

Youth Collaboration in Content Production: A Spectrum of Possibilities

In working with teens and tweens, public media can provide an important platform for youth to have their voices and perspectives heard by broader audiences. Doing so involves being in some form of relationship with and partnership with youth, but this can take many forms in practice.

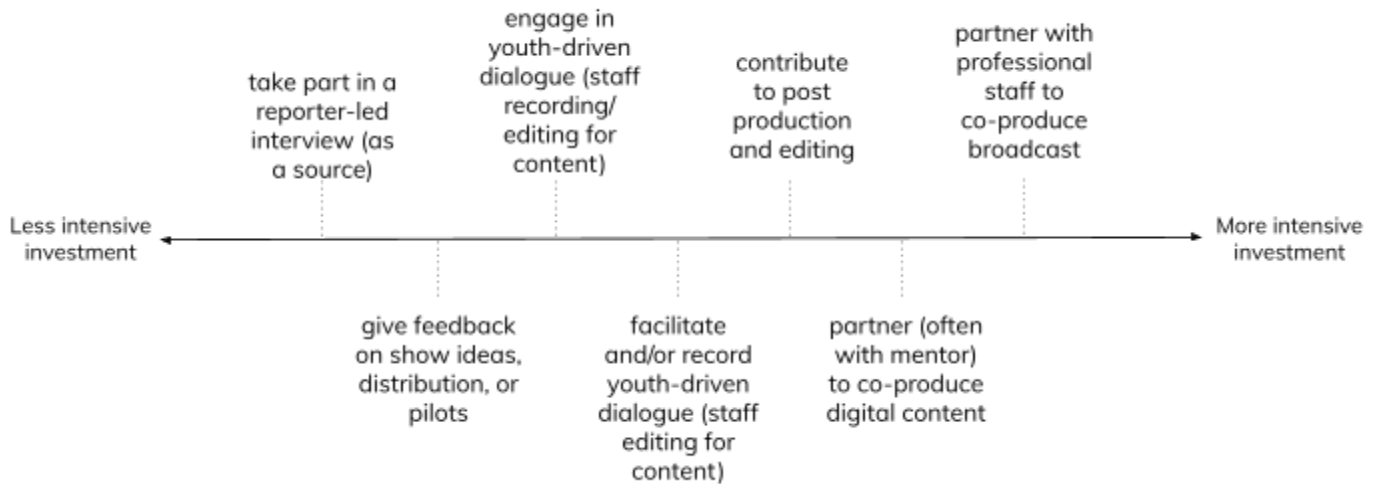
Stations working with youth have experimented with a range of collaboration models. At one end of the spectrum, young people provide key information, but the time asked of them—and the capacity required of staff—is less intensive. At the other end of the spectrum, young people are not just informants but co-creators. In the following tool, we share a spectrum of ways stations have approached collaborating with youth on content production.

No options on the spectrum are better than any other. Deciding on an approach depends on a wide range of factors, including:

- Whether key outcomes focus more on educational experience for youth, the development of high-quality, audience-ready content, or another strategic goal (see [Linking Goals and Approach for Youth Initiatives](#))
- Whether the initiative involves staff across multiple departments or within a single department (such as education or the newsroom)
- The plans and metrics for content reach (see [Strategies for Distributing Content Developed By, With, and For Youth](#)) and considerations related to union rules and broadcast
- The capacity and skills of staff
- Existing partnerships with schools or community-based organizations
- Funding for dedicated staff as well as payment to youth, support for transportation, and investment in technology for youth to use
- Space available at your station for events, youth learning, and youth production

How might your station collaborate with youth on production?

Youth can...



Whichever approach you take, we encourage you to begin by focusing on the ways you envision young people engaging with your station (e.g., giving feedback, partnering with staff to contribute to existing productions, etc.). After you are clear about the activities young people will do, then you can decide on the structure(s) or program approach to take (e.g., focus group, summer camp).

After deciding on what key roles youth might play, it then makes sense to step back and consider what kinds of structures might support them. For example:

If your goal is for youth to...	Then your station might...
take part in a reporter-led interview	capture “age” in your source tracker to build a database of youth prospects or build out training for staff on ethical and effective recruitment of young people as sources
give feedback on planned programs or content	host focus groups or launch an advisory board
engage in youth-driven dialogue that gets incorporated into content	organize a local event series featuring youth, and have staff record events for later editing
record and/or facilitate youth-driven dialogue for new	partner with an existing community-based group, or start an advisory board where youth are more involved in production

content	activities and have staff lead on post-production
co-produce digital content	run advanced workshops or longer-term program in your station or partner with a school to offer an elective course
co-produce broadcast content	offer an intensive year-long mentorship program or engage a select cohort of young people to partner with a producer

Stations may use a range of structures to invite young people into collaboration and to work with them effectively. Some structures are more formal, and may include financial compensation, certification, academic credit, or other incentives. Other structures are ad hoc, and may involve smaller forms of compensation and recognition. The structure your station selects will depend upon your goals, the nature of collaboration with youth, and the community-based partnerships that exist to support your outreach and recruitment.

The Joan Ganz Cooney Center at Sesame Workshop is a nonprofit research and innovation lab that focuses on the challenges of fostering smarter, stronger, and kinder children in a rapidly changing media landscape. We conduct original research on emerging learning technologies and collaborate with educators and media producers to put this research into action. We also aim to inform the national conversation on media and education by working with policymakers and investors.

For further resources and the full toolkit, visit toolkit.nextgenpublicmedia.org.

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