

**1** This river represents a symbol for how youth development practices can be integrated over the course of a program. It has four stages, each characterized by its own color. Young people's needs shift in each stage. By using intentional strategies to respond to these needs, we can design strong youth development programs.

**2** In early stages of group development some youth feel excited to jump right into the water, some want to tentatively stick their toes in, while others feel nervous and hold back. It is our job to create a climate where all youth, regardless of their inclinations, quickly develop a sense of safety and belonging.

**3** We can use creative team building activities to encourage participants to build connections within the group. Using interesting materials and provocative challenges will help youth step out of their comfort zones and build strong relationships.

**4** Develop group agreements with your youth to ensure everyone has the same expectations as your program begins. Ask them: What do we need from one another to feel safe and learn together? Use their input to establish group norms and progressive consequences.

**5** In this stage of group development the adults' role is to supervise and direct young people, and ensure everyone participates and upholds the group agreements. When adults hold the space and establish firm routines, it creates opportunities for youth to take on more leadership roles later in the program.

**6** You know you are entering the second phase of group development when participants have built a sense of community, program rituals are in place, and they are using the language of group agreements to remind each other to make positive choices. Not all of these things will just happen simultaneously, but as these conditions take root, the level of conflict will likely increase.

**7** Conflict represents young people struggling to define their identity by rejecting things that don't seem to fit them. (i.e. picking fights with peers, pushing back on the instructor, or forming cliques that exclude others). This means your group is ready to build conflict resolution skills.

**8** As we see these dynamics emerge we should pause in our instruction to circle up and reflect on the map of where we are going and why. To motivate youth to work through the conflict that's emerging ask them to reflect on the end journey: What makes figuring out how to work together worth it to the group?

**9** At times, conflict can also be an indicator that youth feel bored with the programming. Get them excited about the skills they will build, and the culminating experiences coming up for the group.

**10** When youth are engaged, learning is more fun. Use their motivation to build their skills through hands-on-instruction and practical application.



**11** Young people also need risk and rigor to motivate their participation. Do this by stepping back, and allowing youth to navigate on their own. This means authentically transferring skills and leadership power to the youth, while offering coaching and mentorship from the sidelines.

**12** When the finish line is in sight we want to engage youth to think about how they will give back to the community around them. We do this by activating a youth-led planning process that results in a community engagement project.

**13** In our illustration, youth are planting trees to ensure they leave this river better and stronger than how they found it. Engage your youth in planning a culminating event that makes a difference to them and their community. This is one way to ensure youth see how they can connect what they have learned to what they can do.

**14** It is now time to circle up, appreciate, reflect and celebrate. Have your youth acknowledge the contributions their group members made to support them along this journey, identify how they have grown, and celebrate both successes and challenges.

**15** Finally it is time for youth to look towards the future. You may not be with your youth in the next phase of their journey, but help them name how they will apply what they learned in this experience to their future experiences.

