

# Youth Aspirations: Imagining and Navigating Futures in Higher Education



A 4-H guidebook to prepare youth to thrive in education.

Joanna A. Tzenis, Ph.D.

## About This Guidebook

This guidebook takes a new approach to preparing youth for college. Rather than focusing on grades, ACTS, or financing, the activities and program suggestions in this guidebook help young people envision having higher education in their future and help them begin to take steps toward aspiration achievement that include relying on supports, navigating barriers, and reimagining what is possible for them. At its core, this guidebook is about fostering the belief among young people that college is for them (i.e. they belong) and it is within their reach.

## About Minnesota 4-H Youth Development

Minnesota 4-H youth development is part of the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development. It is the largest youth-serving organization in the state and its programming is grounded in research-based practice. Minnesota 4-H is committed to creating a force of young people who are able to learn and lead in a global society.

<https://extension.umn.edu/4-h/what-4-h>

## About University of Minnesota Extension

Extension conducts community outreach in the areas of land, food, community development and vitality, and youth development and family living. Extension has been part of the University of Minnesota since 1909. Extension's mission is to connect community needs and University resources to address critical issues in Minnesota.

<https://extension.umn.edu/>

## About the Author

**Joanna Tzenis** is an assistant Extension professor at the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development. She holds a Ph.D. in organizational leadership and policy development from the University of Minnesota. Her research and practice are concerned with issues of equity and opportunity in education, with an emphasis on pathways to higher education and advancing the use of community-engaged research processes. She focuses on designing, implementing, and evaluating program models that bring together youth, families and community leaders to promote youth thriving in education by addressing barriers and expanding systems of support.

Contact the author: [tzeni004@umn.edu](mailto:tzeni004@umn.edu)

## Acknowledgements

**Dr. Jennifer Skuza** is the associate dean and state 4-H director at the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development. She conceptualized and secured (CYFAR) funding for the Minnesota 4-H campus immersion program model that inspired the development of this guidebook. Dr. Skuza holds a Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota in work, community, and family education. She provides leadership and direction for programmatic and scholarly work and the strategic positioning of international and intercultural education and outreach in the Center for Youth Development. Her research is focused on immigrant adolescents, social and cultural foundations of education, and advancing the use of qualitative research and evaluation methodologies in youth development and education.

The development of this guidebook was supported by the **Children, Youth, and Families at Risk (CYFAR)** program with funds from the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA). It came about as part of a 5-year grant under award number 1305S32461 and led by Principal Investigator, Jennifer Skuza.

Thank you to the **peer reviewers** who evaluated this guidebook:

**Melinda Garcia, PhD**

Extension Specialist, 4-H Youth Development, Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Services  
College Station, TX, USA

**Ian Marquez**

Prevention Services Director, Centre County Youth Service Bureau  
State College, Pennsylvania, USA

**Faith Mkwanzani, PhD**

Postdoc Fellow, Higher Education and Human Development Research Programme  
University of the Free State, South Africa

**Amber Shanahan, M.Ed., MPA**

Extension Educator, 4-H Youth Development, University of Minnesota Extension  
Saint Paul, MN, USA

Thank you to the following youth development professionals for piloting this curriculum:

Juan Domingo Davila, Ian Decker, Abdullahi Farah, Grace Gbolo, Margo Herman, Daud Mohamed, Kamaal Mohamed, Katherine Nguyen, Dana Trickey, Sam Wang, Isa Valdivia Brekke, and Kelly Vincelette.

# Overview of Youth Aspirations

## Introduction

The content of this guidebook is rooted in elements of positive youth development, critical pedagogy, and draws from research on educational attainment and youth aspirations of young people in the US and around the world. This guidebook helps youth aspire while also helping them be active agents in attaining their aspirations by acknowledging and addressing any social constraints and opportunities along their pathway.

This guidebook *recognizes* that higher education attainment is important for young people to secure employment; but it *emphasizes* the idea that higher educational attainment holds deep **intrinsic value** to youth. Higher education attainment can broaden opportunities for youth to feel respected, secure a sense of dignity, and be a force for social change. The program model and activities included in this guidebook are designed to affect the broader well-being of young people through supporting their abilities to achieve their aspirations in and *through* higher education.

This guidebook is not intended to be prescriptive. Instead, it offers **four research-based elements for success** on youths' pathway to higher education that educators can implement flexibly in a way that best meets the needs of organizations and the youth they serve. These are elements that prepare youth for higher education in a way that complements more traditional academic and financial preparation that are commonplace in the formal school setting. This guidebook is designed with middle school aged youth (who might be the first in their family to go to college) in mind and to be implemented on a college campus, but can be adapted for other age groups and other learning environments.

The essential elements are demonstrated by Figure 1. By including these essential elements in programs, **educators** will be granted opportunities to deepen their understanding of youths' lived experiences, identities, and values related to education, with the hope that this will better equip them to create conditions of support. **Youth participants** will have a chance to deeply and critically imagine futures in higher education. They will also reflect on, understand, and make plans to act on barriers and supports they face along their pathways toward aspiration achievement.

# Essential Elements for Aspiration Achievement

1. Youth need opportunities to connect their educational aspirations to concrete experiences, such as exploring their interests with university faculty, staff, students, and industry professionals.
2. Youth need to feel at ease and a sense of belonging in a higher education setting.
3. Youth need to engage in future planning activities that prompt them to address underlying social barriers and to rely on supports.
4. Youth need to imagine their futures with others so they can build a system of support and enrich their visions for their futures.



Figure 1. Essential Elements

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# Element One: Youth explore interests with faculty and students

## Why This Matters

It is often assumed that young people have no hopes for the future and they therefore must be instilled with the aspiration for college. However, many youth *want* to go to college in the future, but lack opportunities to pursue and explore this aspiration. Because of limited opportunities, they might not reveal these aspirations to others. Exploring topics of interest with students and faculty helps youth explore the links between aspirations and aspiration achievement. It also helps young people build a network of people who can help them or shape their views of what is possible for them.

## How to Do It

1. Build a network on a college campus:
  - Throughout the academic year, have one-to-one networking meetings with college faculty, staff, and student organizations.
  - Keep in mind that they have a self-interest in recruiting youth to their field/department. They also often have outreach as part of their mission.
  - If you feel there could be a mutual benefit in collaborating, ask them to participate in your program (e.g. as a volunteer at your program, or as a host of an activity on campus.)
2. If the faculty, staff, or student is willing to host a group on campus, schedule a time for them to lead a hands-on learning activity for about 2 hours. If you are coordinating a program that takes place over multiple days, schedule one or two different blocks of content learning per day (any more activities can fatigue youth and counselors).
3. In conversations leading up to the event, prepare partnering faculty, staff, and students to answer questions about pathways to higher education (in addition to being prepared to lead content learning).
4. Prepare youth participants to ask faculty and students questions relevant to their own interests and experiences.
5. Hold a reflection about each experience.

# Element Two: Youth develop a sense of belonging on a college campus

## Why This Matters

Primary reasons many potential first generation college-goers in the U.S. do not pursue higher education is because they do not feel at ease or like they belong on a college campus. (This is compounded by lack of financial resources.) Youth might feel that college is for “other people” and that the identities of college students is different than their own identity. Experiencing the life of a college student on an actual college campus, especially under the mentorship of current college students, can help young people develop a sense of belonging in college.

## How To Do It

1. Collaborate with a university or college’s conference end events planning team to:
  - Reserve dorm rooms
  - Book the student cafeteria for meals
  - Rent any game rooms
  - Reserve classrooms
2. Recruit/hire/engage current college students to lead programs.
  - Train them in youth development best practices
  - Emphasize their role as mentors to young people planning on attending college.
  - Plan a time during the program for a roundtable or panel at which the counselors will share their college experiences and answer questions with and for the youth participants.
  - Provide them with opportunities to practice delivering the future planning activities (element #3 in this guidebook).
3. Include “free time” in a program schedule allowing youth to play games or “hang out” in dormitory lounges or on the campus lawns.
4. Lead youth on campus tours that help young people know what it is like to find classrooms, places to study, places for student recreation, and places to relax. This will help them experience college life outside of studying. [Tip: Avoid official admission office tours; they don’t emulate student life. Scavenger hunts are a fun way to explore campus.]
5. Connect youth with student groups on campus so they can learn about non-academic activities in which they can participate.



# Element Three: Youth make plans for the future

## Why This Matters

Middle schoolers are especially inclined to be both optimistic and abstract when talking about their futures. For example, a young person might enthusiastically aspire to be a doctor, but she may not have considered how to pursue this aspiration. While having optimism for one's future provides the foundation needed for taking action, it is common among youth—who might be the first in their families to go to college—that positive attitudes about the future do not translate into aspiration attainment. One reason for this is that, because of social exclusion, they rarely have the opportunity to move from abstract thinking to concrete planning and exploring, which can lead to them realizing (often too late) that they were not prepared to circumvent obstacles and rely on support systems.

To this end, the future planning element in this guidebook consists of ten activities that support youth in planning for futures in and through higher education. The activities are divided into two phases. The *Imagining* phase helps support youth in developing positive, but still concrete, orientations of their futures, which includes understanding how they see themselves now. The *Navigating* phase supports youth as they begin to take action toward their future aspirations and explore the links between aspirations and aspiration achievement. This includes identifying and planning for obstacles and supports they will face along their educational pathways to college.

## How To Do It

The following pages consist of activities that support youth in planning for their futures.

Through each activity, youth will create an item/product that can be included in their **educational portfolio**—a document they can keep and refer to as they continue to work toward achieving their educational aspirations.

# IMAGINING

# IDENTITY WHEEL

## Purpose

By creating an identity wheel, youth will think critically about who they are now and who they want to become in the future.

## Why This Matters

Youth identities are ever changing and affected by their expansive social worlds. By examining their own identities, youth think critically about who they are now and how they understand their possibilities for the future. This helps them practice self-awareness and reflection as they move towards their educational aspirations. It also enhances their abilities to recognize the distribution of opportunities connected to their identities so they are better prepared to navigate and confront obstacles to aspiration achievement.

## Getting Started

Materials: Blank sheet of paper with large circle in the middle (i.e. Identity Wheel template), extra paper, large whiteboard or large sheet of paper, markers/colored pencils

Time: 45 minutes depending on group size

Group Size : No limit

## How to Do It

1. Begin by telling youth that we will be talking about our identities. Ask youth to describe what an identity is. Continue to explain that an identity is a distinguishing characteristic, quality or personality of an individual that makes the person who she or he is. It also relates to how a person sees herself or himself relative to the world and how the person understands her or his possibilities for the future.
2. Ask youth to come up with examples of what might be parts of one's identity. Keep a running list. Explain they we will draw a pie chart of our own identities. You can bring an example of your own identity model share with them.
3. Ask youth to write down the parts of their identity on a separate sheet of paper (e.g. race, ethnicity, religion, social class, abilities, etc.)

4. Using a blank circle, ask them to divide their wheel into sections that show the parts of their identity with the size of each section relating to how aware they are of each identity on a daily basis. For example, a person might not think too much about being male or female, but might be very aware of their race and think about it a lot. [Tip: It is helpful sometimes for youth to rank listed identity components.]
5. Once everyone has completed this activity, have youth share their wheel to the large group. Ask that they share what they created and why they represented their identities in this way.
6. **Reflection:** In small or large groups, answer these questions:
  - Tell us why you see yourself this way. Why are some identity parts larger than others?
  - Do any of these identities help you achieve your educational goals or aspirations?
  - Do any of these identities make it hard for you to achieve your goals or aspirations?

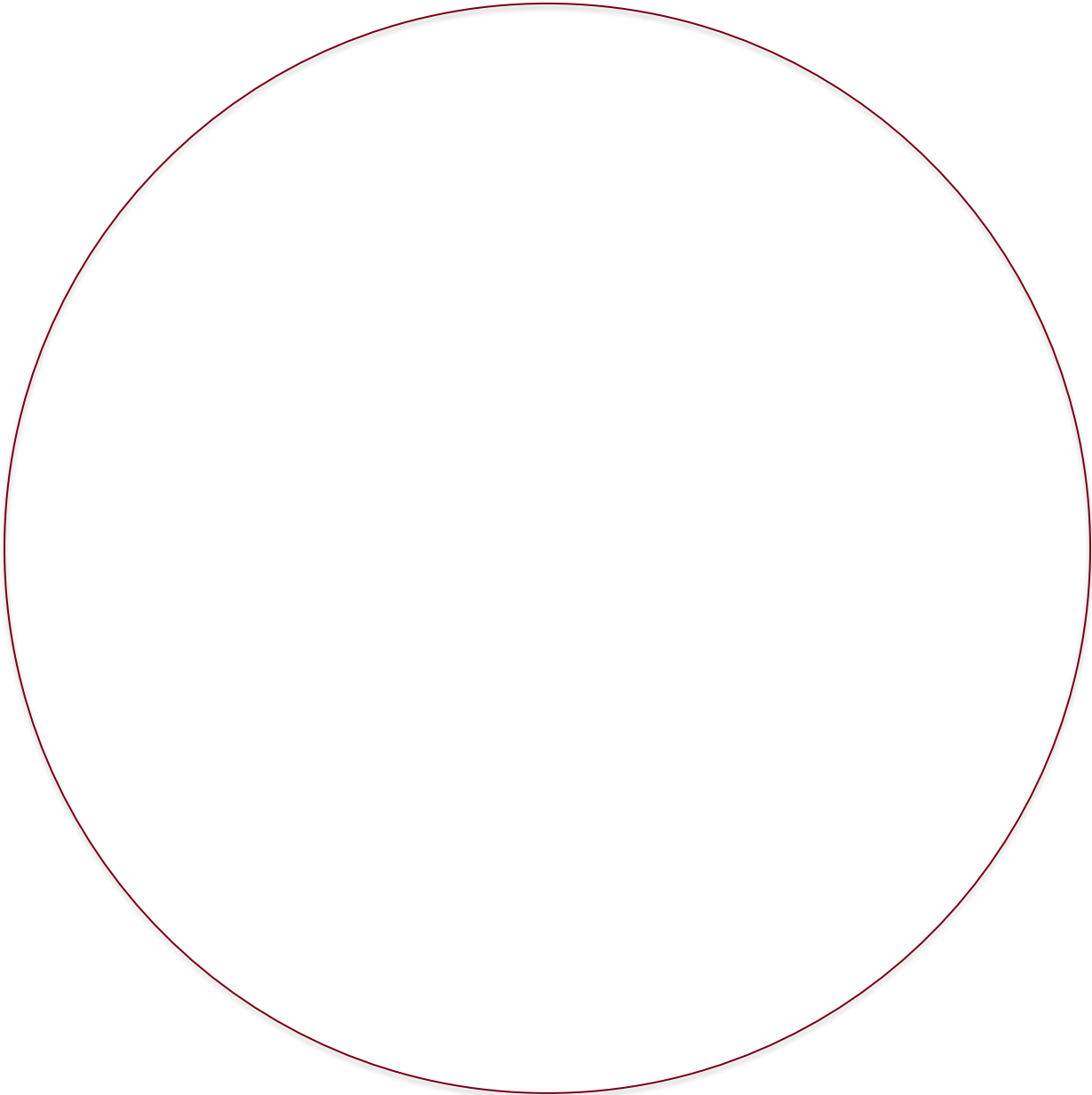
**Portfolio:** Keep the completed wheel to add to portfolio.

### Take it Further

Do this activity again after a span of time (e.g. 6 months, 12 months, or even two years later). Have youth compare the two identity wheels and discuss why their identity wheel might have changed.

Identity wheel activity adapted from “Social Identity Wheel”, from the University of Michigan College of Literature, Science, and the Art (August 2017). Retrieved from <https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/2017/08/16/social-identity-wheel/>

# Identity Wheel Template Handout



Parts of My Identity


# VISION BOARD

## Purpose

For youth to think about and imagine their futures by displaying images that represent future lives they desire.

## Why This Matters

Having optimism and hope for one's future provides the basis needed for taking action that could lead to positive educational outcomes. By envisioning a perfect future, young people are shaping their aspirations. This foundational process of imagining can unlock their potential to take appropriate actions to realize this future life. This activity also helps youth think about futures outside of higher education and job attainment. It can help them think more broadly about what they value.

## Getting Started

**Materials:** Poster board, magazines, album art, computer with internet and printer, scissors, markers, colored pencils, glue or tape, flip cams

**Time:** 60 minutes

**Group Size:** No limit

## How To Do It

1. Tell youth that *imagining* a future that is valuable and makes them happy is an important part of being a young person because it helps them make important decisions that lead to achieving a desired future.
2. Then, ask youth to imagine that they are looking into the future and seeing their lives ten years from now. Tell them that in the future, they are happy and everything is as they want it to be.
3. Ask them to find images and words from pieces of popular culture: (e.g. magazines, album art, book covers, screenshots from the internet) what they want in their future life and lay out the images on the board. Some prompting questions to ask them throughout the process are: *What are you doing? Who is in your life? What are you feeling? What have you*

*accomplished?* Challenge youth that to think beyond about what jobs they will have or what material items they might possess.

4. At the conclusion of the activity, have youth present their vision boards in small groups or to the larger group. [Option: Record the presentation.]
5. **Reflection:** In small or large groups, as youth:
  - How did you feel thinking about possibilities in your life?
  - What specifically about this future you depicted makes you happy?
  - How confident are you that you will realize this future? Explain.
  - What steps would you need to take or what kind of support or would you need to achieve this vision?
  - What role might going to college or university have in achieving this perfect future?

**Portfolio:** Keep the vision board as a portfolio item.

### Take it Further

- Refer to the vision board during subsequent activities. Ask youth how their vision board is related to the other activities they do.
- Have youth look at their vision board six months to a year later. Ask them if there were certain things that they had to do or information they had to find out in terms of achieving this vision.

# TEN THINGS I DO WELL

## Purpose

For youth to identify what they are good at and to take a strengths-based approach to thinking about their futures (i.e. thinking about what can help them be successful in higher education).

## Why This Matters

Having a sense of confidence in their abilities is one element that can help young people realize their aspirations. This is important because while an individual might hope for a particular future, that young person might still have doubts about whether or not she will achieve these aspirations. This activity prompts youth to reflect on their strengths and how they can rely on what they do well as they work to realize their aspirations for higher education (instead of focusing on what they need or do not have, like money or grades).

## Getting Started

**Time Needed:** 30 minutes

**Materials needed:** Paper and pens

**Group size:** No limit

## How To Do It

1. Tell the youth that they are going to be thinking about their strengths and assets. Ask them what a strength or asset is. [Response: A useful, valuable quality.]
2. Then instruct them that each person has two minutes to tell a partner ten things they do well. Then, instruct that each person has two minutes to tell their partners something they feel they do not do well.
3. After each partner has shared, ask each participant to make two lists: one, a list of five things they do well academically the other a list of five things they do well personally.



4. **Reflection:** In small or large groups, discuss the following questions:

- What was difficult about this activity?
- Why does knowing what you do well matter?
- Why do you know you can do some things well?
- Why do you feel you cannot do certain things well? [Challenge youth to strategize ways to improve their perceived weaknesses AND/OR push to understand the root of this perception: Is it lack of confidence or opportunities? Have others unfairly made them feel that way?]

**Portfolio:** Include the lists in their portfolio.

### **Take it Further**

Talents and strengths cannot be developed without the help of others. Have youth identify who they can work with in the future to further develop their strengths.

# Ten Things I Do I Well Handout

## Academically

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

## Personally

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

# VOICING MY FUTURE: YOUTH INTERVIEWS

## Purpose

For youth to practice expressing their future aspirations verbally and to practice their listening skills by interviewing others.

## Why This Matters

Being able to articulate aspirations and share them with others helps young people take ownership of their desired future and strengthens their ability to start taking steps toward achieving this future life.

## Getting Started

**Time Needed:** 60 Minutes

**Materials:** Flips cams/iPads/something to capture video, interview questions (Hand out)

**Group Size:** Size depends on the amount of equipment you have. It works best if youth work in groups of three.

## How To Do It

1. Introduce the activity telling youth that they will be interviewing each other. Ask youth: *What is an interview? What kind of interviews have you seen?* [Examples might be on the news, celebrities on TV, or job interviews.]
2. Ask youth what the goal of the interviewer is. Then, ask what the goal of the person being interviewed is. [You might choose to demonstrate a mock interview with a volunteer youth or colleague.]
3. Have youth work in groups the three. They will take turns interviewing one another. One will be interviewed; the other will hold the camera and the third person will ask the questions (hand out). Then, they will rotate. [Tip: Youth can come up with additional interview questions.]

**4. Reflection:** Come together in a large group and ask the youth:

- What was it like being interviewed?
- What was it like doing the interviewing?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What did you learn about your peers?

**Portfolio:** If possible, find a way to upload these media files to YouTube and share the link with the youth.

### **Take it Further**

Let young people know that colleges often interview prospective students before they admit them. It is helpful to practice talking about who you are and what your goals and aspirations are. Work with youth to brainstorm what kind of questions admission counselors might ask. Then hold another round of interviews in which youth practice asking and answering these questions.

Many first generation college-going youth may have to have conversations with families, loved ones, or peers who do not value higher education attainment in the same way as them. Offer youth opportunities to practice voicing their aspirations for higher education to these people in their lives.

# Voicing my Future Handout

(interview questions)

What is your name?

What grade are you in (will you be in?)

Please fill in the blank: “When I think about going to college in the future, I feel  
-----“

Examples (nervous, excited, curious, etc.)

Follow up questions:

Why do you feel this way when you think about going to college in the future?

How does this program influence how you feel about your future?

What do you think is the importance of going to college?

Alternative wording: Is it important to do graduate from high school?

Why or why not?

If you close your eyes, could you imagine yourself as a college student? What does this life look like for you?

What are some things that make it easier for you to realize your aspirations of going to college one day?

What are some things that make it harder for you to realize your aspirations of going to college one?

What is one thing you are going to do in the six months to help you achieve your aspirations of higher education?

# WRITING A PERSONAL STATEMENT

## Purpose

For youth to imagine in detail how they will fit in in college and how they can be successful in that environment by writing a personal statement.

## Why This Matters

Writing a personal statement is an important part of the college application process. Personal statements give applicants an opportunity to stand out from others who might have similar qualifications, goals, and experiences. The *exercise* of writing a personal statement is important for future applicants because it helps youth develop their skills in writing and perhaps more importantly, it helps them imagine and assert how they will fit in and belong on a college campus. This activity will help youth assert how who they are now (e.g. as described in their identity wheel or their ten things I do best activity) has prepared them to flourish in college and why.

## Getting Started

**Materials:** Paper, pens, a poster board that list questions, computer lab (optional)

**Time Needed:** 60 minutes

**Group Size:** No limit

## How To Do It

1. Begin by telling youth they will practice writing a personal statement, which is something most colleges require in the application process.
2. Ask youth what a personal statement is. Then explain that it is a written essay that helps tell admission offices who you are, why you want to attend the college for which you applying, and why you think a particular college is good fit for you.
3. Then tell youth that a personal statement should creatively answer the following questions: [Tip: It helps to have these questions displayed.]
  - What are your interests, skills, and goals?
  - What makes you a strong applicant for this college\*?
    - This is an opportunity to make you stand out!
  - What about this program/college makes it a good fit for you?
    - Ideas: Academics, campus life, recreational activities, location
  - What do you hope to gain by attending this college?

4. Begin by having youth brainstorm responses to these questions by listing them on a scrap piece of paper.
5. Then, prompt them to start writing their essays. Offer them these tips:
  - Be concise and selective. The interests, skills, and goals should be centered around a theme, rather than a list of all your accomplishments.
  - Give specific examples that make you unique.
  - Be personable and original. Let your writing show off who you are. (You don't need to stick with academics!)
  - Take your time.
6. **Reflection:** In a large or small group setting, ask the youth:
  - What was this process like for you?
    - What did you find difficult about this writing process?
    - What worked well for you in writing this essay?
    - What were some discoveries you made about yourself?
  - What would you want a college admissions person to take away from your essay?

**Portfolio:** Include the written personal statement in portfolio.

### Take it Further

Ask youth to find an adult (e.g a teacher, mentor, family member) to review their essays and offer feedback. Then, give young people the opportunity to revise their essays.

\*You may identify a college or university with which they have had experience or keep it general.

Adapted from Kalamazoo College Career and Professional Development (2013, March). Personal Statements. Retrieved from <https://reason.kzoo.edu/ccd/gradschoollinks/pstatements/>





# NAVIGATING

# THE HIGHER EDUCATION OBSTACLE COURSE

## Purpose

For youth to recognize obstacles they may face as they prepare for college and how they can overcome them.

## Why This Matters

No young person will face the same pathway as they pursue higher education. Each young person, depending on their social identities, social networks, and individual characteristics, will face a unique set of opportunities and obstacles. Sometimes youth realize too late that certain odds are stacked against them or that certain support systems are available to them. This exercise allows youth to prepare strategies to navigate or dismantle obstacles (e.g. personal or social) on their paths to realizing their aspirations of higher education.

## Getting Started

**Time Needed:** 90 minutes

**Materials:** Hula Hoops, tarp, potato sacks, the scenarios printed out, paper to write out answers, video camera, timer

**Group Size:** 5-40 youth

## How To Do It

1. Set up an obstacle course with five different stations. The finish line should represent a goal of attending college. Begin by telling the youth that going to college requires a lot of planning and hard work--starting even before high school. Then explain that everyone has a different pathway to college and will face different obstacles. (Ask youth to define obstacles: e.g. things that will try to knock you off track and might make you feel like giving up.) Tell them it is important to remember your aspirations and try to find different ways to overcome obstacles that try to get in the way of your dream.
2. Then explain that they will be going on an obstacle course with a team (3-5 teams). At each station, there will be piece of paper describing a scenario that represents a dilemma or obstacle young people might face while trying to reach their goal of higher education. As a small team, young people read the scenario aloud and discuss a strategy for overcoming the obstacle presented (i.e. they answer the question: What should [name] do?).

3. They will have five minutes to discuss this topic (a facilitator should be running a timer). They may not agree or come up with a solution, but they will have thought critically about it. As the facilitator, try to ask them tough, probing questions, but ***do not try to guide them to a particular answer***. At the end of the five minutes, the young people will work together to overcome the physical obstacle they face. Once they overcome the physical obstacle, they can run to the next station (even if another group is not done yet).
4. Once a group as completed all five stations, they can race to the finish line!

Tips:

- Ideally, an educator/adult will be at each obstacle to facilitate. If this is not possible, it would be wise to give the youth team roles (e.g. someone who reads the question, someone who writes down ideas, someone who makes sure everyone gets a say, a timekeeper, etc).
  - Each group will start at a different station. Make sure the staff or the participants know the sequence they will follow from one station to the next.
  - If a group finishes the race before others, they should join other groups to help them and/or encourage them (e.g. cheer, clap, run with them, etc).
  - This will be chaotic. Embrace it. It's fun.
5. **Reflection:** Gather as a large group once everyone reaches the destination of “higher education”. Ask youth:
    - What did you learn from this activity?
    - What was challenging about it? What was helpful?
    - Have you faced certain things that get in the ways of your aspirations?
    - How do you predict you can overcome obstacles you may face in the future?

**Portfolio:** Have youth write in their portfolio one strategy they will use to overcome an obstacle they are facing (or might face) as they pursue their aspiration of higher education.

### **Take it Further**

Have young people design (and then implement) their own obstacle course. They can create their own scenarios based on their own or their peers' experiences. They can also create their own physical obstacles.

# Higher Education Obstacle Course Handout

## Scenario One

(Middle School Obstacle)

Henry wants to become an engineer someday. He knows that once he gets into high school, he can register for advanced science and math classes and that those classes will look good on a college application. In order to take those classes, he has to get good grades in the science and math classes he is taking now (in middle school). He is having a hard time getting his homework done for two reasons. To begin with, he shares a room with his younger brother and he is always interrupting when he tries to study. This is a concern because he has to babysit when his mom works at night. Secondly, his friends ask him to hang out or play online video games together. Henry really wants to do well in school, but when it comes down to deciding between video games and studying, video games always just seem more fun. He is still a kid after all.

*What should Henry do?*

*Physical obstacle:*

Hula hoop pass. Hold hands and pass a hula hoop along a group of people.

## Scenario Two

(Early High School Obstacle)

Lola went to a college fair at her school. She was excited to learn more about college, because she knew very little about it. When she arrived at the college fair, she became intimidated and overwhelmed. First of all, it seemed like every other student her age was there with a parent. Lola didn't know she was supposed to bring her mom or dad. She also overheard students her age asking really smart questions that she didn't understand. For example, she heard someone ask, "When is the FAFSA deadline?" and "Can I apply for early admission?" She also heard her classmates state their intended college major; Lola had no idea what she wanted to study! She only knew that going to college might help her live a better life. In that moment, because Lola felt so out of place and unprepared, she wondered if perhaps college wasn't for her.

*What should Lola do?*

Physical Obstacle: The human knot - Stand in a circle and grab hands at random (You can't hold hands with someone next to you). Then try to untangle yourselves without letting go of any hands.

### **Scenario Three**

#### *(Early High School Obstacle)*

Ayanna is really interested in studying medicine one day and becoming a doctor. She wants to help people be healthy and finds the science of infectious diseases to be fascinating. After an interesting day of learning in Biology class, she decides to tell her biology teacher about her aspirations. She tells Mr. Pierson that she wants to have a career in medicine in the future. Mr. Pierson pats her on the back and says, “That is a great idea. You will make a great nurse someday.” Ayanna feels disappointed. She wanted to be a doctor, but now she wonders if she should change her aspiration. If Mr. Pierson doesn’t think she should be a doctor, maybe she should rethink her aspirations. She feels confused.

*What should Ayanna do?*

*Physical Obstacle:* While standing on top of a completely open tarp, the group must create a plan to get everyone on the opposite side of the tarp without anyone stepping off.

### **Scenario Four**

#### *(Late High School Obstacle)*

Maria is beginning her senior year in high school. She is an A student, plays on the tennis team and is in student government. Her guidance counselor says she is well-qualified for many good colleges and sends her links to the applications. The guidance counselor is encouraging Maria to apply for college and the idea of going to college makes Maria happy. However, Maria has four younger brothers and sisters and money is tight for her family. Her parents are telling her she needs to get a full time job to start making money to help out the family when she graduates from high school. Maria feels torn between pursuing her dream and supporting her family financially.

*What should Maria do?*

*Physical Obstacle:* Potato sack race: Each team member has to get from point A to point B or point B to point A, but there is only one sack. So one hops to his or her teammate and then gives him or her the sack. This is repeated until each teammate goes. Encourage them to cheer for each other.

**Scenario Five:**

(Late High School Obstacle)

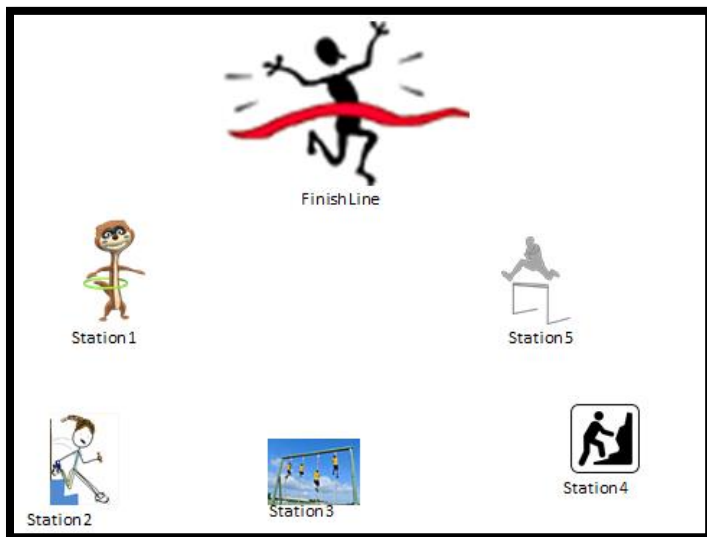
Khalid wants to go college. He talks about it all the time and is excited about the possibility of someday going to college and being the first in his family to graduate from college. However, he's about to start the second semester of his senior year and no one has come to talk to him about applying. He is waiting to hear from his teachers, counselors, and parents to give him directions on what he needs to do to select a college, fill out the applications, and apply for financial aid. Khalid is starting to feel like he is going to miss his chance at college and is frustrated that no one has offered to help him.

*What should Khalid do?*

Physical Obstacle: Hop on one foot while singing the alphabet together. If anyone on your team falls, start again.

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Mock Obstacle Course Map:



# SMART GOAL-SETTING

## Purpose

For youth to create specific goals that can help them reach their ultimate aspiration of going to college one step at a time.

## Why This Matters

While many young people aspire for an ultimate goal, like being a doctor, they often lack the knowledge of the links between aspirations and aspirations achievement. In this activity, youth experience goal-setting processes by establishing short-term goals and determining the steps needed to meet their goals related achieving their broader aspiration of going to college.

## Getting Started

**Time Needed:** 45 minutes

**Materials:** SMART Goal Worksheet

**Group Size:** No limit

## How To Do It

1. Begin by asking youth to recall how they envisioned their perfect future. Ask them to share their perfect future with someone sitting near them. Then go further and tell young people that there are many mini accomplishments they must have to help them reach their ultimate aspiration. This exercise will help them learn to reach these milestones.
2. Review with the youth what a SMART goal is. SMART goals are:

***Specific:*** The goal should identify a specific action or event that will take place. (What do I want to accomplish?)

***Measurable:*** The goal and its benefits should be quantifiable. (How will you know that you have achieved your goal?)

***Attainable:*** The goal should be achievable given available resources. You should also believe that you can do it!

***Relevant:*** The goal should be important and it should matter to you!

***Timely:*** The goal should state the time period in which it will be accomplished. (When is the “due date?”)



3. Share an example of an effective and ineffective goal:

Effective: *I want to have a 3.3 grade point average at the end of the next school year.*

Ineffective: *I want to do a good job in school (too general).*

4. Then work with youth in writing out their SMART goals on the document provided. [Tip: Youth might be inclined to say they will “work hard” or have “better study habits.” Challenge them to come up with something specific.
5. **Reflection:** Ask youth as a large group:
  - Why is it important to have goals?
  - How is a SMART goal different than an ultimate aspiration of going to college in the future?
  - Think of a person who knows you best. What would he or she say about the SMART goal you planned?

**Portfolio:** Include goal setting sheet in portfolio.

### Take it Further

Ask youth to find an accountability person. This could be a peer, a family member, or another adult in their lives. Encourage them to set up regular check-ins with this person to assess progress toward goal attainment.

In six months to a year, check in with youth. Ask them where they are at with this goal. What is the next SMART goal they set for themselves?

Adapted from: Ramp-Up to Readiness™ (2018)

# SMART Goal-Setting Handout

<b>S</b>	Make it <b>specific</b>	What do you want to accomplish?
<b>M</b>	Make it <b>measurable</b>	How will you know you've accomplished your goal?
<b>A</b>	Make it <b>attainable</b>	How can the goal be accomplished? What are some steps you will take to accomplish this goal?
<b>R</b>	Make it <b>relevant</b>	Is this goal worth working to accomplish? Why does it matter to you?
<b>T</b>	Make it <b>timely</b>	By when will the goal be accomplished?

# THE PEOPLE AND RESOURCES IN MY LIFE

## Purpose

For youth to recognize how the people around them influence them in their educational pursuits by mapping out the people and resources in their lives.

## Why This Matters

While determination and hard work matter, going to college in the future requires that young people to depend on others. Social supports are important to identify so that young people know on who they can rely and how. Similarly, young people need to recognize people in their life who could interfere with their future plans and work hard to minimize this potential interference.

## Getting Started

**Materials:** The People and Resources in my Life Handout

**Time Needed:** 45 - 60 minutes

**Group size:** No limit

## How To Do It

1. Begin by reminding youth of the futures they have begun to imagine for themselves. Also remind youth that while it will take a lot of individual effort achieve the future they want, they are not alone on their pathways. There are people who can support them the along the way. If possible, tell them about some mentors and support you have had on your own pathway to higher education.
2. Then, explain that they are going to take the time to identify some people who can support them in achieving their visions for futures. They will also identify people who might get in the way of their aspirations. Tell youth that there might be some people who belong in multiple categories (e.g. a friend might be helpful emotionally, but get in the way of your homework time sometimes).
3. Divide a large group into smaller groups of 3-5 people. First, lead each small group in short conversations around the below questions.
  - Who are the people in your life who really care about you? For example, if you needed help in the middle of the night, who would you call? These are

the people who encourage you, believe in you, and who you can trust to be there for you when you need it most.

- Who are the people who you can go to for help with achieving goals by keeping you on track, helping you through hard situations, or standing up for you?
  - Who are the people in your life who are not helpful? What is your relationship with them? What do you do with them, if anything?
  - Who are the people in your life who introduce you to new ideas, experiences, possibilities, and new people?
4. Then, after the small group discussions, give them time to complete the “people and resources in my life” hand out individually. After completing the handout, gather as a large group for reflection.
5. **Reflection:** In a large group, reflect on the following questions:
- Why is it important to know who is around you who can help you?
  - How might someone who is close to you (like family) and someone who is not really close to you play different roles in helping you achieve your aspirations for the future?
  - Were there any people in your life who you categorized as both helpful and not helpful? Why?
  - What steps can you take in the next year to seek help from people in your life?

**Portfolio:** Include the “The people and resources in my life” handout.

### **Take it Further:**

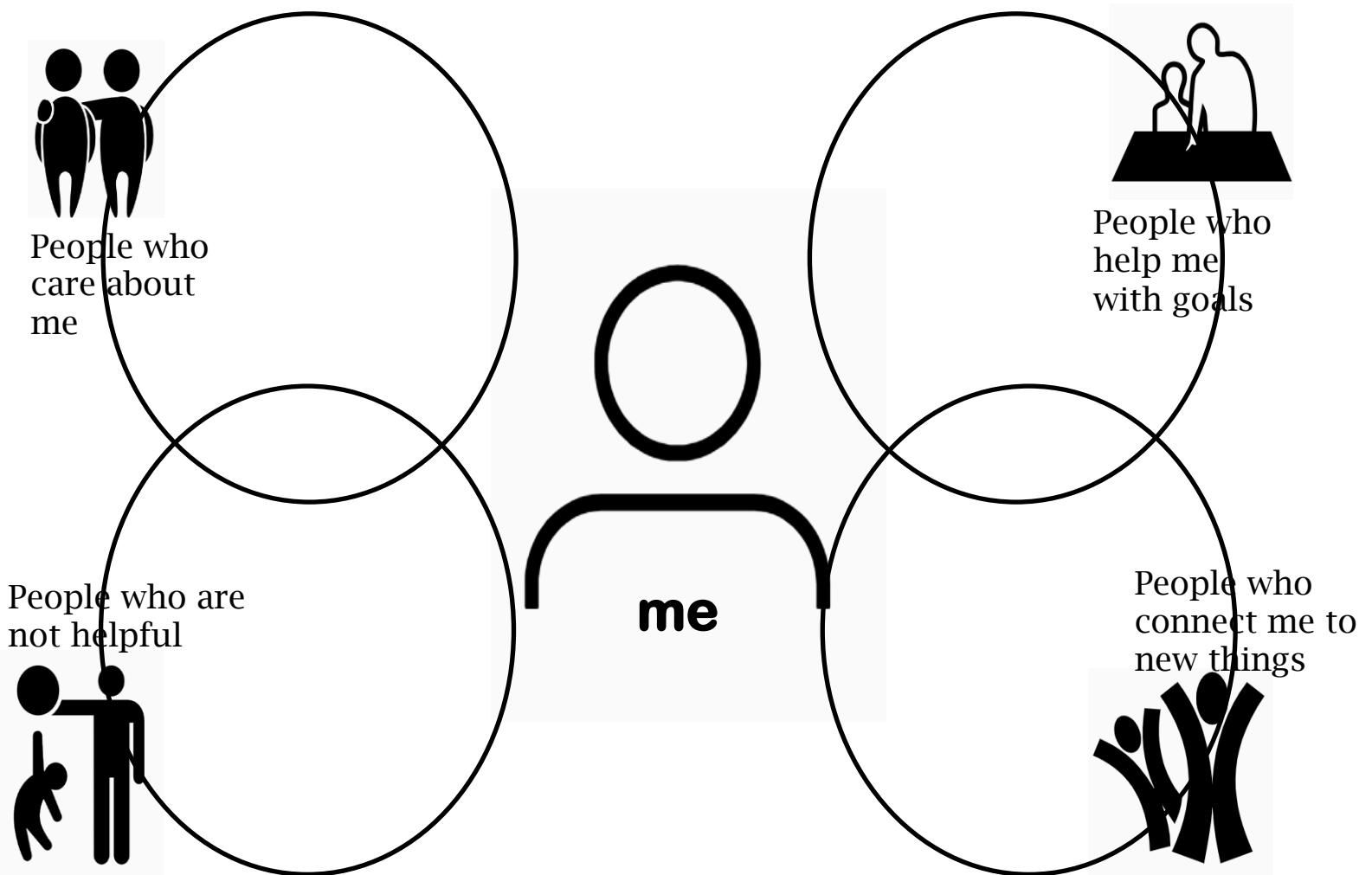
Ask youth to make an action plan to rely on at least two of the people they identified as being supportive.

Adapted from:

Search Institute (2018). *The Developmental Assets Framework*. Minneapolis, MN. Retrieved from: [www.searchinstitute.org](http://www.searchinstitute.org)

Malloy, J.M., Couture, D. and Drake, J. (2011). RENEW Youth Portfolio. *Institute on Disability*: University of New Hampshire

# The People and Resources in My Life Handout



# HIGHER EDUCATION THEATER

## Purpose

For youth to apply what they have learned about their educational pathways and express, through theater arts, steps they can take to be successful.

## Why This Matters

Being able to emulate the experience of preparing for higher education will help youth develop a readiness to take the appropriate action when the time is right. Further, engaging in theater arts can help youth more deeply develop a sense of self and support their motivation to pursue aspirations. This activity allows youth to use artistic expression to start making the link between having aspirations and learning what it takes to achieve their aspirations.

## Getting Started

**Time Needed:** 60-90 minutes

**Materials:** Multiple bags with random materials in it (e.g. hat, rope, plate, book)

**Group Size:** 6-30 youth

## How To Do It

1. Divide the young people into groups of 3-5. Tell the groups that they will be creating and performing a short skit using a few items. Don't give them a lot of details, but just tell them they need to make a skit that best demonstrates what kind of action, decisions, and behaviors young people should be making in order to go to college someday.
2. Give each group a bag with random materials in it (e.g. hat, rope, plate, book, etc.). Tell them not to look into the bag until you say "go." When everyone has a bag and the groups are ready, tell them to go ahead and start.
3. Give them about thirty minutes to prepare their skits. At the end of thirty minutes, have them perform the skits to each other while a staff records it digitally.
4. **Reflection:** Ask youth what inspired their choice of action. How does this fictional skit play out in real life?

**Portfolio:** Upload the video link and share it with youth.

## Take it Further

Hold a playwriting or screen writing day or workshop. Allow young people to spend more time writing and developing a written script around taking action towards realizing their aspirations of higher education. Support them in developing a complex plot and character development. Then work with them on putting on this play or movie.

# MAPPING MY PATHWAY TO HIGHER EDUCATION

## Purpose

For youth to synthesize what they have thought about in prior activities and identify obstacles, decisions, and the support that they may encounter their pathway to higher education by creating a map.

## Why This Matters

Being able to explore and map out pathways to higher education is foundational to attending college in the future. Mapping helps young people think creatively, critically, and concretely about the path before them and start planning the steps they will take to realize their aspirations of higher education.

## Getting Started

**Time Needed:** 60 minutes- depending on group size

**Materials:** Tables, marker, larger piece of paper

**Group Size:** No limit

## How To Do It

1. Begin by telling youth that they will be drawing a map that shows their pathway to higher education. Remind youth that there are things and people along the way that will help them along their paths. Also remind them that there will be things and people that might make it difficult to achieve their aspirations.
2. Ask youth to draw a path that includes things and people (both helpful and not helpful) that they are facing and will face as they work to reach their goal of going to college. Remind them to consider their strengths and supports in addition to obstacles. They can signal in the map how they will act at each juncture in the map.
3. Once youth complete their maps, give them an opportunity to present them to a large or small group.
4. **Reflection:** Ask youth what was helpful about this activity. Ask youth what was challenging about this activity.



**Portfolio:** Youth keep map for portfolio.

**Take it Further:** Check in with youth in six months to a year. Ask them if the map they drew was accurate. Ask them if there were any surprises on their pathways or if they would like to revise their map.

Inspired by: Futch, V. A., and Fine, M. (2014). Mapping as a Method: History and Theoretical Commitments. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 11(1), pp. 42-59.

# Element Four: Youth share plans with family and community members

## Purpose

For youth to showcase their educational portfolio to their family, friends, and community members in a public setting.

## Why This Matters

Presenting goals and aspirations helps young people develop a sense of cognitive and emotional mastery of their pathways to higher education. Additionally, sharing educational plans and aspirations with others can garner more social support for the youth and make them even more excited to pursue the future they have begun to imagine for themselves.

## (Tips on) How To Do It

- Pick a date
- Book venue/secure a location
- Invite families attend (via phone calls, mailed invitations, e-vites, personal invitations)
  - It helps to have an RSVP to the dinner on the youth registration to the program
- Order food
- Develop a program/schedule
- While it helps to have a basic outline of expectations of the event, have youth organize it as much as possible.
- Have youth decorate the room
- Give youth roles: Greet families as they arrive, decorate, tech person
- Arrange for youth to be transported home by their families; have a check out procedure in place.

## Showcase program content

Allow youth to choose what they want to showcase and how. Examples include but are not limited to:

- Group presentations on activities they did in their portfolio
- A presentation on learnings from working with faculty and students
- A presentation on what it felt like to be on a college campus
- Poster presentations in which they synthesize portfolio documents
- Individual presentations on portfolios

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