

ICVisions
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WHO ARE THEY?

ICVisions is North America's first government funded hip-hop (urban music) center. They have a full studio where they allow young people to record their songs for free. As studio equipment and recording time are hard to come by, ICVisions provides professional access and support to youth who otherwise would not be able to get it. Mentoring and photography workshops are also provided. Music industry professionals and people from major labels like Sony BMG come by and talk about their roles, job descriptions, career paths, education, what they based their decisions on and what they see coming in the future.

SO HOW DO THEY ENGAGE YOUTH?

When ICVisions was first starting out, they passed out surveys to young people and did focus groups.

“We put together a breakdancing competition and provided free pizza for youth who showed up. When they came in, we locked the door behind them and said “Ok now that you’re here and having fun with us and eating our food we want to ask you to answer some questions. And from there, youth began to lay the groundwork that would eventually grow into IC Visions.”

Gavin Sheppard, Founder

This is another prime example of how to engage youth: by incorporating them in the decision-making process from the beginning. That way, youth feel a genuine connection, and in turn, a responsibility to the organization. They will be more likely to develop a loyalty and dedication to something they view as their own.

WHAT THE YOUTH FRIENDLY GUIDE SAYS

This is a critical element in forming successful intergenerational partnerships and runs parallel to its definition as explained in the Guide: **“Youth participation can be defined as involving youth in responsible, challenging actions that meet genuine needs, with the opportunity for planning and/or engagement in decision-making affecting others.”**

HOW DO THEY PROMOTE THEMSELVES?

“We really have to compete with a lot of mainstream entertainment sources like clubs, movies, television, parties etc. Basically, everything’s a sales pitch for youth these days. To get ourselves out there we’ve really had to step up and find more innovative ways of grabbing their attention. First and foremost, we’ve observed that the most effective way to bring youth in is by word of mouth.”

Gavin Sheppard, Founder

Youth trust their fellow youth more than some obscure ad that hits them out of nowhere. But creating this word of mouth and creating this reputation is another thing. IC Visions has had to create its own brand to be easily recognizable by youth they target. What do they mean by branding?

“It’s the building of an identity of what you are doing. When we’re building a brand, we’re building an image and idea that we want people to associate with ICVisions the moment they think of us.” Gavin Sheppard, Founder

ICVisions promotes itself in such a way that their idea is consistent with their message each time and until people know who they are. Secondly, the brand has to be short and sweet. Young people today will often judge things within seconds of having seen it, like channel surfing.

“We could put 3 words down, like “remixing social thought”. Among the hip hop community, “remix” is a popular word and is likely to spark interest. Remixing Social Thought could then definitely arouse curiosity and at the same time send out a strong message about what we’re all about.”

Gavin Sheppard, Founder

Image is also what makes ICVisions so popular.

“A lot of youth today feel as if community programs are “soft” and that’s where all the “goody-goody” people go. So to gain youth and to attract them to us, we have to create a new and cutting-edge image similar to what the corporations do to reel in people. A lot of urban youth today are more attracted to the ideas of a company or of potential commerce. Youth don’t want to feel like they’re just going to some center to get handouts, because they don’t want to feel like welfare cases.”

Gavin Sheppard, Founder

ICVisions is run by people who grew up in hip hop culture; they stress the importance of having authentic programming. When youth come to your organization, they want to see and hear people who really live and model the message they’re trying to convey. Also, ICVisions doesn’t want to come across as just another government project. Instead of passing out the traditional eight by eleven black and white papers for publicity, they give out club-style ads. They strive to create an image for themselves that portrays a “cool spot” or movement for youth to go to work on their creativity, get involved, learn, get some mentoring or just hang out for awhile.

ICVisions has done an excellent job at knocking down several barriers that youth face. In their case in particular, ICVisions has allowed youth who would otherwise be financially incapable of professionally recording their songs or even using photography equipment to explore their talents and enhance their artistic skills. They’re providing youth with opportunity and the chance for each to bring their creativity out in the open so that they can help “remix” society a little bit in their own way.