



Informing Our HEALYAC

Conceptual background

Research has progressively shown the benefits associated with engaging youth in the research process (O'Connor, 2015; Hohenemser & Marshall, 2002). According to Hart (1997), early adolescence is the developmental stage when the interactions between adults and youth transform from an authoritative to a reciprocal nature. Incorporating the voices and unique perspectives of this particular demographic allows for the generation of research findings that align with the views of youth themselves (Jacquez, Vaughn, & Wagner, 2013). Although this adult-youth partnership is idealized, it is often not achieved in practice; adult researchers attempt to integrate youth into the research process without critically considering how this youth-adult dynamic will function, resulting in limited decision-making and participation on the part of children and young adults (Hart, 1997; Jacquez et al., 2013). Both youth advisory councils, as well as other forms of community-based youth research, still tend to be adult-controlled, and so there is still work to be done to mitigate these power imbalances in the context of youth research (Ergler, 2017; Arnstein, 1969).

To conceptualize the participatory character and decision-making authority of the HEALYAC, the Development Team (DT), comprised of three high school students and HEALab staff, critically adapted Arnstein's (1969) 'Ladder of Participation' to fit with how the DT conceived the operational dynamics of the HEALYAC. Our development team questioned the upward directionality of Arnstein's Ladder as universally desirable, and instead created what they called a "rope ladder" to allow flexibility in moving up or down between rungs, according to how much power the HEALYAC requires based on specific projects or situations (Ergler, 2017). This allows for a symbiotic governance relationship between the HEAL and the HEALYAC, ensuring that the lab benefits from the council and the council benefits from the lab. Moreover, our youth team challenged the notion that the HEALYAC should occupy the top rung of the ladder ("Citizen Control"); instead, concluding that ultimate decision-making authority should rest with the HEAL but requires mechanisms for accountability. Ultimately, this youth-adult partnership will benefit both parties involved, and the research that is generated will support social change in both practice and policy.

To encourage the integrity of a youth driven processes, the three high school students from the DT developed the format for our HEALYAC. These students were invited to exercise their original ideas and creativity for the HEALYAC, and to base their developmental decisions in academic literature, examples from other YACs, and consultations with experts and stakeholders with relevant experience. Staff roles in this process were conceived as facilitative, whereby staff pointed students to resources, helped to orchestrate consultations, and provided guidance and feedback as needed. In this way, the youth benefited from increased exposure to academic processes while the lab gained youth perspectives and insights in the creation of the HEALYAC. Instead of either group taking on a strong "leadership" role, our opinions, as well as the youth verdicts were equally weighted, following the symbiotic nature of the flexible ladder. After much revising and collaborative efforts, the DT developed a terms of reference that outlined the values and structure of our YAC.

**The terms of reference document (The document is attached below) is flexible, meaning it can change based on the circumstances that arise during the tenure of the operation of the HEALYAC.*

Human Environments Analysis Laboratory Youth Advisory Council (HEALYAC)

Terms of Reference

Purpose

The **purpose** of the HEAL Youth Advisory Council (HEALYAC) is to integrate youth voices, perspectives, and expertise into our research on young people's health and wellbeing. As part of the operational structure of our lab, the HEALYAC is how we implement an overarching participatory approach that sees research as *with* and *for* youth, as opposed to solely *on* youth. By establishing a YAC, we are positioning youth input as integral to shaping both the wider strategic directions and priorities of our lab, and decision-making at the level of specific projects.

Values

The concept of the YAC is rooted in our **values** as a lab. We believe that youth perspectives are necessary to ensure the integrity and quality of our research, so that our research has the greatest potential to improve the health and wellbeing of youth. Considering that we have similar values, both the adult and youth researchers at the HEALab also have a collective goal of improving the health of young people within the London community, and our partnership will assist in the production of social change, both in research practice and health policy. We also see our relationship with the HEALYAC as a two way street: youth advise HEALab projects and directions, ensuring relevance and resonance to strengthen our work, and youth receive leadership experience, research training and education. Diversity is one of our core values, and we believe that a diverse group of youth who bring varied experiences and perspectives to the table is central to advancing the mission of the HEALYAC.

HEALYAC Benefits to Youth

1. Gain first-hand academic research experience through exposure to the HEALab environment (understanding of research processes, grant-writing, ethics applications).
2. Participate in research activities, either on specific roles in data collection and analysis (e.g., administering surveys, participating in neighbourhood audits) or as youth co-researchers, where possible (Refer to the Process for HEALYAC Member Participation in HEALab Research document).
3. Develop leadership skills in an advisory capacity role.
4. Enhance professional development (e.g., time management skills, CV writing, job interviewing) through opportunities embedded throughout HEALYAC activities.
5. Collaborate on local community initiatives (e.g., community-based research, community outreach) where possible.
6. Mentorship from HEALab staff and development of positive youth-adult relationships.
7. Participate in HEALab projects/activities that align with their interests, where possible.
8. The experiences and skills gained in joining the HEALYAC will aid youth strive in their academic life.

HEALYAC Benefits to the HEALab

1. Direction and advice for various projects through a feedback loop system (*Refer to Feedback Loop heading*).
2. The HEALYAC increases the credibility of the HEALab by being dedicated to the community, as well as youth.
3. It allows for the research conducted at the HEALab to be opened to a diverse group of youth, which opens up an opportunity for a diverse perspective.
4. The HEALYAC opens up more research opportunities at the lab including but not limited to research papers, data collection, evaluations and etc.
5. The HEALYAC allows for an opportunity for the HEALab staff to directly collaborate with youth pertaining to their research.
6. Makes research at the HEALab with youth rather than on youth.

Member and Lab Responsibilities and Opportunities

1. Advise on strategic directions of the HEALab and research priorities (engage in discussions about new project/topic areas to pursue).
2. Provide input on research instruments (surveys, interview guides, protocols).
3. Provide input on research design (review summaries/outlines of grant applications/project proposals).
4. Advise on study recruitment/retention strategies.
5. Ensure relevance and readability of publications/research products aimed at youth.
6. Consult as needed on HEALab research and community outreach initiatives.
7. Attend and participate in monthly meetings, members must attend majority of meetings (To ensure attendance there will be reminders.)
8. Collaborate with one another to develop and communicate new ideas to lab representatives.

If selected, all members of the council are expected to:

- Meet bi-weekly (approximately an hour and a half per meeting, some months meetings may be once per month) plus 3x/year for training and/or professional development, or as determined by the HEALYAC. If a member is to be absent, they must provide a reason for absence to the HEALYAC staff co-facilitator.
- Converse as needed in-between meetings over Slack (or means to be determined by the HEALYAC) to advance the work of the HEALYAC.
- Commit to participate on the council for one year with an option for a one year renewal term (*this is subject to change near the end of the tenure in the first year of the operation of the HEALYAC*).
- Take on tasks to advance the work of the HEALYAC in-between meetings, and to report on progress at meetings.

The responsibilities for the HEALab include:

- Ensuring that the YAC members have a good experience with the HEALYAC.
- Considering the feedback from the HEALYAC (Refer to the Feedback Loop).
- Maintaining a safe and positive environment for HEALYAC members.

Recruitment & Membership

We seek to establish a diverse and inclusive YAC. We welcome applications from youth of all genders, sexualities, ethnic backgrounds, religions, and neighbourhoods, and we are committed to accessibility.

- To be eligible, youth must be currently approximately age 13-18 (high school age).
- There will be no fewer than 10 members and no greater than 14 members in the council.
- The selection process will be conducted through an application and a formal interview by staff and youth leaders.
- General qualifications include, but are not limited to:
 - Organizational skills (e.g., punctuality)
 - Commitment to teamwork (Willingness to work with others, contribute to common goals, provide input)
 - Displays interest in public health, health geography, community and/or social issues.
 - Respectful (including of confidential information and others' opinions)
 - Interests in health, community issues, problem-solving, leadership, research

If an applicant is not selected for the HEALYAC, we will work with them to find other volunteer opportunities at the HEALab that align with their interests.

Roles Within the HEALYAC

In Year 1 of the HEALYAC, the role of Youth Co-Facilitators and communication officer will be assumed by the high school students from the Development Team. This initial leadership will help to facilitate the implementation of the HEALYAC, with the

understanding that part of the work of the HEALYAC in Year 1 will be to determine how the Youth Co-Facilitator(s) (and other) roles will be transitioned in Year 2 and onwards.

The roles outlined below are a starting point for the HEALYAC structure. The HEALYAC may revisit these roles and add or remove positions, as determined through HEALYAC decision-making procedures, to meet the needs of the HEALYAC.

Role	Description
Youth Co-facilitator(s)	Responsible for creating meeting agendas (with staff co-facilitator), moving the group through the agenda at each meeting, taking attendance, helping to moderate discussions and ensure inclusive, equitable participation. Prepare meeting minutes in collaboration with the Staff Co-facilitator .
Staff Co-facilitator	Staff lead from the HEALab that will work in conjunction with the Youth Co-facilitator to support the work of the HEALYAC. Responsible for reporting back to the HEALYAC on lab progress and action on HEALYAC feedback and guidance. The staff co-facilitator is responsible for reminders, taking notes at meetings and preparing minutes in collaboration with Youth Co-facilitator(s). <i>Refer to the feedback loop to understand how the staff co-facilitator interacts with the HEALab.</i>
Communications Officer	Drafting social media, posting updates on website, maintaining the message board, creating communications products eg.posters, brochures, presentations, etc.

Accountability and Reporting Relationships

The HEALYAC will report directly to the HEALab Staff Co-facilitator and Director via the Youth Co-facilitators. Possible forms of communication include:

Internal:

- Monthly/bi-weekly meetings
- E-Mail
- HEAL employee information sessions
- Online message board
- Updates at the beginning of every meeting

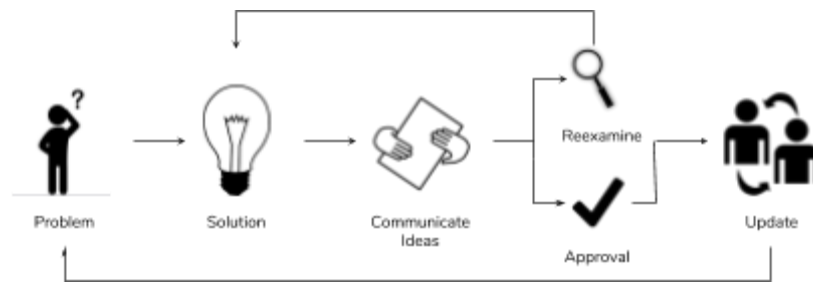
External:

- The HEAL website
- Newsletter

Feedback Loop

In addition, the HEALab must demonstrate how guidance and input from the HEALYAC is being used, thus, there is a feedback loop. The feedback loop consists of five steps:

- 1) HEALab presents a problem to the HEALYAC through the staff co-facilitator (*Refer to Internal section of the Accountability and Reporting Relationships heading*).
- 2) HEALYAC hypothesizes solutions to questions and problems (*Refer to Decision Making Process*).
- 3) HEALYAC sends ideas to HEALab through the staff co-facilitator and/or directly.
- 4) HEALab evaluates idea.
- 5) HEALab keeps the council updated on how their input is being used. If the lab decides not to use input from the HEALYAC they will still need to inform the council on why they decided against their ideas.



Decision Making Process

In order to make a decision regarding an idea presented to the HEALYAC certain conditions have to be met, these conditions include:

- 50% of active members shall constitute the bare minimum of a quorum.
- $\frac{2}{3}$ of the members present must vote in favour of a decision for it to be instituted.

In order to make amendments to the HEALYAC Terms Of Reference or other YAC documents certain conditions have to be met, these conditions include:

- $\frac{3}{4}$ of active members shall constitute a quorum.
- $\frac{3}{4}$ of the members present must vote in favour of a decision for it to be instituted.

Yearly Meeting Plan (October - June)

- Bi-weekly meetings will be held every other Thursday at 6pm.
- At certain times of the year, there may be one meeting per month

Meeting Number	Description
Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prior to the HEALYAC being established, all members are required to attend an orientation meeting. • Orientation will take place in October. • The orientation will involve: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ An overview of the HEALYAC and the HEALab ○ A mock council will be held ○ A description of the various roles on the council ○ Details on when and where the council will meet ○ An introductory survey • Draft and sign a “pledge” (How do we want to work together? What are our values?) • Brainstorm development/training areas of interest (to be re-visited as group works together)
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction to HEALab members and ongoing research projects • More team building exercises • Ethics session • Research 101
2-17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project specific meetings + workshops for HEALYAC members
18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summative feedback/input from the HEALYAC to HEALab • Final evaluation of the HEALYAC experience.

Meeting Structure

- Meetings will generally be based on the following outline (however, the following outline is flexible):
 - Welcome and attendance
 - Icebreakers
 - Overview of agenda from Youth co-facilitator
 - HEALab report-back from staff co-facilitator

- Work through the agenda items for the meeting
- Educational opportunity:
 - Presentation from HEALab staff member about their research
 - Presentation from guest speaker
 - Training (ethics, safety, etc.)
- Summary of actions to be taken/tasks assigned until next meeting
- 5 mins at the end for feedback, regarding improvements to the HEALYAC

Evaluation

- Two meetings (in month 6 and month 12) will be dedicated to evaluating the HEALYAC. Members will be asked about their experience, how they believe the HEALab has succeeded (or not) in addressing their feedback, ways the HEALYAC can be improved, etc. We will use a survey as well as discussion-based feedback.
- Feedback from HEALYAC evaluations will be used to inform any changes to the HEALYAC in the future.
- We will also embed a research project in this evaluation, subject to ethics approval from Western University’s Non-Medical Research Ethics Board.

Changes in HEALYAC Structure and Composition

Potential revising of the HEALYAC is to be considered in the case of any concerns, as well as the HEALYAC not being able to meet the expectations and responsibilities set out by the lab. Depending on the severity of the issue, staff and council members can work collaboratively to make any changes to the structure and/or other components of the council.

- In the case of three or more members leaving during the span of a year, a new recruitment process will be held for the newly empty seats.
- Members of the council whom do not meet the expectations of the council will be invited to work with staff co facilitators to discuss ways to improve attendance and participation. The staff will do their best to to accommodate the member’s needs whether that is leaving the council or making changes to better integrate them into the HEALYAC.

Amending the Terms of Reference

This terms of reference is a document to outline the basic HEALYAC structure, however it is flexible and may be changed if inclusively decided by the HEALYAC as well as the lab members. All amendments will be added to the amendment heading as to separate the original TOR from the changes made later on. Refer to the “Decision Making Process” section to understand how amendments are decided by the council.

Some of the topics that are to be discussed by the members of the HEALYAC include:

- A common platform for communications, some options may include: facebook, email, messenger and etc.
- Detailed renewal process (possibly near the end of its yearly operation).
- Role selection process (*Refer to Roles Within the HEALYAC heading*).

Amendments

To be determined