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Data Brief—Meaningful Adolescent and Girl Engagement

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**Meaningful adolescent and youth engagement (MAYE)** (WHO, 2018)

An inclusive, intentional, mutually-respectful partnership between adolescents, youth, and adults, whereby power is shared, respective contributions are valued, and young people’s ideas, perspectives, skills, and strengths are integrated into the design and delivery of programs, strategies, policies, funding mechanisms, and organizations that affect their lives and their communities, countries, and the world.

**Why MAYE matters**

- Allows stakeholders to **take an integrated approach** that sees the whole adolescent rather than seeing the adolescent through one lens, such as sexual and reproductive health or education
- Views **young people as experts and partners** with decision-making power rather than as participants in youth activities
- Helps achieve equity, **disrupt power dynamics**, build trust, and promote inclusion of youth perspectives
- **Is linked to achieving the outcomes and targets** in agreed-upon goals, such as the Sustainable Development Goals
- Improves the **quality and responsiveness of sexual and reproductive health programs and policies**, leading to improved development outcomes

**Strategic planning steps in establishing MAYE** (Family Planning High Impact Practice, 2022)

- Prepare your institution, project, or initiative to meaningfully engage and partner with youth.
- Determine which youth to engage and the mechanisms of engagement and partnership.
- Implement the engagement and partnership with youth.
- Monitor, measure, and be accountable.
- Sustain youth engagement and partnership.

**Why MAYE matters for girls and meaningful adolescent girl engagement**

MAYE was designed for adolescents and youth rather than girls specifically; however, its focus on intentionality makes it relevant for adolescent girls. Girls’ social position, experiences, and vulnerabilities merit girl-specific engagement strategies, which can foster girls’ leadership and technical skills and demonstrate their effectiveness as community members and leaders. Meaningful adolescent girls’ engagement is where **girls’ opinions, ideas, and experiences are integrated** into an institution, program, or project’s activities or structure to make it more effective, accountable, and relevant to the needs of adolescent girls (Coalition for Adolescent Girls, 2015).

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1 To monitor progress with MAYE, the Partnership for Maternal, Neonatal, and Child Health (PMNCH) established an Accountability System and a MAYE Task Force to oversee the development of a MAYE accountability report, which was based on analysis of 100 respondents among the 250 signatories and found that several documents exist on “making the case” for MAYE, but comprehensive “how to” guidance was missing. Based on the feedback of the accountability survey and further consultations with PMNCH Adolescent & Youth Constituency members, there was a common agreement on the need to strengthen accountability on MAYE and provide more detailed guidance to organizations on how to improve MAYE implementation. As a result, PMNCH supported the development of a Practical Guidance Resource, which addressed gaps and critical issues from the accountability report.
Theory of change for adolescent girl engagement (Coalition for Adolescent Girls, 2015)

Assessing progress on the MAYE journey (WHO, 2022)
- Support youth leadership in decision-making
- Agree upon roles, responsibilities, and expectations
- Establish a clear method for addressing and responding to feedback
- Create and identify opportunities for young people
- Support sustained engagement and ongoing relationships
- Build skills and knowledge
- Use language and communication methods that are understandable, respectful, and accessible to everyone
- Provide young people sufficient support and resources
- Provide enabling environments
- Promote gender equality and the empowerment of girls and young women

Adolescent girl engagement readiness: assessing strengths and identifying gaps in current ways of engaging girls (Coalition for Adolescent Girls, 2015)
- Institutional buy-in
- Existing or past engagement/experience working with adolescent girls
- Vision and action
- Resources (human and financial)
- Policies and standards

Recommendations for strengthening and amplifying MAYE

As MAYE gains momentum, there are recommendations to strengthen accountability and opportunities to amplify this approach with a global audience. Recommendations include ensuring protection of young people in organizational settings through proper recognition and compensation, investing in the professionalism of adolescents and youth by establishing long-term contracts and ensuring representation in governing bodies and decision-making spaces, training staff to identify structural barriers and the culture of power and privilege and ensuring that organizations carry out activities from an intersectional perspective, and developing and implementing an accountability and transparency plan (WHO, 2021).

The practical guidance resource and information related to MAYE will appear in the updated Global Accelerated Action for the Health of Adolescents (AA-HAI) 2.0 - guidance for national-level policy-makers and program managers to assist them in planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluation of adolescent health programs - which will be launched at the Global Forum for Adolescents on 11-12 October 2023 as part of the 1.8 Billion Young People for Change Campaign.
DATA BRIEF: MEANINGFUL ADOLESCENT AND GIRL ENGAGEMENT

REFERENCES


This data brief was created by the Population Council’s GIRL Center in collaboration with PMNCH to inform the thematic roundtable discussion on Meaningful Adolescent and Girl Engagement at the Girls Deliver Pre-Conference on Adolescent Girls held in Kigali, Rwanda ahead of the Women Deliver 2023 Conference.