

Recommendations Report: Student-Led Workshops for Fall 2025 Student Summit

By Sophia Nguyen

December 2024

This paper will offer recommendations for the Queer Youth Task Force based on key findings from *Making Space, Making Change*, and *Hart's Ladder of Youth Participation*. By reflecting on existing youth-led and youth-driven models, QYTF can strengthen its structuring and ensure that student interests and needs are aligned with and met. Data from student registration forms (Fall 2017 to Fall 2024) consistently highlight that the top three areas of interest for the youth are **Mental Health, Self-Care, and Healthy Relationships**. QYTF already operates at Level 7 of Hart's Ladder, where youth drive the advocacy work with adult supporters, making decisions and leading initiatives. At this level, youth are not simply participants; they are decision-makers and leaders in their own advocacy, while adults are present to provide support, resources, and guidance.

To better meet the needs of the youth and ensure workshops are effective and relevant, we must keep in mind that the success of these workshops depends on the active involvement of the youth—from design to execution. Additionally, workshops must be reflective of the diverse and unique needs of the youth, offering inclusive, intersectional, and affirming spaces that honor their lived experiences. One of the most powerful ways to empower students is to actively involve them in the design and structure of the workshops, which can be done by organizing focus groups or brainstorming sessions where students can share their ideas on what topics they feel should be addressed and what types of activities or resources they find most helpful.

Additionally, assigning peer facilitator roles to students and allowing them to facilitate the workshops with adult mentors can give students the opportunity to be involved in guiding discussions, setting the tone, and creating an environment where they feel comfortable sharing their own experiences. Incorporating activities where students work together to discuss scenarios, role-play, or create solutions related to mental health, self-care, and healthy relationships can build confidence within the youth and feel supported by their peers.

Regularly affirming the contributions of students and youth by providing constructive feedback can help them feel appreciated, respected, and recognized for their contributions, which can boost their likelihood of taking initiative and feeling empowered in future workshops. It is also important to establish and enforce a system for continuous feedback, such as regular evaluations through surveys, anonymous suggestions, or peer-led feedback sessions to provide insights into how workshops can be improved. Youth leaders can take responsibility for reviewing feedback and making further improvements and recommendations for adjustments. This approach ensures that QYTF's programming remains responsive and accountable to the needs of the youth.

Recommendations Specifically for Top 3 Workshops

For the Mental Health workshops, QYTF can develop them to be youth-led, focusing on building coping strategies, recognizing signs of distress, and accessing queer-affirming mental health resources. Youth should take the lead in designing the content, with adult facilitators providing resources and support. This ensures the content is authentic and grounded in the real experiences of queer youth. Furthermore, peer-led discussions and support circles could help normalize mental health conversations and reduce stigma.

For the Self-Care workshops, they can be developed to be youth-driven, where youth can brainstorm and share self-care strategies that work for them. Workshops could include mindfulness, journaling, creative expressions (e.g. art or music), and stress-relief techniques tailored to the queer experience. Youth should be given the autonomy to lead these workshops ensuring that self-care recommendations promoted resonate with their lived experiences.

Lastly, for the Health Relationships workshops, they can be designed to be youth-led, emphasizing on communication, boundaries, consent, and navigating queer-specific relationship dynamics. The workshop can include peer leaders that facilitate role-playing activities and discussions, helping participants reflect on their own relationship experiences and share insights.