

Engaging State Young People in the NYTD Review

The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) is a federal reporting system designed to collect information on youth transitioning out of foster care who are served by state agencies that administer the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition (Chafee program). Periodically, the Children’s Bureau conducts a review of a state’s NYTD. The NYTD Review comprehensively evaluates states’ policies and practices for collecting and reporting timely, reliable, and accurate data on these youth. The review is also an opportunity to explore how states use NYTD data to evaluate the quality of services provided to youth in transition as part of a continuous quality improvement (CQI) framework. It is essential to involve young people from the very beginning, starting with the NYTD Review planning process and sustaining their involvement throughout state NYTD and CQI efforts.

The following suggestions will help your state team strategize to engage and maintain the involvement of young people in your state who currently are or formerly were in foster care and are interested in making a difference for other youth in transition, both during your NYTD Review and in ongoing CQI efforts.

Why Involve State Young People?

Youth involved in prior NYTD efforts said their completing the NYTD survey, and participation as a State Youth Ambassador and/or state young person focus group member, meant they could directly

influence decisions about how to improve state programs that affect them. They noted that their voice drove changes in services, because their involvement in the NYTD surveys helped to highlight what worked and what needed improvement. Having the state listen to them and respond effectively led them to encourage other youth to participate. It can also lead to states partnering with youth in conducting surveys and other NYTD outreach efforts.



Identifying State Young People for the NYTD Review

A federal review can be intimidating for anyone involved, at any age. To ensure that youth know they are a vital part of the process, you should engage them early in the planning stages. You will need to support youth throughout the entire process so they feel prepared and confident, and that their voice is being heard.

Two roles involve young leaders from your state in the NYTD Review. They can serve as (1) young adults who are state team members (referred to as State Youth Ambassadors) and participate with state and federal staff in most review activities; and/or (2) participants in a focus group. By making these activities a positive experience for them, you show them that their contributions are valued. As you continue to engage them, they will hopefully support your state’s ongoing NYTD efforts after the review. A young person may perform either or both of these roles, described in more detail below.

State Youth Ambassador (at least 1 young person per state, preferably at least 2): Young people in this leadership role participate in several NYTD Review activities during the three phases of the review process. They participate in review planning calls during the pre-onsite phase; they attend the entrance conference, NYTD system demonstration, stakeholder interviews, exit conference, and daily general debriefing meetings during the onsite phase; and they participate in calls during the post-onsite phase. They do not participate in the case record reviews due to confidentiality. It is important to get them involved as early in the planning process as possible so that they feel “ownership” of the review.

How do you identify young people to be State Youth Ambassadors and strong state team members? States typically reach out to youth advisory board members or young leaders who currently are or formerly were engaged in the state’s statewide leadership efforts (e.g., CQI efforts, teen conferences). In addition to having been in out-of-home care, those identified for participation should be knowledgeable about the state’s youth engagement and NYTD efforts.

In-Person Young People Focus Group (target 7 to 10 young people per group, but as many as the state wants to invite, can accommodate logistically, and can provide incentives for participation): This focus group is facilitated by specially trained members on the federal team. The meeting lasts between 1.5 to 2 hours and is typically held in the evening. Its purpose is for young people to discuss their role in the state’s NYTD efforts, their experience receiving services from the state agency, and their participation in the NYTD survey. Information discussed remains confidential, with potential exceptions for disclosure of abuse, neglect, harm to self or others, or concerning information.

How do you identify the best participants for the focus group? Because of the focus group’s purpose and the questions asked, states should involve young people currently in out-of-home care (foster care) from different placement settings; with varying experiences, knowledge levels, and a variety of perspectives on the state’s child welfare system; and from different geographic areas of the state.

States often reach out to active youth advisory board members and to youth who currently or formerly received supportive Chafee-funded services from the state or through community partners that have supported their independent living goals. It may be helpful and more convenient for the participants if the state coordinates the focus group with other meetings already scheduled for young people.

Supporting All State Young People During the NYTD Review

Once you have identified, invited, and received commitment from participants in the NYTD Review and ongoing NYTD efforts for both roles, consider the following to prepare and support young people:

Resources for All State Young People

The “Introduction to the National Youth in Transition Database Video Series” on the Children’s Bureau website provides a six-part overview of NYTD and the NYTD Review, covering the topics listed below. The short, instructional videos range from 2 to 7 minutes in duration and were made for all audiences. Viewing the videos before the onsite review will help both State Youth Ambassadors and focus group participants prepare for the review.

Video series homepage: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/nytd-video-series>

- **Introduction to NYTD, Part 1:** History and Implementation
- **Introduction to NYTD, Part 2:** Data Collection and Reporting
- **Introduction to the NYTD Review**
- **System Demonstration and Survey Methodology Review**
- **Case Record Review**
- **Stakeholder Interviews**

In the videos below, prior NYTD Review and survey participants discuss what was involved and encourage other youth to participate. The videos provide context, insight, and good talking points to consider when recruiting youth and may be valuable for them to watch as well:

- Spotlight on NYTD, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W_jKCVShd8
- Take the NYTD Survey, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9RmlsaGQ7dw>
- Give the NYTD Survey, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tuvQMZh5BJY>

The *Youth Leadership Toolkit* was created by the National Resource Center on Youth Development (NRCYD) in collaboration with FosterClub to provide the fundamentals of meaningful youth engagement. The “Strategic Sharing” and “Travel Guide” sections are useful in preparing both State Youth Ambassadors and focus group participants for the review.

- Youth Leadership Toolkit: <https://store.fosterclub.com/youth-leadership-toolkit/>

Preparing All State Young People State Youth Ambassador(s)

- Invite them as early as possible to participate in the NYTD Review planning calls during the pre-onsite phase.
- Educate them on the importance of sharing during all phases of the NYTD Review. Their feedback may be shared with the federal review team to allow the youth voice to be heard.
- Provide tips on how to share in a professional setting so they are prepared to offer feedback at any time on statewide NYTD outreach efforts and youth engagement, and how the state has utilized NYTD data to increase youth engagement efforts. FosterClub offers useful information on “Strategic Sharing” at <https://www.fosterclub.com/foster-parent-training/course/strategic-sharing>
- Share and discuss documents you have submitted to the federal team and point out the areas that pertain to youth engagement efforts. Ask them for feedback.

- Remind them of when they took the NYTD survey (if applicable). If they did not complete the NYTD survey (at ages 17, 19, or 21), share the state’s process for engaging youth in the state’s NYTD survey efforts and what changes resulted from their participation.
- Share the state NYTD data snapshot in advance of convening the young people focus group and discuss the data points that stand out to them.

State Focus Group Participants

- Remind the young people when they took the NYTD survey (if applicable), so they are aware before they participate in the young people focus group.
- Share the state NYTD data snapshot, as well as several of the questions that will be asked, in advance of the focus group so they can be considering their own thoughts on the data points.
- Educate them on the importance of sharing during the focus group. Their feedback will be summarized for the federal review team to allow the youth voice to be heard.

Debriefing for All State Young People

Connect the State Youth Ambassador(s) and focus group participants with a supportive adult by identifying a staff person to be this point of contact. Any time a young person provides feedback or shares their story, debriefing with a supportive adult provides an opportunity for them to reflect on daily activities, process review or personal issues that come up, and touch base on what to expect for the next day’s activities.

State Youth Ambassador(s):

- Minimally, the supportive adult should offer to debrief daily.

- The supportive adult should check in regularly and offer a debriefing more than daily if needed.

Young People Focus Group Participants:

- A supportive adult should offer to debrief after the focus group.
- Allow time for focus group participants to debrief with other state youth or peers after the focus group.
- The supportive adult should check in within a week of the focus group and offer a debriefing if needed.

Networking Opportunities

State Youth Ambassadors: A casual meet-up will be arranged to provide an opportunity for the State Youth Ambassadors to meet and interact with some of the members of the federal team. These members are similar in age to the State Youth Ambassadors (18–25), are highly trained to be active members of the federal team, and have former experience within the child welfare system. They provide an orientation on the review and daily activities, share and go over review documents, and form a professional working relationship with the State Youth Ambassadors. The meet-up usually occurs over dinner the evening before the first day of the onsite review. This can be held virtually if preferred.

Young People Focus Group Participants:

Scheduling time before and after the focus group for networking allows the participants to interact and make connections with other young people from their own state. Those facilitating or others participating in the focus group may share youth leadership opportunities with those who are not familiar, and the young people may be invited to become members of the state’s youth leadership board or to attend state-hosted teen conferences or summits.

Compensation

Be creative and resourceful by exploring all funding source options available to help provide compensation to the young people. Within state funding parameters, it is also helpful to ask youth who previously participated in statewide NYTD efforts what compensation they think may be most attractive to incentivize participation.

State Youth Ambassadors: They participate in approximately 3 planning calls and most of the activities during the 4-day NYTD Review. States should consider a way to compensate them for their expertise, time, and logistical needs. States should ask them how they want to be compensated. Common compensation choices include:

- Payment for expertise and time
- Gift cards (amount reflective of time; ask which gift card is preferred)
- Snacks and refreshments available throughout 4-day NYTD Review
- Meals (provide cash, restaurant gift cards, or payment for meals)
- Pre-paid hotel room and incidentals
- Transportation assistance (ask youth what the need is):
 - Transportation to and from NYTD Review activities

- Public transportation passes or cash
- Mileage and toll reimbursement
- Parking/meter pass
- Gas gift card
- Other (e.g., professional clothing, printing review materials)

Focus Group Participants: Each focus group is a 1-time event for participants, lasting approximately 1 hour. Good examples of compensation include:

- Payment for expertise and time (including travel to and from the focus group)
- Gift cards (amount reflective of time; ask which gift card is preferred)
- Meals, snacks, and refreshments during the young person focus group
- Transportation assistance:
 - Coordination with placement provider
 - State staff transportation to and from focus group
 - Public transportation passes or cash
 - Mileage and toll reimbursement
 - Parking/meter pass
 - Gas gift card

NYTD Review Planning Checklist, Including When to Engage Young People

“Appendix A. Planning Checklist,” from the [Guide to the NYTD Review](#), is a useful tool when planning a NYTD Review and engaging young people. This abbreviated version of the checklist helps states guide their youth engagement efforts for their NYTD

Reviews. It provides recommended timelines for when to engage young people in their roles as State Youth Ambassadors and focus group participants. The checklist also references specific sections within the guide.

PRE-ONSITE PHASE

Approximately 6 months before onsite phase

Activity	State Efforts to Engage Young People	Guide Reference
<input type="checkbox"/> Children’s Bureau Regional Office confirms dates and location for onsite phase with the state. Federal review coordinator sends letter of confirmation to the state.	<input type="checkbox"/> State brainstorms young person engagement in NYTD Review and begins to identify state young people for two roles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - State Youth Ambassador (at least 1, but prefer 2) - Young Person Focus Group participant (target 7–10, or more if state can accommodate) 	Section 4.1

4 months before onsite phase

Activity	State Efforts to Engage Young People	Guide Reference
<input type="checkbox"/> State and federal review team members identified.	<input type="checkbox"/> State identifies at least 1 young person (preferably 2) to participate as a State Youth Ambassador on the NYTD Review state team and invites them to attend planning calls (except the separate technical calls with the state technical lead focused on information technology). <input type="checkbox"/> State begins process of identifying additional young people (target 7–10 per group, or more if the state can accommodate) to participate in the NYTD young person focus group. These young people will be invited later in the planning process. (See “1 month before onsite phase” section below.) <input type="checkbox"/> State requests technical assistance call(s) on how to engage youth, as needed, through coordination with the federal review coordinator.	Section 3

Activity	State Efforts to Engage Young People	Guide Reference
<input type="checkbox"/> State and federal team host NYTD Review kickoff planning call to walk through pre-onsite phase documentation requirements for onsite phase. Monthly planning calls will follow.	<input type="checkbox"/> State invites the State Youth Ambassador(s) to the kickoff call. <input type="checkbox"/> State explores and may provide incentives for participation in kickoff call.	Section 4.1

1 month before onsite phase

Activity	State Efforts to Engage Young People	Guide Reference
<input type="checkbox"/> State continues youth engagement and planning for the NYTD Review.	<input type="checkbox"/> State continues engagement of the State Youth Ambassador(s) on the state review team and invites them to attend planning calls (except for the technical calls with the state technical lead). <input type="checkbox"/> State invites identified young people (7–10, or more if the state can accommodate) to participate in the NYTD young person focus group. <input type="checkbox"/> State requests technical assistance call(s) on how to engage youth, as needed, through coordination with the federal review coordinator.	Section 4.7
<input type="checkbox"/> State and federal teams host conference call to confirm meeting logistics for onsite phase.	<input type="checkbox"/> State invites the State Youth Ambassador(s) to participate in the ongoing planning calls in preparation for the onsite phase of the NYTD Review. <input type="checkbox"/> State requests young person engagement technical assistance call(s), as needed, through coordination with the federal review coordinator, to orient the State Youth Ambassador(s) and plan for a meet-up with trained young members of the federal team.	Section 4.1
<input type="checkbox"/> State and federal teams finalize agenda for onsite phase.	<input type="checkbox"/> State shares the agenda with the State Youth Ambassador(s).	Section 4.2

POST-ONSITE PHASE

4 months after onsite phase

Activity	State Efforts to Engage Young People	Guide Reference
<input type="checkbox"/> Final debriefing call is held to discuss final report and to kick off improvement planning.	<input type="checkbox"/> State invites the State Youth Ambassador(s) to participate.	Section 6.1
<input type="checkbox"/> State submits initial improvement plan.	<input type="checkbox"/> State continues to engage State Youth Ambassador(s) in activities such as NYTD improvement planning. <input type="checkbox"/> State invites State Youth Ambassador(s) to join follow-up calls, meetings, or other post-onsite phase activities (except any separate NYTD Review technical calls focused solely on information technology).	Section 6.2