

Getting to Know Your Youth Group: Tailoring Engagements for Success

Things to know: First, no youth group is alike. Each group has unique characteristics, needs and abilities. Second, getting to know youth and building respect and rapport takes time, and chances are that your map making engagements won't entail multiple sessions with the same group of kids. Therefore, planning ahead of time is key to ensuring success. We find it *essential* to meet with the educator or group leader well ahead of the engagement. This person knows the youth best and their insights and tips for working with their group often prove to be invaluable in supporting your engagement planning and facilitation.

You can either choose to *co-create* the engagement with the educator or group leader or you can *create it yourself* after your conversation together. We suggest that you have a draft of your engagement framework ready prior to your meeting with the educator or group leader. Go through the agenda with them and get their insights and feedback. Use the list of questions below during your meeting to get a sense for the group. Once you do, tailor your facilitation and plan.

Questions to tailor engagement planning:

- ❖ What are the group's attributes? What are they like? Creative, shy, up for anything, reluctant?
- ❖ What do they need? Do they like working in pairs, small groups? Like choice?
- ❖ What works well for your group? What elements make for a successful activity?
- ❖ What kinds of methods, activities and experiences keep the group engaged? Do they like visual preference surveys or build with their hands?
- ❖ What kinds of routines or group processes are already in place? How do you get their attention? Do you have established small, working teams, ways of decision making? Especially strong leaders that you can call on to start the share out?
- ❖ What is the ideal number of minutes for each part of the lesson (introduction, warm up, main activity, share out and closure)? How long can they attend for?
- ❖ What doesn't work well? What leads to disengagement?
- ❖ Does the educator or group leader want to co-facilitate with you? Could they handle any behavior management needs, if they arise? What other role might they play? Scribe during share out? Support youth 1:1?
- ❖ Do you think the group will be interested in the concept of a child-friendly map?
- ❖ What do you think they'll need to know? How can we plan for success?
- ❖ What special skills, interests or capabilities does the group have?
- ❖ Anything we should be aware of (or be particularly sensitive to) in supporting the group? Any learning needs?
- ❖ What are some strengths, cultural components and/or achievements unique to the group that might help us understand who they are?