



Evaluating Ourselves – the Ladder of Engagement

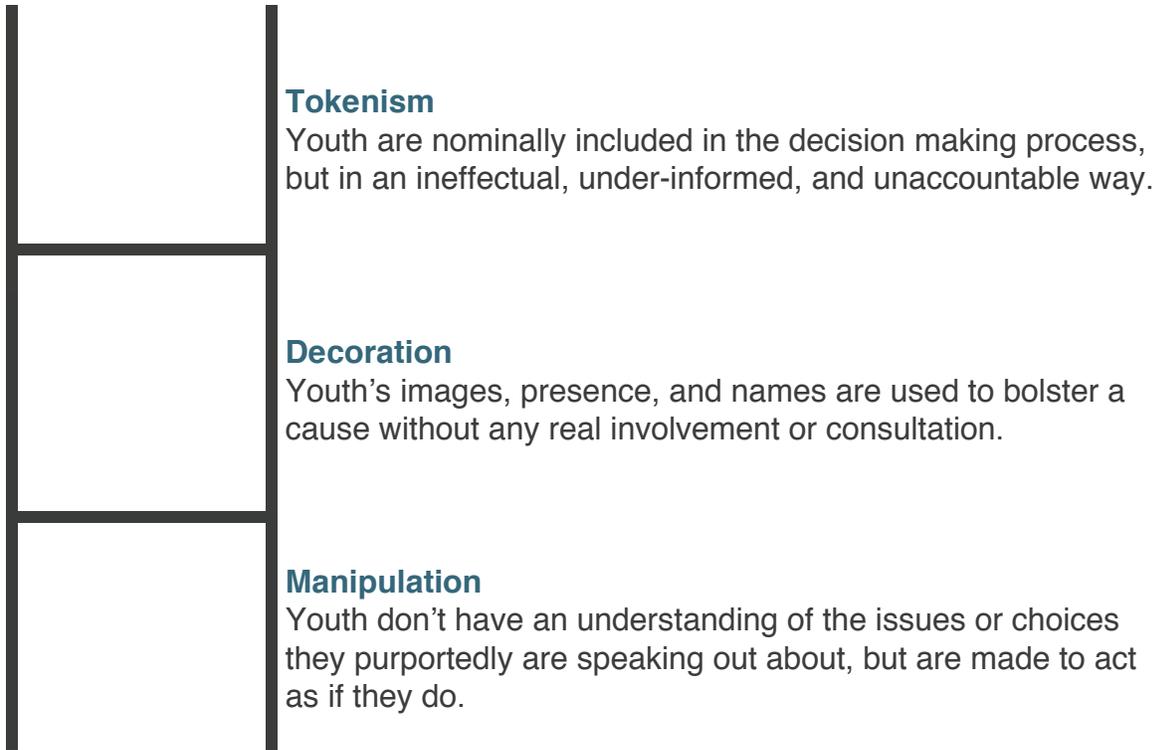
To understand the state of youth engagement in your organization, Apathy is Boring has adapted a widely used tool called **the Ladder of Engagement**.

First introduced by Roger Hart in a United Nations report on children, the ladder provides a benchmark for your own process through which youth can progressively build capacities while being put in touch with the consequences of our decisions.¹

The Ladder of Engagement



¹ Hart, “Children’s Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship.” 8-14.



Tips for using the ladder:

- You need to pay careful attention to the real impact youth involvement has within your work. **Ask yourself: how might things have gone differently if youth weren't present?** If you have trouble seeing where youth input changed your direction, you may be at the bottom end of the ladder.
- More importantly, **ask the youth involved where they feel their ideas were implemented.** What may look like shared decision making from the adult side may actually be tokenistic if youth have a different answer.
- The ladder isn't a roadmap for board takeovers by youth or banishing adults from every boardroom. It's about clearly outlining **the terms of real equal partnerships between youth and adults.**
- The key is to **be honest about the levels of engagement you practice.** Give young people opportunities to climb the ladder, and regularly revise your strategy based on their feedback.

Remember:

A young person giving programming input that isn't being listened to might actually be *less* engaged than a youth assigned to office tasks but who is informed and openly conscious of their position. The difference lies in open and

honest communication. Youth understand that smaller actions contribute to a larger goal, but you need to be explicit and honest about the nature of their contributions.

Evaluating efforts based on a clear standard helps you to ensure that you're getting the greatest benefit of a youth engagement initiative. The Ladder of Engagement can help you reflect about where your initiative stands, and give you ideas about what your next steps can be to take it to the next level.