

A group of young people are hiking away from the camera on a path covered in fallen brown leaves. The person in the center wears a grey hoodie, red pants, a dark cap, and a blue backpack. To their left, a person with long blonde hair wears a black jacket and a light blue backpack. To their right, a person with curly hair wears a black jacket and a camouflage backpack. The background is a dense forest of bare trees.

# NETWORK LEADER'S GUIDE



# INTRODUCTION

## *“Shepherding the heart of youth leaders”*

Youth leaders deal with many expectations but nobody asks them about their heart until they crash and burn. At the Youth Leader Collective we shepherd the youth leader by creating a safe place for them to be known. We also care for their spouses through date nights and retreats. We host yearly training sessions to coach our youth leaders and volunteers to be better equipped. We work together to reach the campus so that students can experience Jesus. Our teenagers needed more adult connections so through the “Pray For Me” campaign, we partnered them with prayer champions. And we built bridges through our Racial Reconciliation bus trip where we visited civil rights museums and gathered ministry leaders at the oldest African American church in Montgomery, Alabama for prayer, communion and hymn singing.

Zach Wyatt - Youth Leader Collective Director, NNYM Chattanooga Area Director



## WHY NETWORK?

You have a heart for the youth in your community, but there are so many needs and so little time. You can't do it alone; you never need to feel alone! A network allows us to experience authentic, life-giving community. God desires for you to work together. Biblical unity is the driving motivation behind youth ministry networking, based on four scriptural values as described in the NNYM Values Agreement (see page 14 for the full text).

- **Personal discipleship** in prayer, family and biblical application, “...make disciples of all nations...” (Matt 28:19b NIV)
- **Equip students** and those who love them, “to equip God’s people for works of service,” (Eph.4:12a NIV)
- **Share the gospel** and the love of Jesus, “Love one another as I have loved you.” (John 15:12b ESV)
- **Encourage unity** through collaborative relationships, “...that they may be one as We are one.” (John 17:22b NIV)

To live out these values, the **mission** of the National Network of Youth Ministries is to **unite Christ-followers in communities through youth leader networks to share the gospel and advance ministry to every teenager.**

## WHAT IS A YOUTH LEADER NETWORK?

Networking since 1981, NNYM has identified four priorities built on two foundational principles that are common among healthy ministry networks. These elements are core to building a kingdom movement in communities. Mature leaders live from godly character and seek kingdom-based relationships.

### A healthy youth leader network...

unites Christ-followers who practice cooperative leadership to help teenagers become lifelong followers of Jesus Christ as they Pray together, Build relationships, Develop strategies, and Share resources.



As your network applies these principles in a **healthy environment**, you will expand your combined ministry exponentially (see Ecclesiastes 4:9-12). *In fact, the only way we can hope to get to "every" is by working together.* We'll discover what that looks like on the pages that follow.

### USING THIS BOOKLET:

*Network Leaders' Guide* helps you network in your community around four priorities. Work through the booklet alone, in a group or with a Network Coach. Use the interactive questions to apply the priorities to your setting. There are more resources online at [nnym.org/training](http://nnym.org/training).

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## UNITE THROUGH COOPERATIVE LEADERSHIP

Cooperative leadership is radically different from the way the world leads. To guide a kingdom movement in their community, cooperative leaders:

- Lead themselves first;
- Share a compelling vision; and
- Develop others through a “Plus 1” leadership mentality.

They build God's kingdom rather than their own empires and “Check their egos and logos at the door.” Biblical unity is always a priority, so they deeply believe that we are “Better Together.” As they do ministry together, they don't care if someone else gets the credit.

Quite simply, they lead like Jesus.

## CREATE A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

People in a healthy network pursue an inviting atmosphere that overflows with love and unity (Colossians 3:14). In a meditation titled “True Hospitality,” Henri Nouwen wrote that relationships should *“create space where strangers can enter and become friends.”*

Why is this important? Because loneliness is a prime cause of ministry burnout.

- Extended loneliness can lead to Isolation.
- Extended Isolation can lead to violating our value system.
- Violating our value system can lead to losing respect - and even a ministry.

A healthy network helps youth leaders who are strangers become friends. As you practice grace and unity, you don't need to agree on every issue. You create a healthy environment by embracing others' differences (gender, ethnicity, culture, worship styles) and valuing their unique strengths and perspectives.

A network is complete when it is as diverse as the body of Christ. Participants reach out to all their brothers and sisters, saying *“We are not complete without you.”*

With the tone set for leadership and environment, then a healthy network weaves four core priorities into all they do together.



## INTRODUCTION: INTERACTIVE

- Where do you see leaders uniting to work with teenagers in your community? What's their "Why?" What's your "Why?"
- What aspect of cooperative leadership resonates most with you?
- How can you picture yourself developing other leaders around you?
- Can you remember a time you walked into a meeting and felt like you didn't belong? What about the opposite? What was in the environment that made you feel each way?

## NEVER LEAD ALONE



We co-lead our network in New York with a great team of youth leaders: Daniel Sanabria (YFC), Ross Queener (Cru), Jeff Talavera (local church youth pastor) and Anna Shuman (Nyack College Youth & Family Studies Coordinator). In partnership with Nyack College, the Youth Pastors and Emerging Leaders Fellowship (YPELF) exists to foster valuable connections among our next generation of leaders. Through various events and resources, we provide a robust community with unique opportunities to fellowship, network, and develop a variety of skills that allow young leaders to grow together. When young leaders collaborate and join forces, they create a catalyst for change in a movement that impacts both our city and future generations to come.

- Vandelyn Kennedy - YPELF Team Lead/Church of God in Christ International Youth Department Chair & John Ginnan - New York Youth Alive director/NNYM New York state coordinator

# PRAY TOGETHER

The four priorities of the healthy networking naturally flow from the Network values. The priority “Pray Together” reflects the Personal Discipleship value that prayer, family and the Word of God define who we are. As you partner with God and others through prayer, you’ll discover God’s DNA for your network.

## CONNECT THROUGH PRAYER

Prayer is our source of strength. When we align our hearts with God’s, His love overflows into the lives of our families and communities. As we connect with Him, we are more prepared to connect with others.

## LISTEN FOR LIFE

God desires constant two-way communication; that’s why the verse says, “Always pray.” (1 Thes. 5:16). So how do you build listening prayer into every aspect of your life? Actively listen to Him. Talk to Him as you go. Take extended time for you and your network to get away and hear God’s voice.

## ASK GOD FOR HIS VISION

God wants to mobilize a movement in your area to reach and empower every teenager. Why not allow Him to orchestrate the movement? Gather with others to ask God to give you His vision for youth in your community.

## CREATE A PRAYER COVERING

*Imagine every young person in your community covered in prayer.* A healthy network makes prayer intentional and expansive. How? By investing in prayer personally and organizing others to pray corporately. Intercede regularly for the teenagers in your community and families, and recruit others to join you. There are a number of national prayer strategies that help focus the church on praying for students.



- What helps you to connect in a deeper way, personally with Jesus?
- How does the idea of hearing from God resonate with you? How have you experienced Him speaking?
- What picture do you sense God is showing you of the youth in your community? Who else in your community sees the same picture?
- What are ways that you can build a foundation for prayer in your network? Who in your community would you trust to pray for your network as you build it?

### SCHOOL PRAYER OPENS INNER CITY DOORS



We put the power of prayer into a very worthy place: our local school. We launched a new network in inner city Cincinnati revolving around one of the local high schools. We partnered with the new principal to get church volunteers to pray with faculty and staff weekly. As a result, the principal visited a church on Sunday morning. Later, she expressed that school discipline improved 64% and asked us to pray every school day! Our prayers opened the school's doors for solid relationships with more local churches, parachurch ministries and community organizations just because we prayed 30 minutes a week.

- Orlando Hale - NNYM Cincinnati area coordinator

# BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

Doing life and ministry together lives out the value of unity through collaborative relationships. Working together builds a team that God can use to transform young people in your community. Doing ministry with others overcomes isolation and loneliness (see Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

## DEEPEN TRUST

Healthy relationships are built on commitment and trust. Hanging out, praying and serving together create a healthy environment for networking. 1 Peter 4:8 says, "...love each other as if your life depended on it." Build trust with other leaders through regular connection and communication.

## ESTABLISH COMMON GROUND

You can help unite your network through the principles found in the NNYM Values Agreement (page 14). The National Network fosters unity and resource sharing among 130 national ministries and a multitude of churches.

## GATHER YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM

You are not alone! There are others in your community with a heart to work together. Look for leaders who resonate with the shared vision, and bring different strengths to co-lead the team. Team leadership is a good expression of Cooperative Leadership.

## MEET TOGETHER

As your core team expands, it's time to invite others for a gathering, based on the four priorities. Choose current topics that help develop the skills and character of participants. For example, an Los Angeles-area network invited a high school principal to share her perspective on school violence.



## BUILD RELATIONSHIPS: INTERACTIVE

- How can you deepen trust with other youth leaders in your network?
- Which of the topics in the NNYM Values Agreement might be topics of discussion at a network meeting?
- Who are other leaders in your community with whom you could share leadership of the network?
- Make a list of ideas you believe would add value for your network members in your gatherings. Who could you invite to share about some of these topics?

## BUILDING TRUST WITH TRIBAL YOUTH LEADERS



With Native teenagers, trust is earned. Within the 566 tribes are many traumatized, fatherless teenagers. The suicide rate among native teens is 2.5 times greater than the national average. They crave authentic relationships from leaders who love them. At the same time, Native youth leaders wear multiple hats with few resources. Sometimes they are just as deeply scarred as the teenagers. As a Native youth leader, my heritage helps me to process their shared pain with empathy and listening. They need youth leader communities established on authenticity and consistency. Therefore, we focus on chaplaincy and rapid response training to help with mental health issues in both youth and youth leaders. We partner by doing life and ministry together.

- Seth Stevens - AcrossNations Outreach missionary/NNYM Tribal ministries coordinator

# DEVELOP STRATEGIES

How do we advance ministry to every teenager? By developing shared strategies, we embrace the value of equipping students and those who love them. It's hard work to assess needs, plan strategies, and partner with other leaders in your community. But as you build strong relationships, you can leverage them for gospel-centered cooperation. Start small and grow.

## DO YOUR HOMEWORK

God's plan for transformation can be discovered by first looking in: listening to what motivates your leaders to come together. God may already be speaking to your group. Then, look out by doing research. Discover the needs of youth in your community, asking "How can we serve here to reach our students?" You can learn from surveys, interviews, focus groups. As you learn, join with God where He is already working. Who can we partner with to leverage our energy?

## SHARE THE MISSION

Prayerfully craft a clear, simple mission statement that communicates the "big WHY" your local network exists (see Habakkuk 2:2-3). How does your network add value to the youth leaders in your community?

## SET GOALS

Next, set goals that help you accomplish your mission. (Use the worksheet on page 13).

## ENGAGE YOUR COMMUNITY

Once you've discerned your goals, go for it! It may be an initiative or event that is already going on, but would be better if done together. How can you help students engage in gospel-centered movements in their schools and community? Here are three pillars for campus and community engagement:

- **Prepare** students to lead by equipping them to effectively reach their peers.
- Be **Present** in the lives of youth by attending school and community events.
- **Partner** with school and youth organizations to accomplish mutual goals. See [nnym.org/partnering-with-schools-101](https://nnym.org/partnering-with-schools-101).



## DEVELOP STRATEGIES: INTERACTIVE

- Looking in, what mission do you sense that God is already giving to youth leaders in your community? Looking out, what research tools/ techniques could you use to better understand the needs of youth and families in your community?
- How do you communicate the vision/mission to someone at a church or ministry who feels like you are competing for their time, energy and resources?
- What are one or two goals that you can set for your network? You can record them in your action plan on page 13.
- How can your network work on ideas for Prepare, Present, and Partner?

## EQUIPPING STUDENTS FOR CAMPUS MINISTRY



As a regional coordinator, Mark Shaner unites youth leaders across the Southeast like Joe Maldonado. After leading in the local church for 31 years, Joe started with First Priority South Florida. He now networks church youth leaders to equip students for campus ministry like the student-led club at Indian River Charter High. He connects with the Indian River Youth Network for prayer and relationships. Joe says that he “loves living life with this group of youth leaders.” With the work of local teenagers and youth leaders, over a thousand students have said “Yes” to Jesus in South Florida.

- Mark Shaner - NNYM Southeast regional coordinator &  
Joe Maldonado - First Priority South Florida Regional Director

# SHARE RESOURCES

## UTILIZE THE ASSETS GOD PROVIDES FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

Since every teenager needs Christ, you need to prioritize sharing the gospel and the love of Jesus in order to participate with God in transformation. But how do you find the resources to carry out that strategy?

## MOBILIZE A MOVEMENT

“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.” Look in the pews! Jeremy Del Rio, a New York network coordinator, states “50-80% of the people in your church are already connected to youth.” How do we unleash them to do ministry with you? Help them focus on students they already know.



## WIDEN THE NET

Do we need to think differently about whom God has put on our team? Pray about how to “widen your net” by connecting with Christ-followers in your community who are already serving teenagers. They can expand your disciple-making influence and help you serve more teenagers.

## SERVE IN YOUR STRENGTHS

God gives vision and provides resources. Look around you: God places leaders and organizations who can help reach your goal. Imagine if your network wants to do an outreach. One church has a gym, another leader is a graphic artist, another shares the message. You are better together!

## SUSTAIN THE MOMENTUM

To keep on going, you need to evaluate, adjust and stay in the game. Take time to celebrate the victories, then evaluate. Be brutally honest. Adjust your game plan as you work together toward the long-range vision.



## SHARE RESOURCES: INTERACTIVE

- How can you enlist the help of other leaders in your community?
- Who are some people you know who already love and disciple youth? How could you appeal to them to join in your networking, and how would you communicate with them?
- Make a list of the strengths: time (volunteers), talent (skill sets) and treasures (financial or facility resources) that already exist in your community for discipling teenagers. What have you overlooked?
- Have you ever been part of a cooperative initiative, and then finished the effort in a way that motivated you to continue working together? How was that done? What can help you sustain the momentum for cooperation in your community?

## COLLABORATING WITH THE “DMV”



80% of youth leaders in the DC area are co-vocational or volunteers. Even though time and resources may be scarce, they continue to find spaces for community within our network by engaging with each other. They create opportunities for collaboration, community, and relationship building. The DC Metro Area Network, or the “DMV,” collaborates on events like a virtual youth service led by youth, a virtual game night for teens, and a summer gathering/cookout for youth leaders. This community is a very creative and powerful group that I am proud to represent in this region of the world.

- Thomas A. Brackeen, Jr - NNYM East Central regional coordinator

# NEXT STEPS

The networking priorities you set for your community will help you as you apply them. Take some time to decide what is most important for you to accomplish. Set goals from the networking objectives. The following action plan can help you identify one or two important actions per priority to grow your network.

## CREATE AN ACTION PLAN

| Goals                      | Deadline |
|----------------------------|----------|
| <b>Pray Together</b>       |          |
| + _____                    | _____    |
| + _____                    | _____    |
| + _____                    | _____    |
| <b>Build Relationships</b> |          |
| + _____                    | _____    |
| + _____                    | _____    |
| + _____                    | _____    |
| <b>Develop Strategies</b>  |          |
| + _____                    | _____    |
| + _____                    | _____    |
| + _____                    | _____    |
| <b>Share Resources</b>     |          |
| + _____                    | _____    |
| + _____                    | _____    |
| + _____                    | _____    |

# CONNECT TO NNYM

Your local network team is vital. Your NNYM team is also here to serve you. We believe you have something valuable to share with other networkers outside your community. So we encourage you to:

- **Register yourself and your network** at [nnym.org](http://nnym.org). *It's free and fast*, offering tools to help you connect and communicate. Being registered helps new people connect with you and your group if they are moving to your community.
- **Get on the map**. NNYM's online database is searchable, helping others to find you. It notifies you when they join. Imagine one directory, with all local networks in one place.
- **Invite those in your network to register** on our website. It's a "no-spam zone."
- **Contact us** if we can help you. Free network coaching is available from our staff and field team.

## NNYM VALUES AGREEMENT

These core values are agreed to by each leader in the Network, including local network coordinators. They are convictions to be pursued in life and ministry by a National Network of Youth Ministries leader.

Motivated by my love for Jesus and a desire to love and serve young people and youth leaders, I seek to live a life marked by:

### **Personal discipleship**

Affirming that our souls matter to God, I commit to: A life of prayer for myself, other youth leaders and students. Modeling my home, family and all relationships after the example of Christ. The Bible as the authoritative Word of God.

### **Equipping students**

and all who desire to love and serve young people.

### **Sharing the gospel**

and the love of Jesus in order to participate with God in transformation.

### **Encouraging unity**

through collaborative relationships in order to more effectively reach and equip every young person.



## YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Isolation is deadly. You want...need to connect with other youth leaders in your community. Where do you start? Is there help available? Is anybody else actually doing this? The National Network of Youth Ministries is a community that's here to help. Network Leaders' Guide is a resource you can use to expand the "reach" of your ministry:

- Why network? Four Values every Christian youth leader should embrace.
- Three essential habits of Cooperative Leaders.
- How to create an environment in your network that welcomes others.
- Four Priorities of a Healthy Network - youth leaders and others who:
  - Pray Together
  - Build Relationships
  - Develop Strategies
  - Share Resources
- Action Points to apply these priorities as you work with others to build Christ's kingdom in your community.
- Connecting to an uncommon fellowship on a nationwide mission: to unite Christ-followers in communities through youth leader networks that share the gospel and advance ministry to every teenager.

***We're better together!***

National Network of Youth Ministries  
PO Box 501748  
San Diego, CA 92150  
[nny.org](http://nny.org)  
858-451-1111  
[coordinator@nny.org](mailto:coordinator@nny.org)

