with research.

NO ONE-FITS-ALL SOLUTION

NWT communities and Indigenous groups are diverse and no one solution works across all communities and youth. Researchers can make sure they engage youth effectively by going into the community, building relationships with youth and listening to their views.

To learn more about Hotił ts'eeda and research support in the Northwest Territories, visit:

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