



FACTSHEET

Intentional Program Design: Creating New 'Architecture' in Youth Programs

Content developed from a YouthREX Webinar featuring Jennifer Skuza, Associate Dean, University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development, Sherry Boyce, Extension Educator, University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development, and YouthREX

Being intentional in your program design means thinking about organizational outcomes and the needs of participants when making decisions.

How to Start: Begin with the end in mind

It's important to always keep your audience's needs in mind. From this, you can identify **outcomes** or **intended results** that are informed by these needs. Once you have determined this, you work backwards to design your program, with all of your activities flowing from your intended outcomes.

What is the Lightning Rod for your Program?



This is what compels young people to come to your program. Are you providing an experience that they can't get anywhere else? What relevance does the lightning rod play in their lives? Being aware of this will inform your planning and help you be intentional in your program design.

Next Step: Your Approach

Program development is an ongoing systematic approach that we follow in order to plan, implement, and evaluate our programs. It is not confined to a set timeframe and can be fluid. There are four different research development approaches that can be employed in program development. Although each program has a distinct purpose, values, and benefits, they can overlap and even be combined.



1. Classical Approach: This approach involves applying a standard set of principles and procedures to building a program. Typically data driven, the classical approach can sometimes seem to be top down in nature.

Example: Youth workers carrying out a highly prescribed program model that was predetermined by a particular funding source



2. Naturalistic Approach: This approach doesn't apply a set of standard principles or procedures – instead, it is very organic, relying on experience and intuition. Programs using this approach are very customized to fit the needs of a particular audience.



Example: Youth workers trying to establish youth team groups in multiple public housing sites; each team would have different goals, themes, and activities. The program would reflect the needs of each group



3. Critical Approach: There are explicit moral standards involved with this approach, as the goal is to address injustice, power, and oppression. This approach operates from the interests of its target audience.

Example: A youth program that has goals to reduce racism, sexism, homophobia or any other form of prejudice or discrimination at an individual, institutional, community, or system level

4. Interactive Approach: This is the most practical of the four approaches and is very comprehensive. It includes a list of things you should be considering when designing your program and acts as a practical guide or checklist. Youth workers select items they think may be necessary, but might not use them all.

Example: Some of the things on the list include developing program objectives, formulating evaluation plans, preparing budgets and marketing plans etc.

Don't Forget, Participant-Centred Design is Key

You have to be aware of the context surrounding your audience, as youth programs cannot be cookie cutter. Determine the learning experiences and components you want your program to include because these are the starting point for design work, as well as the platform for developing your evaluation plan.

Weave your program into the lives of your participants. It is very important to be conscious of what is going on in the lives of your participants, as well as the wider community. Look for windows of opportunity because the placement of your program naturally influences who can make it. Keep in mind that your program doesn't have to "do it all" – build on existing programs in your schools and communities.

Ask Yourself These Questions: The Art of Program Design

There is a set of Design Principles that can be used in developing your program.



Balance: Are your desired learning experiences represented in your design and across your program cycle? Is there enough content to get to your outcomes?



Proportion: You have to make sure you don't do too much of one thing and risk overlooking an important activity.



Unity: Sometimes we have older programs that don't really fit into a new program. You don't need to include a program or activity just because it's always been done that way. Ask yourself if it really belongs in your design.



Rhythm: How can you arrange your program to achieve the energy level that you want?