



# ALA KAMALI'I

## Youth Rising

Hawai'i Youth Participatory Action Research  
*Discoveries and Experiences from the YPAR Movement*



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# Mahalo

Deep appreciation for the ʻōpio (youth) who have stepped into leadership to make a difference in their communities, for the people and the ʻāina (land). Gratitude for the dedicated organizations and adult allies—program staff and administrators—who go above and beyond to support the healthy development of Hawaiʻi’s young people. Mahalo to former SNAP-Ed Coordinator Tina Tamai and Kamal Singh-Khaira for their original vision and Daniel Leung of the Kapiʻolani Community College Culinary Arts Program for steadfast partnership. Many thanks to the YMCA of Honolulu and especially Diane Tabangay for guidance and modeling the way. We are especially grateful to the following people who generously contributed their time and reflections to inform this report.

“Thank you” as a way of living. Live in thankfulness for the richness that makes life so precious.

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# Executive Summary

In 2015, the Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) partnered with the YMCA of Honolulu (the Y) and training consultant Kamal Singh-Khaira to pilot test a new approach to youth leadership development in Hawai'i. Together they launched the state's first Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) projects, which used an evidence-based framework to enable young people to conduct research, formulate solutions and take action on nutrition and physical activity issues in their communities.

After the first two Y branches demonstrated a number of positive outcomes, the partners engaged other youth-serving nonprofits in YPAR training and a subsequent mini-grant program that funded 15 projects over a two-year period ending in 2020. As the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted everyday life, the pause provided an ideal time to reflect on lessons learned and consider potential program improvements that could encourage wider statewide adoption of this youth-led approach. The team engaged Deb Marois of Converge Consulting, Research & Training to conduct a qualitative evaluation and gather recommendations.

While nearly all the organizations felt quite positive about their experience and most would do YPAR again, more financial and technical support are needed. A major factor that influences success is an existing youth program with strong connections in the community and experienced, dedicated, and creative staff. All YPAR implementers described positive outcomes and beneficial impacts for youth and their organization, along with other changes they observed in families, schools, and the broader community. Shifting to online work in the midst of a pandemic was by far the greatest implementation challenge. Nonetheless, some technological innovations helped simplify data collection and analysis. A "hybrid approach" that combines in person activities with online learning holds promise for facilitating future YPAR projects.



Implementation of YPAR in Hawai'i has generated some unique cultural adaptations with projects that engage the whole family, gardens planted with traditional Hawaiian foods, and an emphasis on caring for the 'āina (land), including restoration of the Ulupō Heiau, a Hawaiian sacred site. Perhaps one of the biggest cultural shifts that YPAR instigates is in who carries out the research. Youth transition from being the subject of study by outside "experts" to conducting research, making meaning of their own experience, and positively impacting the community.

To sustain and expand YPAR in Hawai'i, stakeholders recommend that DOH and the Y establish a YPAR Hui (Network), increase locally-based training and technical assistance, provide adequate and timely implementation funding, continue engaging neighbor islands, offer more incentives to youth and families, and institutionalize YPAR.

YPAR is funded through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program–Education Program (SNAP–Ed) by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS).



# Introduction

The State of Hawai'i, Department of Health (DOH) Chronic Disease Prevention & Health Promotion Division works to promote health and reduce the burden of chronic disease for the people of Hawai'i by empowering the community, influencing social norms, and encouraging healthy lifestyle choices.

Because engaging youth in this work is vital to accomplishing long-term changes, DOH supports Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR), an evidence-based framework that enables teens to discover assets and challenges in their communities and take action so that healthy lifestyles are easier where people eat, live, work, learn, shop and play.

YPAR is funded through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—Education Program (SNAP-Ed) by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) to promote healthy eating and healthy lifestyles among low-income populations.

In 2015, DOH partnered with the YMCA of Honolulu and training consultant Kamal Singh-Khaira to pilot test YPAR in Hawai'i. After initial successes with youth teams from two YMCA branches, the partners launched a mini-grant program to fund other youth-serving organizations to carry out pilot projects. After two rounds, the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted many of these activities. Despite the challenges, Hawai'i's YPAR projects continued on, making adjustments and adapting. During this pause, partners took the opportunity to evaluate. Understanding what catalyzes or hinders success will enable the partners to sustain, strengthen, and expand their YPAR efforts.

# Learning Goals & Data Collection Methods

After five years of implementation, partners wanted to learn what changes could encourage wider adoption of the YPAR framework, especially on neighbor islands. As DOH and the YMCA look ahead to a post-COVID landscape, they also wanted to know what supports are needed to successfully implement YPAR and what barriers prevent projects from getting started or continuing.

To learn about YPAR successes and challenges and gather recommendations for future directions, Deb Marois of Converge Consulting, Research & Training conducted 17 semi-structured, confidential interviews with adult allies and youth program administrators. Due to logistical constraints and additional barriers created by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, youth participants did not participate in this study.

Interviews were typically an hour long, conducted via Zoom, and recorded. Transcripts were created using Otter AI software and then reviewed for accuracy. Interview data was coded and analyzed using Dedoose, a web-based application for qualitative and mixed methods research developed by academics from UCLA. Documents such as participant lists, evaluation summaries, and final reports also were reviewed to better understand overall project implementation. Output data was provided by DOH and the YMCA of Honolulu (the Y).

**The quotes throughout this report are from these interviews.**

## Primary Research Questions

1. What helps or hinders the successful implementation of YPAR?
2. What changes and supports are needed to continue, improve and expand YPAR in Hawai'i?

## General Interview Questions

1. What difference has YPAR made?
2. What helped you implement YPAR?
3. What's been the most challenging?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a virtual approach?
5. What is needed to expand the use of YPAR, especially on neighbor islands?

For the full question guide, please visit <https://www.yparhawaii.com/>



# Background & Context

## WHAT IS YOUTH-LED PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH (YPAR)?

“YPAR (Youth-led Participatory Action Research) is an innovative approach to positive youth and community development based in social justice principles in which young people are trained to conduct systematic research to improve their lives, their communities, and the institutions intended to serve them. YPAR is a cyclical process of learning and action research—research is done not just for the sake of it but to inform solutions to problems that young people themselves care about.”<sup>1</sup>

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“YPAR actually allows the participant to understand the current situation of what’s going on in the community, how can they support it in ways that align with their interests, both for themselves, their own benefit, but also their communities and families, their schools.”

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SNAP-Ed funded YPAR projects engage youth in addressing and promoting nutrition and physical activity issues in their community and aim to empower youth in achieving health-related policy, systems, and environmental changes. YPAR primarily targets middle and high school youth (ages 12-18) in school and community settings, in urban and rural areas. YPAR projects may also include upper-elementary-aged youth. An adult ally mentors, supports, and facilitates the youth team.

<sup>1</sup> YPAR Hub, UC Berkeley <http://yparhub.berkeley.edu/learn-about-ypar/>



Through YPAR, youth engage in leadership, critical thinking, problem solving, strategizing skills, and service learning to address their target issue related to nutrition and physical activity. The YPAR curriculum (or toolkit) used in SNAP-Ed is organized into eight “Stepping Stones” that guide participants through the research process, from forming a team, developing a research question, and collecting and analyzing data to presenting results and advocating for change. Each project submits an interim and final report to reflect on and summarize their work.

## YPAR IN HAWAI‘I: THE YMCA AND DOH, PARTNERS IN HEALTHY YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

The Y is one of the largest nonprofit organizations in Hawai‘i, serving more than 100,000 people annually at six sites throughout Oahu. Youth development, healthy living and social responsibility are core components of their programs and services.

As a long-time partner with the DOH, the Y had offered nutrition education as part of its youth programming and served as a convener of youth-serving agencies to launch the Kalihi Teen Nutrition Partnership (KTNP) and 808 Jr. Chef, a program for teens to learn about and apply their knowledge of nutrition and healthier eating choices through cooking and recipe development.

However, though there were multiple nutrition education options for elementary-aged children and adults, there was a lack of programming, resources and evidence informed work to engage older youth. So, when the opportunity to pilot test YPAR in Hawai‘i arose, the Y was ready to build on success and eager to try something new.

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“This is the way that we can do food justice work with Hawai‘i youth to give them choice and voice.”

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**PRO-TIP**

## Establish a Youth Leadership Team

Creating a teen leadership group was the first step in YPAR implementation at the Windward Y. The youth began by volunteering, meeting up on weekends and planning activities on their own.

With this solid core group, momentum and readiness built. The YPAR curriculum was introduced within the Y’s existing summer program, which included fun activities like camps and dances—and that’s when it “really blossomed.”

Many of the teens accepted a challenge to commit to YPAR for a full year. New projects included distributing free meals, partnering with the Hawai‘i Food Bank, regenerating four other school gardens, and partnering with the Y’s senior club to plant a branch garden.

YPAR began in Hawai‘i with training for adults and youth, hosted at the YMCA. DOH provided funding to engage training consultant Kamal Singh-Khaira, originator of California’s Youth Engagement Initiative and co-developer of the SNAP-Ed YPAR curriculum. David Lau, teen program director at the Windward Y, served as the first adult ally. Working with the teen leadership group, the Mālama ‘Āina Service Club (Protect the Land), their first project restored an abandoned community garden at Waimanalo Intermediate School and built partnerships with the school community to sustain the effort.

The early success led the teens to begin caretaking the Ulupō Heiau, a Hawaiian temple located in the Y’s backyard. This opened the door to learning more about traditional culture and a different perspective on land and food. By combining elements of YPAR and the Y’s commitment to community service through their Togetherhood program, the youth leaders generated community enthusiasm, inspiring 150-200 volunteers to participate in quarterly work days.

“Before YPAR we could never imagine that many volunteers coming... getting 10 people out to a volunteer day was hard.”

Next, teens at the Mililani Y launched their YPAR project, which focused on restoring a garden and serving weekly harvest of fruits and vegetables to the local homeless community. Mililani’s teen program director Bryan Murphy facilitated the process, including supporting the youth in surveying more than 100 residents.

Meanwhile, DOH and the YMCA continued to host YPAR 101 trainings for local youth-service providers. Though the trainings were well-attended and received excellent feedback, YPAR implementation was slow going.

In 2018, DOH introduced mini-grants as an incentive for training participants to implement YPAR. After attending the YPAR 101 training, participants were eligible to apply for a \$5,000 mini-grant. Diane Tabangay, the Y’s Executive Director of Youth Development, provided overall coordination and implementation support. Training consultant Kamal Singh-Khaira offered technical assistance on a “as needed” basis.

Over the next two years, until the COVID-19 pandemic, 15 YPAR projects were implemented by 10 organizations, the majority on Oahu with one each on Moloka’i and Kauai. In the fall of 2020, “micro” grants were awarded to several existing YPAR projects to support youth teams in implementing food access, nutrition, and physical activity projects that addressed the impact of COVID-19 on their communities.

### YPAR INPUTS

- Training
- Existing Youth Programs
- Reporting Templates
- Technical Assistance
- Skilled Staff
- Curriculum
- Mini-Grant Funding

### Hawai’i YPAR by the Numbers

YPAR trainings, 2015–2019	4
YPAR 101 training 2017–2019, Adult participants (unduplicated)	88
Projects funded through mini-grants, 2018–2020	15
Total dollar amount distributed in mini-grants	\$79,000
Number of youth leaders engaged in funded YPAR projects <18 years old	196
Youth Summits (one virtual)	2

## HISTORY OF HAWAI’I YPAR: TIMELINE OF KEY ACTIVITIES

**2014**

**Association of State Nutrition Network Administrators** snowed in during a conference in Washington D.C. Hawai’i SNAP-Ed coordinator Tina Tamai meets Kamal Singh-Khaira, director of Public Health Institute’s Center for Wellness and Nutrition and founder of the CA Department of Public Health’s Youth Engagement Initiative.

Diane Tabangay, YMCA Honolulu executive director of youth development, oversees the implementation of “Food and Fun,” an evidence-based curriculum for youth nutrition education launched by Y USA and funded through a SNAP-Ed grant.

**2015**

**USDA SNAP-Ed Toolkit** includes YPAR as a practice-tested method based on nearly a decade of implementation in California. Following Kamal’s YPAR presentation at a regional SNAP-Ed conference, Tina invites a new partnership to form. David Lau at Windward YMCA pilots YPAR with the teen leadership group.

**2016**

**First YPAR training** in Hawai’i at the YMCA of Honolulu. Mililani YMCA begins second YPAR pilot project. YPAR training offered at YMCA’s youth summer camps.

## 2020 Mini-grants Awarded to Address COVID-19

### **Kōkua Kalihi Valley**

YPAR Ehuola

### **Mālama Kaua'i**

Youth Led Marketing SNAP CSA Program

### **SEEDS of Honua**

Digging Deeper: Youth Perspectives on Gardening and Seed Saving

### **Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Center**

"Hānai 'Opio/Nourished Youth"

### **Windward YMCA**

Community Gardening and Food Distribution

## 2019–2020 Mini-grants Awarded

### **Hawai'i Appleseed**

"Our Food Story"

### **Kaimuki-Waialae YMCA Branch**

"Project Aloha"

### **Kōkua Kalihi Valley Ehuola Alakai**

"Let's Talk Trash"

### **Waianae Coast Comprehensive Health Center**

"Hānai 'Opio/Nourished Youth"

## 2018–2019 Mini-grants Awarded

### **Hāmākua Youth Foundation**

"Gardens and Food Preserving"

### **Kōkua Kalihi Valley**

"Zero Waste, Zero Waste Meals"

### **Waianae Community Redevelopment Corp**

"Food Sovereignty"

## 2017–2018 YMCA of Honolulu YPAR Projects

### **Mililani YMCA Project**

"Wahiawa Outreach"

### **Nu'uuanu YMCA Project**

"Urban Garden"

### **Windward YMCA Project**

"Ka Mala Ulu"

### **Windward YMCA Project**

"Ulupō Nui"



**2018**

**Mini-grant program launched** by SNAP-Ed coordinator Daniela Spoto. Annual YPAR 101 training offered to youth serving agencies. Tammy Chase-Brunelle becomes SNAP-Ed coordinator.

**2017**

**YMCA continues YPAR projects** in three locations. YPAR training expands to include other youth-serving agencies.

**2020**

**COVID-19 pandemic impacts YPAR implementation.** Micro-grants provided to existing grantees to support continued youth engagement. A first of its kind, virtual statewide youth summit is hosted to showcase YPAR projects.

**2019**

**First statewide youth summit** in Hawai'i. YPAR training expands to include participants from neighbor islands.

**2021**

**Evaluation of the first five years** of Hawai'i's YPAR efforts. YPAR 101 training resumes in online format.



# Implementation Successes & Challenges

## EXISTING YOUTH PROGRAMS, EXPERIENCED STAFF & COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Almost all of Hawai'i's YPAR projects were implemented by existing youth programs that had goals such as youth leadership development, community service, healthy living, and/or preparation for college and careers.

“It’s really not adding a program, it’s just adding a way of thinking about how you offer a program.”

These programs already had experienced staff who could serve as adult allies, access to and engagement with youth, understanding of community issues, other funding streams, and trusting relationships with families, schools, and other agencies. Consequently, they were able to implement YPAR with a relatively small infusion of resources.

**“YPAR is a great tool to get you to understand how to run an effective program.”**

Youth programs took what they already did well—for example, youth camps or culturally-based, family nutrition education—and infused YPAR into those activities. In a number of cases, this approach seemed to strengthen outcomes, including youth development. As program staff embraced the youth-led aspect, this way of working with teens became less separate, integrated across programs, and a way to ensure young people have voice, choice, and the ability to gain knowledge through research.

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“It was not a program that we had to create new, we already had teens coming to us for different reasons. So, it was just really a different way of working with teens.”

“It became our program, not just the program model, it really kind of fused together over a period of time. And that was really the special part; it wasn’t a separate YPAR thing. This is the way we run our teen program now.”

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However, this strategy resulted in a few challenges as well. Sometimes certain aspects of YPAR were difficult to align with existing youth programs. Most notably, a few interviewees mentioned that it was difficult to define the community when youth came from different geographic neighborhoods from across Honolulu. Some youth programs that decided not to implement YPAR had pre-determined strategies that didn’t sufficiently allow for youth-led decision making. These programs desired youth participation, but the decision of what to work on was already made. Existing youth programs may find YPAR a better fit if they have a broad goal, but not necessarily an established framework or model to follow.

Clearly, the Y was instrumental in the piloting and launch of YPAR in Hawai’i, first as implementer of this new youth-led framework and then championing the approach through its existing networks and serving as a coordinator for the mini-grant program.

**“YMCA really picked it up and ran with it.”**

**“Diane was very instrumental in whatever has been done with YPAR of this community.”**

## **TRAINING, TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE & EVIDENCE-BASED, FLEXIBLE CURRICULA**

Nearly all interviewees credited training as an essential factor in successful YPAR implementation, some describing it as “robust” and “valuable.” Years later, many of those interviewed still vividly remembered the comfortable, welcoming learning environment, the social aspect of meeting other youth service providers, the “knowledgeable” and “approachable” trainer, and the “awesome binder.”

While some felt prepared to facilitate the process after attending the training, others had a steeper learning curve or did not feel confident in their abilities to launch a project. The time gap between completing the training and launching a project combined with an absence of structured TA and a “practicum” component following the training contributed to this lack of confidence for at least one interviewee. Several adult allies attended YPAR training multiple times. For some, returning for a refresher on “YPAR 101” or next level “YPAR 202” after implementing a project helped anchor the knowledge more deeply.

**“The toolkit definitely was kind of our Bible.”**

Nearly two-thirds of those interviewed mentioned the toolkit and the step-by-step guidance it provides as being particularly helpful, specifically naming activities such as teambuilding icebreakers and “the Ideal vs Real” community mapping exercise. A few reported feeling a bit overwhelmed by all the information in the binder, and/or unable to digest so much information over a two-day training period. Though having print materials to refer back to was generally useful, it was not particularly user-friendly for online learning.

About three-fifths of those interviewed mentioned the flexibility of the curriculum as a positive factor contributing to implementation success. Being able to “pick and choose” which activities and elements to share and to “skip around” and not “go in order” of the stepping stones were important success factors. That it was “evidence-based,” along with the real-life examples shared during the training contributed to people’s confidence, willingness and enthusiasm to give YPAR a try.

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“Whenever we were struggling with something, she <Kamal> would schedule a conference all with us and talk us through things. I mean, that was a huge different for us just having that support.”

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Adult allies could access technical assistance (TA) on an as-needed basis through email and 1:1 calls with the trainer. The content tended to be questions about “allowability” and grant administration to ensure compliance with USDA SNAP-Ed rules. Other calls tended to have more urgency and focused on specific problem-solving, for example, how to phrase a research question, facilitate a particular stepping stone; adapt the timeline or activities; complete a report for an approaching deadline; or prepare for an upcoming media interview.

The Y’s administrator also fielded calls and emails. Sometimes adult allies with YPAR implementation experience served as informal mentors for staff at newly funded projects. Other adult allies went the solo route and did not utilize the optional TA.

## FINANCIAL SUPPORT: MINI-GRANTS & YOUTH STIPENDS

The mini-grant program appears to be an essential feature of YPAR success. Seed money to run projects often was the incentive needed for organizations to take the next step to implement YPAR after attending the training. Funds typically were used to compensate youth for their time, purchase supplies and promotional materials, and offer incentives such as bus passes and field trips. During the pandemic meeting costs such as transportation or space rental were minimal.

The most common descriptions of the application process were “easy, simple and straight forward,” especially when compared to complicated federal grants. Several interviewees mentioned they appreciated the simplicity of the reimbursement process and the flexibility to easily make budget adjustments. Others valued the reporting requirements: an interim and final report that encouraged participants to reflect on their plan, commitments, and progress without fear of reprisal.

“It was a humanizing thing. So that when we wrote our report, we didn’t have to lie or make up what we did, we could be very honest. Because one of the things they wanted to hear was what we struggled with.”

“YPAR is a great tool to get you to understand how to run an effective program.”



The mini-grant program helped build staff capacity for several participating organizations. For those newer to nonprofit program administration, they gained experience in grant writing and management skills such as tracking expenses, activities and outcomes. The opportunity was relatively low risk, “easy and accomplishable,” and offered professional growth.

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“Opening the youths’ minds to recognizing this brand-new thing that they’ve never encountered before takes time. So, commitment from the youth is a challenging thing. Which is why the incentives were necessary to kind keep them encouraged to follow through with the job.”

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One of the most commonly mentioned benefits of the mini-grant program is the ability to offer incentives for youth participation. Several projects offered a job or paid internship to help strengthen the youths’ commitment and prepare them for the “real world” of college and careers. Compensation also enabled youth researchers to help their family financially, especially vital during the COVID-19 pandemic with so many people out of work.

The primary challenge most often mentioned with the mini-grant program is the amount of funding available. Though a few interviewees thought the grant amount was sufficient, most felt that the amount was inadequate to support the time and effort required of staff. Some described the YPAR process as intensive, which became even more so if youth dropped out and more recruitment was needed—a common challenge encountered by adult allies.

**“The mini-grants are good if you have an already existing group and need a push to do a certain project. The hardest part about YPAR is building that group.”**

**“It would have been very difficult to operate YPAR solely on its own with staffing and funding for other things, within a time to really make much of a difference. The funding was just not adequate for the amount of time it took. So, we supplemented with our funds, our staffing and staff time. And with our youth participants already in our program.”**

**“My feeling is it wasn’t worth the effort for a \$5,000 grant. The effort has to balance out with the reward, and I think at that point I was working on other, more substantial grants, like operating grants for a program rather than a special projects grant.”**

**“If someone is not employed with a company, it would make it very difficult to implement because part of the funds would then become the facilitators income.”**

Timing also presented challenges. Some rounds were relatively short and did not provide enough time to complete all the activities. Then, some youth dropped off during the lag between funding cycles, losing momentum during the wait and moving on to different activities.

Organizations with multiple sites and/or several different youth programs had to decide internally who would apply since eligibility was limited to one project. In these cases, instead of competition, conversations to assess readiness occurred. Some key considerations were whether there is already an existing group of interested teens, available staff, and a project idea.

## Why do some organizations decline to participate or continue?

**The funding amount is inadequate to support the staff time and effort required to carry out YPAR,** especially during start up. Non-profit staff often are already spread thin and want to be sure they can fulfill commitments to existing programs before taking on additional activities.

**Organizations sometimes determine that the amount of grant funding available is not “worth it.”**

Administrators may prioritize larger grants that have greater benefits for the organization such as the ability to cover salaries.

*Caveat: Be careful not to assume that organizational size is the determining factor. Some larger agencies will compete for relatively small grants if it supports their goals and allows them to leverage multiple funding sources. They also may be better positioned to absorb staffing costs or provide in-kind resources to support the project.*

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“The idea that you couldn’t buy any food for the kids unless you were doing like an activity is just ridiculous to me, because these kids all need to be eating healthy. We’re bringing them in after school, we’re keeping them for a couple of hours. And then we’re not allowed to buy food, which if you’re going to run a program for kids, the one thing you want to be doing is feeding them healthy food.”

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**Other organizational priorities at the time of the grant release.**

**YPAR 101 training is a pre-requisite and offered once or twice a year**—if unable to attend, must wait for another opportunity.

**Some who participated in the training ultimately didn’t implement a YPAR project** because they already had a youth engagement model or other programmatic goals for which YPAR wasn’t a good fit.

**The timing of the grant award did not allow for adequate planning and began at the start of summer,** impacting school-based outreach and recruitment.

**USDA rules that strictly regulate expenditures for food created barriers** and for some, felt contrary to effective youth engagement and Hawaiian culture.

## HAWAI’I’S CULTURAL ADAPTATIONS

### How has YPAR been adapted for Hawai’i’s culture?

SNAP-Ed’s YPAR started in Hawai’i as a pilot project, with the questions, “Will this work here? Can it be adapted in a way that suits Hawai’i?” Though there had been years of success in California, that state also had more funding, mandated scopes of work, and structured technical assistance, as well as a different culture. Some wondered if a trainer from the continent would be effective or if the advocacy component would seem too bold for Hawaiian youth—would they be reluctant to speak out about health disparities?

Instead, the young people were not shy about sharing their experiences and talked openly about sensitive community issues such as hunger, homelessness, sex trafficking, and drug use. In part, the trainer’s enthusiasm and non-judgmental presence helped create that safety. For the adults, attending the trainings in a welcoming, “culturally sensitive” location where people felt comfortable to take off their slippers and talk story created an ideal atmosphere for learning.



Flexibility proved to be an essential factor in implementation success. Since YPAR is not a turnkey curriculum requiring strict fidelity, people were more open to incorporating it into their existing youth programs.

For example, Kōkua Kalihi Valley's Ehuola program uses a culturally-based approach to health and wellness that provides hands on experience growing food and preparing cultural dishes from scratch. Rather than working 1:1, the program is designed around the family unit working together over the course of a year. The YPAR framework offered enough flexibility that multi-generational families could participate together while still maintaining the youth-led approach.

**“It’s a balance of helping to change lifestyle choices with the older generation, but at the same time, honoring where they come from.”**

Youth learned about the cultural foods served by their grandparents and parents, primarily passed down through oral tradition. For some youth, shame associated with their heritage shifted to pride as they talked story with their elders. They documented the recipes, adapting when needed for the modern context. Later, they presented at YPAR trainings to share the impacts. In addition to modifying their meals, some parents now view youth as leaders who can guide the family through change.

In most cases, cultural adaptations evolved organically, following the interests of youth. For example, at the Windward YMCA, talking with teens about healthy eating led to gardens and then naturally transitioned to culture as they planted foods such as kalo, sugarcane, papaya and ti leaf. Over time, other changes reflected the growing interest in culture: instead of visits to the ice palace, youth went on field trips to other nonprofits aligned with ‘āina (land) work. Working to restore the Ulupō Heiau, an ancient sacred site in the Y's backyard, enabled teens to learn about traditional culture and protocol while they tend to the lo'i (taro) patches, harvest the kalo, and clean the 'auwai (irrigation ditch), and pull weeds.

A core principle is that health is connected to the land. So, when young people from Kalihi observed their community, they noticed a lot of trash on the ground, primarily from food waste. They cleaned it up but also recognized that would not get to the root of the problem. Their next step linked the modern concept of “zero waste” to the traditional cultural value of caring for the land and leaving it in good condition for future generations.

The young people's interest in reducing food-related trash led to questions and data collection about where families' food comes from, revealing that about 18% of families grew, hunted or fished for their own food while others traded with friends and ohana (family). One family adhered very strictly to the shelter-in-place guidelines to protect the kūpuna (elders) living with them. Since they rarely left home, they invested heavily in their garden. During their YPAR presentation, they shared how this allowed a “returning back to their culture and returning back to the land.”

## Defining Culture

When considering culture, interview participants often referenced “Island” or “Pacific” culture, a term inclusive of not only Hawaiian culture but also Samoan, Micronesian, Tongan, Filipino, and more.

Caring for the ‘āina (land) is fundamental to island culture and the Hawaiian people. Mālama ‘āina (love for the land) are common expressions throughout the islands and many people feel a kuleana (responsibility) to protect, maintain and preserve the land.

In addition to taking care of the land, traditional Hawaiian cultural values include taking care of each other, the community as one big, extended ‘ohana (family).

These central values underpin many of the youth-led projects from restoring neglected school gardens to feeding people experiencing houselessness.

Some of the cultural adaptations were more nuanced. For example, writing the final report gave youth an opportunity to practice spelling Hawaiian words correctly, including proper placement of the 'okina (a consonant that indicates a glottal stop) and kahakō (a diacritical mark that indicates a longer vowel sound). Incorporating art into the YPAR projects also brought in culture, from youth designing logos to painting murals to help create a healthier sense of place. Other times, adults introduced youth to practices such as the Monday morning na'au (gut) check, to provide time and space for each person to share their current emotional state. This helps team members understand how to best work with each other and offers a uniquely Hawaiian approach to the YPAR toolkit's "open communication" activities.

Perhaps one of the biggest cultural shifts that YPAR instigates is in who carries out the research. Youth transition from being the subject of study by outside "experts" to conducting research and making meaning of their own experience. The Wai'anae Coast is home to the largest population of Native Hawaiian communities on Oahu and often captures the interest of health researchers. In this case, YPAR offered an opportunity to empower teens to do their own research and positively impact the community.

### What next steps could strengthen the "Island Culture" aspect of YPAR?

A few interviewees suggested potential ways to adapt the YPAR training and curriculum so that its less "Western-based" and better reflects Hawai'i's multi-ethnic population, which in turn could attract greater interest and participation. However, this requires more than "just changing some words to be Hawaiian words." To really incorporate an "indigenous point of view," it's essential to include activities and stories that are tied to the 'āina, the connection with community, and the varied history, foods, and traditions of the diverse Pacific populations that live on the Hawaiian Islands. Several people also expressed that feeding kids is a basic tenet of Hawai'i's culture and the USDA rules that disallow the purchase of food create a frustrating barrier to successful youth engagement.

Ideas for incorporating cultural adaptations into the YPAR training and curriculum:

Include more project examples from Hawai'i to share successes and inspire new participants.

Learn how Hawaiian charter schools adapt curricula to be more culturally based and apply those lessons to modify the YPAR toolkit.

Recruit a team of people with diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise such as fishing, taro gardening, native planting or Hawaiian arts such as hula dancers and chanters to help inform changes to the curriculum.

Draw on adult allies' expertise—they have a wealth of knowledge based on their work with Island youth and could share culturally-based activities.

Use locally produced foods in cooking classes to help people learn where to source fresh, healthy foods and the importance of a resilient food system.



## THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE: COVID-19 PANDEMIC & VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT

Interviewees described typical YPAR implementation challenges including staff turnover, compliance with USDA rules, recruitment, inconsistent participation of youth and difficulty working around their busy schedules. Several adult allies, including some of the most experienced, spoke about the difficulty of “letting go and letting youth lead.” But the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic were by far the most commonly mentioned.

COVID-19 necessitated changes in almost every aspect of life and YPAR implementation was no exception. Nearly all interview participants described the shift to online work as the primary pandemic-related challenge. Most youth programs found ways to adapt, with various levels of success in keeping young people engaged and projects on track. While pandemic life created more difficulties for YPAR implementation, there also were a few novel adaptations that made some steps easier—most notably in data analysis.

**“Transitioning from being in person to being online was the hardest to do.”**

**“It’s been really challenging to keep the kids engaged and engaging with them virtually was really difficult...it was a very drastic shift.”**

**“Transitioning with the binder to virtual learning was really hard.”**

Overall, implementing YPAR virtually seems to be “a mixed bag.” Most adults interviewed for this report generally believe the drawbacks outweigh the benefits. Some had success early in the pandemic when youth were isolated at home. Most hosted Zoom meetings and got creative by using interactive activities and collaborative technology such as Jamboard and Padlet. YPAR icebreakers from the toolkit seemed to translate well to the online



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**“It’s less tangible, the relationships are tougher. You’re hiding behind a screen that people might not turn the cameras on. So, you don’t build relationships that you would.”**

**“More than likely their camera’s not going to be on, they’re going to have some kind of random picture emoji, something that doesn’t even connect to who they are. So, it’s harder to connect with the students.”**

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environment. However, youths’ access to devices and a reliable internet connection were widespread barriers. Distractions at home from space sharing with parents and siblings also presented challenges.

Many of the interviewees described the difficulties they encountered with establishing relationships with the youth online, especially without video. Several adult allies also reported that maintaining communication with youth became increasingly challenging, particularly for those who relied on email.

At the same time, some youth formed strong bonds with each other online, which helped them deal with the anxiety and stress in their homes due to the impacts of COVID-19. Some looked forward to virtual connections because they provided an opportunity to talk with peers who shared common worries and offer mutual support.



In September 2020, DOH and the Y hosted a virtual youth summit to give the grantees an opportunity to share their work and present on projects. Feedback for the event was generally very positive. But once distance learning commenced, many young people experienced Zoom “burnout” and weren’t interested in more online activities after school. Some very clearly stated their preference to meet in person with peers and adult staff. A few of the adult allies abandoned their attempts to hold virtual space and developed work-arounds to safely gather outdoors.

**“First it was the access. And then it was, ‘We don’t want to be virtual.’”**

**“We have strictly followed our COVID guidelines but we have stretched them to the maximum that we can still be in compliance.”**

Going forward, some adult allies believe a “hybrid” approach might be the best option. It may be some time before some people feel comfortable returning to in-person activities. Several emphasized the importance of bringing youth together in-person at the beginning of a project. One idea is to have youth gather in the same room yet maintain “physical distance” while working online. Others are adamant that in-person learning cannot be replaced with a virtual approach.

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**“YPAR needs a little bit of a hands-on approach. I don’t know if it can go completely digital.”**

**“I definitely think that in order to implement this program effectively, you need to meet in person at the beginning, that’s a necessary thing. Launching virtually, I would not recommend it.”**

**“The pandemic overall has made most people much more comfortable with doing things virtually and online, whether they like it or not, they’re more comfortable.”**  
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## Benefits of Virtual YPAR

**Convenience:** People can easily log on from the comfort of their homes with the click of a button just before the meeting starts. Transportation and geographic distance barriers dissolve while travel time disappears. This is especially important for youth who so often rely on parents or public transit.

**Reach:** There is the potential to engage many more people.

**Less logistics and more cost effective:** No meeting space, food or transportation costs. Far less prep time is required of facilitators since there is no room set up or food purchasing and preparation.

**Ease:** Surrounded by technology throughout their lives, most young people are comfortable online and can navigate different platforms easily.

**Relationship Building:** Much to the surprise of some adult allies, some youth participants formed very strong bonds in the virtual environment.

**Simplified data collection and analysis:** Some data collection methods and analysis tools are easier in a digital environment (e.g., surveys, Excel).

## Drawbacks of Virtual YPAR

**Access and connectivity:** Youth did not always have access to a device or a reliable internet connection, particularly in more rural or coastal areas.

**Distraction:** From family members sharing space to the temptation to “multi-task” while attending a Zoom meeting, it can be difficult to remain engaged.

**Difficulty building relationships:** Anonymity in the virtual environment makes connections less tangible often due to a norm of “cameras off,” whether to avoid being seen or due to poor internet connection. Casual in person connections are difficult to recreate in the virtual environment and for some, the “interpersonal” or “social-emotional” learning aspects were absent online.

**“Zoom Fatigue”:** There are real physical, mental and emotional consequences from virtual relating, often compounded by technical problems and the resulting stress and frustration of not being heard.

**Desire for human contact:** Many young people hungered for real connection with peers, adult mentors and with the land. “They want to touch the dirt.”

**Online facilitation:** The YPAR toolkit is not designed to be delivered online and most adult allies did not have this training or experience. Some schools did not allow Zoom on their devices—the preferred platform for many adult allies.

**Easier to bow out:** Engagement decreased over time and adult allies say it’s easier to skip a virtual meeting and/or leave when breakout groups begin.

**Constraints on research methodology:** Observation and PhotoVoice require being out in the community and therefore are not well-suited to a virtual environment.

### PRO-TIP

## Consider Technology Needs & Use

Aim for each young person to have a computer, internet access, and space to work.

Test the content on different devices such as laptops, iPads and tablets.

Think about a backup plan for when tech issues arise

Consider how to engage youth who don’t have tech access.

Schedule smaller meetings offered at a variety of times.

## Overcoming Virtual Challenges in Communication & Data Analysis

**“We had to be super creative, developing virtual games and we used different ways virtually to have fun, like we did a scavenger hunt and played Rock, Paper, Scissors. We did what we could.”**

During the stay-at-home orders, one YPAR project primarily used Zoom for meetings because features such as share screen, breakout groups and recording enabled more interactive activities. But first, they had to overcome a policy challenge because the schools only allowed youth to use Google Meets on their school devices.

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**“Communication is a huge part of the success of the program.”**

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While one project's emails increasingly went unanswered, another found an effective alternative. GroupMe, a free text app, enabled communication with the YPAR interns without revealing anyone's personal information. Meeting reminders, absence notices, and follow up assignments could be shared easily among the group and 1:1 messaging allowed more personal check-ins. “The multi-layered communications allowed us to know when someone wasn't doing so great, but still understand that and let them know that, ‘OK, when you're ready, you can come back.’”

Online technology made data collection and analysis easier for one team. The youth interns were in the middle of surveying the community but weren't able to continue when COVID-19 hit. So, they dropped the “old-school clipboard and pencil surveys,” and used Google Forms to conduct surveys electronically.

**“Working digitally with the data analysis phase is so much more effective than if we had to do it in person.”**

Everyone had access to the raw data and could work simultaneously on the same shared Google Sheets, making it easier to summarize data and create charts. And in this case, the adult allies already knew how to use these technology resources. They taught the youth interns how to use Excel in 1:1 virtual sessions and divided up the survey questions to avoid overwhelm. Then, everyone came together to share their analysis process and present their results, which enabled mutual learning. This was a successful adaptation that these adult allies are eager to retain and repeat.





# YPAR Results

**All YPAR implementers described positive outcomes and beneficial impacts for youth participants and their organization, along with other changes they observed in families, schools and the broader community.**

Adult allies typically say they are most proud of the youth participants—the leadership skills they developed, their commitment and follow through. They also described a wide range of topics, experiences, and skills practice that contributed to the youths’ learning and development. For many of the adult allies, seeing youth develop the skills and confidence to make changes in the community is the biggest difference YPAR made.

“They began to realize that they have a part a huge part in making a change and a difference and they can make a change in the future for real issues.”

“You could see how it shifted for a lot of them...how they blossomed into more of a leadership role.”

“The highlight of this whole program is seeing the youth transform, and really love the community.”



## Youth Impacts

- ▶ Learned how to do research including developing a research question, selecting a method, collecting and analyzing data, writing and presenting results
- ▶ Learned about food systems, SNAP-Ed, food deserts, food sovereignty, and state-wide barriers to growing food
- ▶ Learned to grow food, adapt recipes, cook new dishes, and compost
- ▶ Acquired a deeper understanding of their community and its health issues
- ▶ Finding their “voice” and overcoming fear of public speaking; presenting at national conferences
- ▶ Increased confidence and less anxiety
- ▶ Applied teamwork and program planning skills
- ▶ Developed mutually supportive friendships
- ▶ Practiced making decisions, exercising choice
- ▶ Prepared for adulthood by learning job skills and entrepreneurship
- ▶ Fundraising experience
- ▶ Increased pride in cultural heritage
- ▶ Older youths served as mentors for younger teens
- ▶ Understanding their role in creating community change—opened their eyes to possibilities, realize they can make a difference

YPAR also shifted the perspective of many adult allies, forever changing how they work with youth. For some, there's less emphasis on getting it done perfectly and more attention to youths' social-emotional experience. Others say their focus on community service and social responsibility increased. Ultimately, they most appreciated the opportunity to support youth in identifying issues, conducting research and creating community change.

While not every participant or organization experienced all of these outcomes, the following are a compilation of the difference YPAR made from the perspective of adult allies interviewed for this report.

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“It opened the door for us to be able to support the youth in recognizing community issues and promoting change...Overall, it kickstarted us to be able to provide a framework to how we want to encourage and interact with our youth. Making sure that it's fun and enjoyable for them, but also educational.”

“YPAR opened up the opportunity for us to teach the youth about what research is, and how the questions that you develop and the data that you start to gather, you can use that information to start to create change.”

“YPAR can help youth funnel their concern, what they're passionate about, into something more actionable.”

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## Staff/Organizational Impacts

- ▶ Built staff capacity and confidence in grant writing and program administration
- ▶ Provided a framework for an adult coalition to understand issues and make decisions together
- ▶ Raised awareness of climate change and reducing waste
- ▶ Changed the approach to working with youth; provided a framework
- ▶ Increased focus on community service
- ▶ Increased community partnerships, volunteers and donations
- ▶ Helped clarify goals for teen program
- ▶ Provided new ways to communicate with parents about objectives of the teen program, distinguishing it from a drop-in program
- ▶ Enhanced reputation as a result of using an evidence-based curriculum

## Family, School & Community Impacts

- ▶ New partnerships and projects established
- ▶ Dilapidated gardens restored
- ▶ New community and school gardens planted
- ▶ Free meals distribution
- ▶ Increased volunteerism and donations to support youth-led projects
- ▶ Changes in family and school meals
- ▶ Workshop series and toolkit developed by youth working with the University of Hawai'i College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources (CTAHR).



MĀLAMA  
ĀINA



# Recommendations for Sustaining & Expanding YPAR in Hawai'i

## ESTABLISH A YPAR HUI (NETWORK)

**A hui (an association, network) could establish a community of practice for learning, training, and mutual support for adult allies and other youth service providers to continue and expand YPAR implementation.** According to some interviewees, youth service provider networks tend to be more island specific, so there is room to grow statewide relationships. Creating these relationships would help position youth-serving agencies to be ready to seize opportunities as they arise. Meeting in person and/or virtually on a regular basis would connect YPAR practitioners enabling them to:

- Build relationships, capacity and readiness for greater collaboration
- Know “who’s who” and engage new staff, especially important given turnover
- Share opportunities, resources and methods, e.g., upcoming grants and toolkits
- Problem-solve around common challenges
- Coordinate outreach, promotion and training
- Participate in planning and sustainability efforts

## INCREASE LOCALLY-BASED TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Most interviewees emphasized the importance of locally available training and technical assistance—several stressed that it's essential to have a person who lives in Hawai'i in this role. A dedicated position would enable more hands-on, small group, and 1:1 support. Pro-active technical assistance might include regularly scheduled check-ins, follow-up after the training, and site-specific problem-solving such as co-facilitating a particularly challenging step in the process.

Some interviewees were open to online training and expressed interest in learning techniques for facilitation and engagement in a virtual environment. Others stressed the importance of meeting with other adult allies in-person, in a comfortable learning environment (perhaps outdoors). These situations allow participants more opportunities to “talk story”—informal conversations that are essential for building relationships and learning. Though it can be more difficult to take time off to attend training and incur more travel costs, in-person gatherings provide a more distraction-free environment in which to focus on content.

### Other Training Improvements

While the YPAR 101 training generally receives overwhelmingly positive feedback, interview participants also suggested a number of potential improvements such as:

- Modify the curriculum to better reflect Island culture and share more examples from Hawai'i.
- Adapt the training for a virtual environment—offer some components in person, some online and share tips for engaging youth.
- Include youth—and consult with them about how to use the virtual environment most effectively.
- Break the training up into smaller components to reduce information overload.
- Offer self-guided learning and pre-recorded video content, especially clips that demonstrate how to facilitate the steps.
- Increase the frequency of trainings to expand

not only the number of people trained, but also eligibility for mini-grants.

- Consider holding post-award “kickstart” trainings to allow more staff and youth from funded projects to participate. These could be site or cohort specific.
- Host trainings on neighbor islands, adjusting for specific contexts.
- Provide “on demand” training for multiple staff at one organization and/or for DOE teachers who might otherwise not be able to take time off to attend.
- Provide “refresher” courses.
- Include a confidence building, post-training practicum or “shadowing” opportunity for adult allies who want more support.
- Add digital marketing content to help youth better promote their action strategies.

Some interviewees advised including youth in YPAR trainings. Reasons ranged from ensuring that at least a few youths from each project would be prepared to help facilitate the process with their peers to addressing turnover after youth graduate, and because “getting their buy-in is just as important as getting the adult buy-in.” Training student leaders from service clubs—especially those that oversee statewide efforts—is another potential strategy for expanding the use of YPAR since they decide whether to roll out new initiatives statewide or in their individual chapters.

## PROVIDE ADEQUATE AND TIMELY IMPLEMENTATION FUNDING

While the mini-grant program has been successful in seeding new projects, it's difficult for organizations to sustain and grow YPAR without additional resources. The most common recommendation is to provide enough money for a full year of planning and implementation, including support for dedicated staff who can focus on YPAR. Some estimated this might require at least doubling the current mini-grant amount. Another suggestion is to offer different grant amounts, based on project needs and stage of development. More might be needed upfront to kickstart a project; alternatively, the money could grow as the project grows.

“We found if you don’t stay connected with the teens year-round, if it’s just going to be a seasonal thing, you lose them over time.”

Continuity and timing are also important considerations. Dedicated staff that can work with youth on a year-round basis rather than seasonally can prevent drop out. Grant timelines could also better align with the start of school and allow staff more time for planning and recruitment. Another idea is to offer the grants twice per year.

Several interview participants suggested using a youth-led approach for the mini-grants. This would give young people more opportunity to shape the project and gain experience with applying for grants, budgeting, and reporting.

Some interviewees offered budgetary guidelines for consideration, with the caveat that they would need more time to estimate actual costs. Budget factors include:

- Youth compensation, which might be factored at \$15/hour
- Staff time based on an average of 6 hours per week for the adult ally or 15% full-time equivalent. A co-facilitator and some administrative oversight may also be needed.
- Materials and supplies, incentives, food for cooking demonstrations, rental costs for meeting space and travel.

### CONTINUE ENGAGING NEIGHBOR ISLANDS

All interviewees offered ideas to facilitate the expansion of YPAR on neighbor islands. First, it is essential to have one or more YPAR champions on each island. Ideally, passionate people with energy to spearhead the effort, described by one interview



**PRO-TIP**

## Talented Adult Allies Catalyze Success

Look for these skills:

- Background in public health, education, policy and/or youth development
- Understanding of local community issues
- Understands facilitation and mentor role
- Able to step back and let youth lead
- Experienced working with youth and families
- Relationship builder
- Creative, fun and willing to try new things
- Ability to use technology effectively
- Bonus: research experience

participant as, “Really good people in positions that are willing to step up and go the extra mile.” Adult allies who have insight into the community, can connect youth with resources and help them build partnerships will enable projects to be more effective and create change.

In addition to a dedicated adult ally, successful projects typically report having a co-facilitator or implementation partner as well as support from their organization’s executive leadership.

Tapping into existing coalitions, youth programs, and teen leadership councils is a recommended strategy to find interested adult allies and youth. One interviewee suggested that “connectivity to the community” should be one criterion for grant awards—without these relationships, recruitment is more difficult. Says another, “It really starts with one group. You just need somebody to buy in, whether that’s a YMCA, a Boys and Girls Club, or even church youth groups.” A small core group of committed teens is the seed from which more can grow.

Concentrating on “place-based” work that enables young people to be “rooted in their environment” where they have a passion to make a difference is another recommendation. Connecting youth with adults in their community who are working on food systems and healthy living gives them a chance to make a local impact. Then, convening youth from across the Islands enables them to share what they’re learning, showcase their community work, and have a voice in regional and statewide efforts.

Understanding the unique conditions on each island, as well the more rural setting, is vital. Healing and trust-building are needed to overcome a history of broken promises and disappointments in some neighbor island communities. When presenting the YPAR opportunity, flexibility and support for young people to take action should be emphasized rather than adherence to a step-by-step process, which can be a turn off for some. “Talking story,” listening to young people, and appreciating local knowledge can help build bridges. Offering YPAR training on each island is recommended to help build relationships and adjust for community specific contexts.

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“If YPAR comes to us, we’re in our settings and that would be great. Because you know, Oahu has a different feel from the outer islands. Total different feel. We’re more country, you know. Them coming here, that would be huge because then you build that relationship with the trainer and trainees here on our islands.”  
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## OFFER MORE INCENTIVES TO YOUTH & FAMILIES

### Neighbor Island Outreach Considerations

- ▶ The Y, which has been instrumental in implementing YPAR, does not have branches on all the other islands. Even if a branch does exist, they may not have the capacity to undertake YPAR. Branches with a dedicated teen program director are best positioned for this work.
- ▶ YPAR projects that enrolled youth under age 12 encountered some challenges based on developmental readiness so these adult allies recommend adhering to age requirements. Additionally, they say this helps prevent situations where the interest is coming primarily from a parent rather than the young person.
- ▶ Urban areas have news outlets and call centers that share information widely. However, to learn about community issues or raise public awareness in rural areas, “It’s still word of mouth, coconut wireless.”

Though most YPAR projects offer youth compensation for their time, interviewees suggested a number of other ideas for incentives that could increase engagement such as:

- Link the YPAR opportunity to preparing for college entry and career development.
- Ensure families see the value in YPAR, especially since it helps youth prepare for college and careers.
- Offer a scholarship award for YPAR youth.
- Give recognition to youth on agency websites.
- Sponsor YouTube competitions or other online challenges.
- Share results of PhotoVoice research on Instagram. The frequent and consistent use of social media can raise awareness, build an audience, and gain followers.

## SUSTAIN AND INSTITUTIONALIZE YPAR

Most interviewees discussed strategies to catalyze the widespread use of YPAR as a framework for strengthening youth leadership in Hawai‘i. Many pointed out that YPAR’s youth-led approach can be applied in a wide variety of settings. Beyond the SNAP-Ed focused projects, these practitioners hold a vision for broader application across disciplines and sectors, especially in education or for example, by linking food access, sustainable agriculture, and climate change. A key strategy for sustainability is embedding YPAR principles within existing youth programs. Some emphasized the importance of applying the YPAR framework across programs and funding streams so that it becomes a way of working, rather than a siloed approach.

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“The most effective form of change is a community effort.”

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To build capacity and catalyze the widespread use of YPAR, most interviewees recommended introducing YPAR to existing groups and networks that operate both statewide and locally. These groups often share similar goals and values, such as youth development, community service, healthy living, and career or college preparation. By training group leaders, they could in turn teach their members. Engaging a broader cross-section of stakeholders also can improve reach and ensure greater diversity of mini-grant applicants beyond community afterschool programs.



Some examples include:

- Interact, Leo, and Key clubs, which are the youth service groups associated with Rotary, Kiwanis and Lion clubs.
- The Hawai'i State Student Council, which represents the voice of Hawai'i's 180,000 public school students.
- Career and Technical Student Organizations, especially HOSA-Future Health Professionals (formerly known as Health Occupations Students of America).
- The Hawai'i Farm to School Hui, which includes farm-to-school and school garden network leaders from six islands and representatives from the Hawai'i Departments of Education, Health, and Agriculture.
- Hawai'i P-20 Partnerships for Education, which strengthens the education pipeline, focusing on college, career and community readiness for students.
- Youth mental health programs.
- Tobacco/vaping prevention groups.
- Job training/GED programs, including the youth component of each island's American Job Center.
- The Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance, a network that supports sustainable, quality afterschool and summer learning programs that result in improved academic, social, emotional, and physical outcomes for children and families.
- Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Boys and Girls Club and 4H.

Continuing to work through existing partnerships and networks could not only help expand YPAR, it could also help rebuilding youth programs after the ravages of the pandemic. For example, in the Kalihi area, there is a long-standing coalition of youth-serving organizations that includes the Y. The Y also plays a key role in the Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance, which engages multiple youth-serving organizations and is well positioned to leverage resources. The Y could continue to be instrumental in the implementation and wider adoption of YPAR, not only by coordinating training and technical assistance, but also by serving as a convenor, making connections, and tracking outcomes.

**“All these clubs that are embedded into schools after school programs—they have limited funding so this is a perfect opportunity for them. You just train the head of the main group.”**

**“Many schools have various civics clubs so that's a natural place for a framework like this to be implemented.”**

**“Rather than trying to make a whole new coalition, how do we embed YPAR in the coalitions that already exist? What are the other groups out there that could take this and run with it?”**

Given the relatively small investment of funds needed to implement YPAR and the substantial impacts that result, several interviewees believe that YPAR offers an attractive model to philanthropic and state agencies that already support youth development and afterschool activities. Internal champions could integrate YPAR into Request for Proposals (RFPs), activity planning, and accountability reports by asking, “What YPAR concepts are you using or how are you using YPAR concepts?” One interviewee suggested that the Office of Youth Services might be a candidate for adopting this approach. Convening or forming a funding network to support the use and expansion of YPAR also could help with sustainability, perhaps by offering a matching grant.

**“I wish YPAR was more known by other government agencies because if small groups can run with YPAR, it seems like such a small amount of money to put towards something that can have such a larger impact in your community.”**

**“Being able to get other stakeholders at the table is really important.”**

**“If we can embed these principles into their standard operating procedures, that’s how you build sustainability.”**

**“How can we integrate YPAR into the program? How do we make that a part of what we do and part of our core services?”**

While some say working through the schools is an important key to success, others point out that teachers are already overwhelmed and the Department of Education can be challenging to engage. Borrowing from other youth organizing strategies, several interviewees recommended finding a champion teacher at each school to train in YPAR, potentially starting a club at every high school. Connecting with advisory classes and club advisors in middle and high schools is one starting point; YPAR presentations at school ‘ohana nights or other community events is another. Existing school-based programs could strengthen the youth-led component by incorporating YPAR. Two possibilities include UPLINK programs (afterschool activities to prevent middle school students from engaging in risky behaviors) or 21st Century Community Learning Centers (federally funded before-school, afterschool, and summer learning programs).

Encouraging youth serving organizations to demonstrate their support for YPAR on their websites is one tactic for raising visibility and prompting more widespread adoption. Publicly recognizing these partners for using the framework, for example on DOH’s website, is a form of reciprocity that could elevate their collective efforts. However, remaining flexible—both with fitting YPAR into existing missions as well as with “branding”—also is advised. One interviewee noted that there is sometimes too much focus on what a project is called or how many logos are visible on program materials. Programs might use YPAR but not call it that, especially since the acronym itself is not particularly meaningful to most people.

Interview participants identified some initial questions to explore and process steps for establishing sustainability:

- Identify funding streams, projects and programs that align with YPAR principles.
- Conduct research to learn about the system, who the players are, and what policies and regulations need change.
- Include succession planning since many longtime youth advocates are expected to retire in the next few years.
- Continue engaging, educating and supporting youth.
- Acknowledge that systemic change takes time.

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**“The more they gather data and implement, the more change we can make. With the longevity of it, we can start to really make some great transitions within the community for the youth and for the adults.”**

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## Questions for Sustainability Planning

- ▶ How can YPAR principles be embedded more broadly among youth service providers and organizations, going beyond a single grant or project?
- ▶ How can existing partnerships and coalitions be engaged?
- ▶ How can we be more strategic and expand YPAR at the state level?
- ▶ How can YPAR become a grant requirement or integrated into activity planning among different funders?
- ▶ How can we get the Department of Education to add YPAR to the school day?
- ▶ How can YPAR be integrated into civic or science education curricula?
- ▶ How can we partner with job training/GED programs?
- ▶ How do we continue YPAR internships if DOH no longer provides funding?



# A Vision for the Future

The Department of Health and the Y are continuing their partnership to advance youth-led nutrition and physical activity projects in Hawai'i. After considering the recommendations in this report, they are committed to both a statewide and regional approach to engage interested stakeholders, continue offering training relevant to Hawai'i practitioners, and pursue additional funding to support YPAR activities. Their near-term goal is to establish a peer network that will provide mutual support and in the long-term, work towards expanding the use of YPAR beyond SNAP-Ed. For more information and to get involved, please visit <https://www.yparhawaii.com/>.





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[www.yparhawaii.com](http://www.yparhawaii.com)