

Parts of a good  
after-school program?



# Youth Guidelines for High Quality ELO Spaces

2019 Youth Advisory Committee Work  
Learning Brief

The Youth Guidelines for High-Quality Expanded Learning Opportunity (ELO) Programs centers youth voice in ELO quality improvement work. Over the course of two months, four groups of young people ages 12 -18 years old in King County, Washington State participated in co-design focus groups to share their perspectives on quality in ELO spaces. Then the Youth Advisory Committee at Cultivate Learning, a group of seven youth ages 13-18 years old, reviewed their feedback, identified themes, and developed the Youth Guidelines for High-Quality ELO Programs. There are a multitude of ways to use the Youth Guidelines to shape ELO programing such as guiding staff training, implementing program quality improvement practices, and shaping funding agendas. These guidelines are one tool ELO programs can use to center youth voice in practices, spaces, and systems that deeply shape the daily lives of young people.

# Youth Guidelines for High Quality ELO Spaces

## Logistics

A high-quality program clearly communicates and addresses cost, transportation, and age of attendees. Youth feel safe when they know how to get there, cost, and who will be there.

- **"Affordability matters [to us], and I need transportation home."**

## Program Space

A high-quality program provides a comfortable, flexible, and spacious learning space. Youth feel more relaxed and engaged when the program space is comfortable.

- **"[We want] a space where you can just chill."**

## Food

A high-quality program provides food. Youth can better focus and learn when they are fed.

- **"[We think] having snacks [is important] because if the program does not have food, some kids probably have not eaten since the lunch provided at school."**

## Staff Interaction

A high-quality program has relatable and friendly staff members. Youth want warm and helpful staff members who build relationships and help them navigate school and family challenges.

- **"[We want] someone that feels nice and cares about you. Someone that interacts with you. Like if you're doing an activity, they do it with you."**

## Program Environment

A high-quality program creates a safe environment. Youth want to feel safe and belong in the program.

- **"We want to feel respected by our teachers and comfortable to share."**

## Activities

A high-quality program offers fun activities where youth can build friendships. Youth want to have fun and connect with their peers.

- **"[We want] field trips and more things to do. I remember when we were younger, we used to have these cooking sessions. It was a really nice thing for us to get to do together."**

## Academics and College Prep

A high-quality program supports youth in academic growth and college prep. Youth want help with homework from knowledgeable tutors. Older youth benefit from college prep programs that offer SAT/PSAT prep and other academic support.

- **"You can have fun [at program], but still get your homework done."**



## Life Skills

A high-quality program supports life skill development. Youth desire mentors that help transition them into young adulthood and learn career skills.

- **"[We'd like to] learn skills that could later apply to a job."**

## Community Focus

A high-quality program engages youth in community-based projects. Youth want to better their communities.

- **"[We'd like to] help the community and people around you."**

## Youth Leadership

A high-quality program integrates youth voice into the daily structure. Youth want to vote on activities and the daily schedule, especially on how often the program has breaks.

- **"[We want] power for the students. Like the students could take charge of some things."**

## Youth Recommendations

The Youth Advisory Committee created recommendations based on their guidelines. Read the full report for more information.

- 1 Provide staff trainings on equity and creating a safe and trusting program environment
- 2 Fully fund ELO programs, so all young people can attend and programs have sufficient supplies
- 3 Actively include youth voice by bringing young people into planning and program evaluation
- 4 Create additional staff trainings based on the Youth Guidelines
- 5 Subsidize public transportation for ELO participants to increase accessibility
- 6 Continue to solicit and implement young people's perspectives on high quality in ELO spaces