

INFORMATION FOR SCHOOLS AND YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS

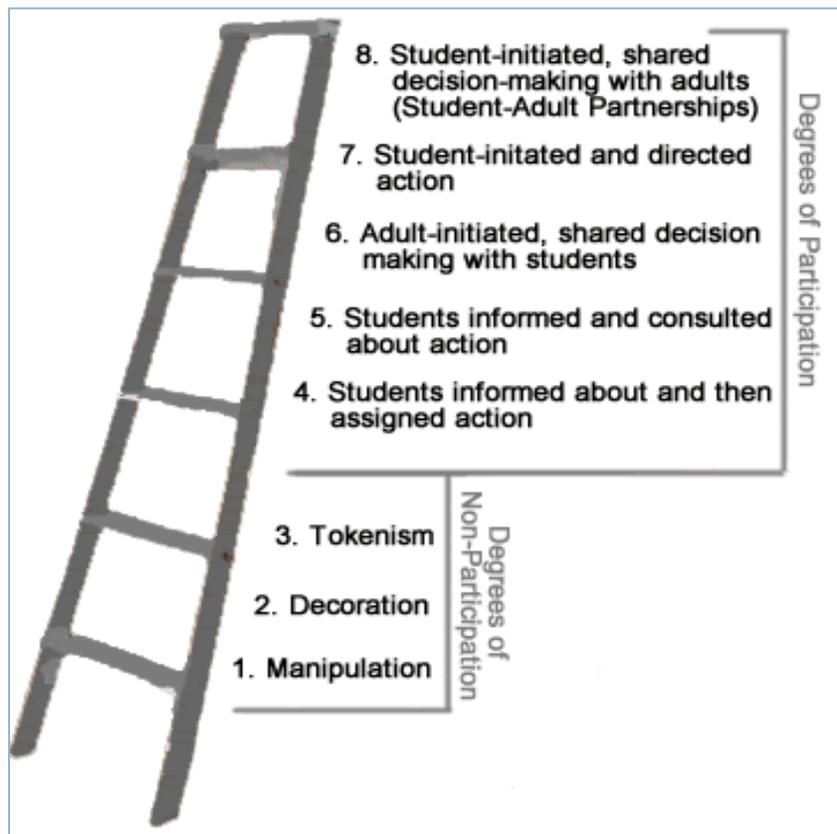
The Development and Achievements of Leaders in Life

The Leaders in Life Youth Conference brought something new to Kern County when it started in 1999: the concept of youth as experts on their own situation.

The **Leaders in Life Youth Conference** started in 1999 through the vision of Morgan Clayton in partnership with the Kern County Network for Children and the Kern County Superintendent of Schools office. The original concept was to provide an opportunity for youth to learn from inspirational speakers and connect to resources so that young people could become engaged in shaping improvements in their schools and communities.

This event is planned by a diverse group of over 120 youth in middle and high schools from across Kern County. The youth leadership skill-building activities are unique in that they are **planned BY youth and FOR youth**. The Leaders in Life Youth Conference targets its one-day event of dynamic speakers, workshops, and resource booths toward the youth in Kern County and the southern and central section of California. The first conference in the February of 2000 hosted over 500 students from across the region, and has since grown to involve 2000 youth from eight Californian counties. What started as an event planned by youth under the close guidance of a parallel adult planning committee now operates entirely under the direction of the student General Planning Committee, with students facilitating all general and subcommittee meetings -- orchestrating every detail of the conference planning process.

Conceptual Framework for Student Engagement



The Ladder of Student Involvement in Schools (Adapted by Adam Fletcher from the work of Roger Hart *) From Hart, R. (1994) *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship*. New York: Earthscan.

The Leaders in Life Youth Conference involves students from schools in two ways:

General Planning Committee: Each school may nominate two new students, grades 6-12, each year to serve on the planning committee. The nomination process is also open to agencies and organizations that work with youth at the same grade levels. Nominations are received in September and October. Overall, the committee seeks to reflect the diversity of the Kern County student population in terms of both socio-economic and academic backgrounds.

Nomination forms may be found under the Schools/Community tab. It is advised that each school or agency designate one staff member to manage its nominations. Once students are actively participating on the committee, they may continue serving in subsequent years. Over the years, hundreds of youth have served for multiple years, gaining valuable leadership skills, experience, and confidence that contribute to their future success in college and careers.

The General Planning Committee meets once a month during the school day in October, November, January, and February to plan and organize the conference. The students also select to participate in one of five working subcommittees: Fundraising, Marketing and Public Relations, Resource Fair, Speakers and Workshops, and Venue and Logistics. The subcommittees will each meet one additional time per month, during after-school hours, between October and March. On the day of the conference, students take on a variety of roles, including school group check-in, masters of ceremony, stage managers, troubleshooters, media representatives, workshop presenters and facilitators, lunch line help, and general set-up and clean-up. Overall during the planning process, students gain skills in leadership, team meeting facilitation, time management, organization, communication, and community outreach.

Each year, a group of 20 students who exhibited strong leadership skills are selected to serve on the Leaders in Life Executive Board. The board members decide on policies and program direction, lead the subcommittees, and provide guidance to new students on the General Planning Committee. The Executive Board students attend a four-day leadership camp in July offered by the California Association of Student Councils and a three-day planning retreat in August to prepare for the new year.

Leaders in Life Youth Conference: Open to schools and agencies with students in grades 6-12, the conference seeks to provide a “spark” for each attendee, hoping that the youth will find a positive activity, direction in life, or way of thinking that will help them grow today and in the future. Groups that attend will hear dynamic opening and closing speakers, attend two breakout session workshops, and visit 40+ booths at the resource fair. Workshops fall into such categories as Issues Faced by Teens, Student Leadership and Advocacy, College and Career Exploration, and Tobacco Use Prevention Education. Resource Fair booths include Information for Teens, Education, Mentoring, After School Programs, Colleges, Military, and Job Programs.

Each entity may register up to 40 youth to attend. One adult advisor or chaperone must be registered as well for every ten students. ***An Intent to Participate form is sent to schools in January but may also be accessed under the Schools/Community tab.*** Once the Intent is received, Leaders in Life staff will follow up with a registration packet where the school indicates the students and chaperones who will be attending and their workshop preferences.

The conference is designed for youth of varying academic achievement levels. Schools and organizations are encouraged to bring a diverse mix of students, including young people who may often be overlooked for leadership opportunities like this.