



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT LEARNING INSTITUTE (CDLI): EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FOR TRANSLATE AND PILOT Ys

With your partnership, YMCA of the USA (Y-USA) is systematically collaborating with select Ys to rapidly discover, test, and disseminate best adult practices that will positively influence millions of youth across our Movement and the world. Your partnership is helping to bridge research and practice – an effort that requires committed individuals like you to learn how critical practices can be implemented by youth development practitioners with intentionality, leading to positive youth outcomes. We thank you for partnering with us to build knowledge and apply what we've learned to ensure all youth development practitioners are supported in serving our nation's next leaders.

Building on our history as a movement

The Y has a long history of promoting character development. Character is a key element of the Y's approach to working with youth, and for over 160 years the Y has helped youth develop into ethical, caring, and successful adults. The word *character* reflects our commitment to a holistic approach to youth development, to evidence-based programming, and to our core organizational values of honesty, caring, respect, and responsibility. Our work in character development is shaped by and inclusive of the interconnected areas of positive youth development, including social and emotional learning, non-cognitive traits, soft skills, and other domains such as grit, motivation, and growth mindset. These areas, especially social and emotional learning, are central to our work in the Character Development Learning Institute (CDLI).

CDLI's mission and approach

The mission of the CDLI is to ensure that youth cultivate the character skills and traits necessary to reach their full potential. The CDLI defines youth character development as the process through which youth develop and integrate a set of values, skills, attitudes, and behaviors that encourage them to flourish in learning, in work, and in life. The CDLI will advance positive youth development through a collaborative, program-agnostic, and deliberate process that builds on research-informed adult practice areas and integrates these practice areas in youth programs serving youth ages 5-18. Advancing adult practices in out-of-school-time settings includes assessing, verifying, adapting, scaling, and sharing best adult practices within the Y Movement.

The process to develop the CDLI follows Y-USA's established model to implement interventions across the Y Movement, across the following three phases:

- The **Discovery Phase** was completed in 2016. Through a literature scan, as well as case studies of three exemplar Y sites, five evidence-informed and promising adult practice areas shown to support the development of character in youth were identified: (1) emotion management, (2) empathy, (3) relationship building, (4) responsibility, and (5) personal development.
- In the **Testing Phase**, the primary question we wanted to answer was "Can the identified adult practice areas be implemented within different kinds (size, location, program type) of Ys?" To answer this question, 32 sites were selected to **translate** the practice areas from working definitions to actual strategies and tactics in their sites. As the CDLI progressed, the adult

practice areas continued to be reviewed by our research partners and to be developed with participating Ys. Now that the adult practice areas have been translated and further refined, a **pilot** has begun with 96 youth-serving programs across 64 Y associations to learn and develop how Ys successfully implement character development.

- Once the adult practice areas have been sufficiently tested, the CDLI will enter the **Dissemination Phase**. In this two-year phase, we want to address how to share the adult practice areas with success across the Movement more broadly. Y-USA will identify an additional 225 to 325 Ys to participate in direct CDLI training and implementation assistance. The training materials and CDLI resources will also be accessible to an additional 200 to 350 Ys.

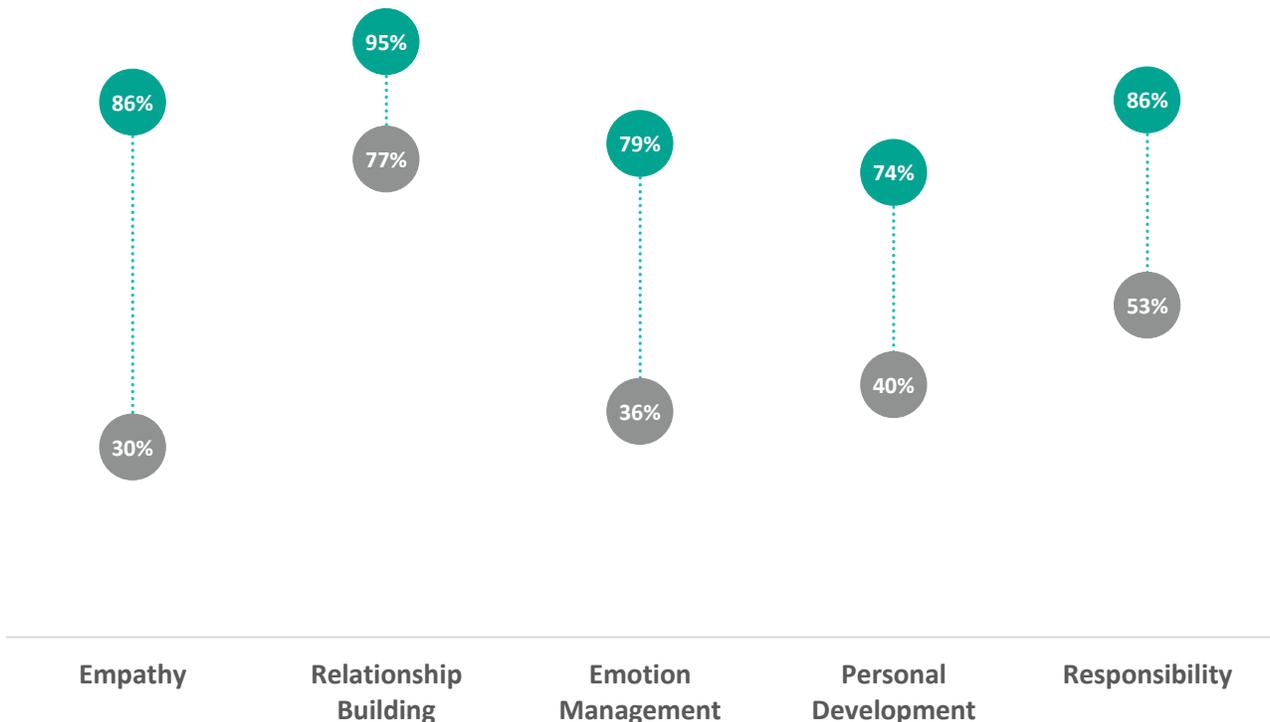
Learning throughout the Translate phase

At the end of Translate, we asked Ys to reflect on their experiences in CDLI so far. In particular, we asked Translate Ys how prepared they were to implement the five practice areas before CDLI and how prepared they were now. Generally, since participating in CDLI, Ys reported that they were more prepared.

Oct.
2017

Apr.
2017

After the Translate Phase, more Ys feel prepared or very prepared to implement strategies and tactics related to the five practice areas in their CDLI program.



CDLI TRANSLATE FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

As part of the Y's commitment to evidence-based youth development and to continuous improvement, Y-USA contracted an external evaluator, Child Trends, to evaluate the Translate phase.

Translate findings (national report)

In the following pages, we've outlined the recommendations from the national Translate report and highlighted some changes that we've made to the CDLI based on these findings. We invite and encourage you – the leaders of participating CDLI Ys from both Translate and Pilot – to review the recommendations and consider the implications for your own work in the Institute, using the included discussion questions.

Translate findings (site level report)

Ys who participated in the Translate phase have also received a site-specific report from Child Trends. The following discussion questions can help Translate Y leaders and implementation teams thoughtfully review, discuss, and consider the implications of their site level reports:

- What surprised you about your site level report?
- What in your site level report confirmed what you already knew?
- What similarities do you see between the national report and your site level report?
- What differences do you see between the national report and your site level report?
- What recommendations from either the site level or national report are you already working on improving?
- What additional areas of opportunity have the site level or national level reports revealed for you? What did you learn about collecting data during the Translate phase that can inform your plans for the Pilot phase?

NATIONAL REPORT: RECOMMENDATION 1

ORIENT Ys TO THE CDLI USING PLAIN LANGUAGE, DRAWING CONNECTIONS TO EXISTING INITIATIVES.

- Ensure that the language of the CDLI is simple and reflects the terms and concepts that resonate with staff and volunteers.
- Provide a general description of the CDLI early in the process and consider holding the convening earlier.
- Develop a brief orientation document (or set of documents) that describes the CDLI in plain language and can be used by sites to educate others in their branch, association, or community about the CDLI.
- Focus on intentionality in the language used to describe the CDLI.

WHAT HAS THE CDLI TEAM AT Y-USA CHANGED IN RESPONSE TO THIS RECOMMENDATION?

Redesigned the CDLI 'placemat'

Co-created a CDLI Pilot Guide and Toolkit with participating Ys

Hosted Pilot orientation for Cohort 1 in smaller professional learning communities

Hosted Pilot jump start calls for Cohort 2

Use the word 'intentionality' repeatedly in the new orientation materials

TALK ABOUT IT WITH YOUR TEAM

1. How would you explain character development and the areas of practice to staff and non-staff (i.e, volunteer, part-time/seasonal staff, full-time staff, your board, and funders)?

2. The CDLI Placemat

During Translate, many Ys reported they were already developing character. How does focusing intentionally on the adult practitioner elevate your work with character development specifically and youth development broadly?

NATIONAL REPORT: RECOMMENDATION 2

PROVIDE CONVENIENT ACCESS TO RELEVANT RESOURCES.

- Leverage strong existing resources to avoid “reinventing the wheel.”
- Move forward with plans to develop tools because they seem to be well-aligned with Y program recommendations.
- Develop more live ways to connect as Y program staff and volunteers have a strong preference for in-person trainings over webinars.
- Focus on clearly defining who to involve.
- Develop a set of self-paced learning opportunities so that staff and volunteers can access information that is relevant and timely.

WHAT HAS THE CDLI TEAM AT Y-USA CHANGED IN RESPONSE TO THIS RECOMMENDATION?

Strengthened connections to Y-USA Cause-Driven leadership and Youth Competencies wheel

Updated placemat to include real-life examples of Ys implementing strategies and tactics

Began development of virtual Instructor Led Training (vILT)

Explicitly outlined who to involve in capacity assessment discussions and implementation teams

Posted materials on online community, with timeline guidance on what to access and when

TALK ABOUT IT WITH YOUR TEAM

1. What existing resources do you already use or have access to that could complement or reinforce the CDLI practice areas?
2. Child Trends found that staff and volunteers expressed a strong preference for in-person training rather than distance education. How can your implementation team leverage the learning from CDLI to create meaningful in-person learning experiences for your staff and volunteers?
3. One of the resources that has been created is the CDLI Toolkit.

How might your team use this resource in training your staff and volunteers?

NATIONAL REPORT: RECOMMENDATION 3

FOSTER OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEANINGFUL PEER LEARNING.

- Create opportunities for Y programs to showcase their work and learn about others through peer learning exchanges.
- Provide peer learning opportunities so that programs can observe how the practice areas are implemented in other sites.
- Finally, a few Y programs suggested opportunities to share information through online resources.
- Establish professional learning communities that help to create peer-to-peer information exchanges.

WHAT HAS THE CDLI TEAM AT Y-USA CHANGED IN RESPONSE TO THIS RECOMMENDATION?

Tapping into Ys to showcase their work in the CDLI at venues such as EXPO

Developing Hub expectations to include visiting other Ys to provide direct feedback to Y counterparts

Transitioning monthly webinars with all participating programs into peer learning communities: peer-to-peer sharing meetings (grouped by TA) and critical conversations focusing on each area of practice (grouped by program area)

TALK ABOUT IT WITH YOUR TEAM

1. What aspects of your CDLI work are you excited and interested in showcasing to your peers in the CDLI and the broader Y movement?
2. What do you hope to learn from your peers?
3. How will your implementation team share the knowledge gained in the peer learning community and online community with each other?

NATIONAL REPORT: RECOMMENDATION 4

EQUIP IMPLEMENTATION TEAMS TO DEVELOP SUSTAINABLE PLANS AND MONITOR PROGRESS.

- Y programs are seeking opportunities to focus on sustainability.
- Experts recommend that Y programs decide which adult practice areas to target based on student or program needs and strengths rather than on a pre-determined global sequence.
- Offer supports to increase Pilot sites' capacity to establish effective implementation teams.

WHAT HAS THE CDLI TEAM AT Y-USA CHANGED IN RESPONSE TO THIS RECOMMENDATION?

Nurturing upper level management involvement to create a platform for sustainability within participating Ys

Setting up evaluation tools that will be available at reduced market rate once CDLI funds are no longer available

Creating self-directed learning resources that can be used without the high-level supports currently being offered by CDLI

Developed reflection tools that allow Ys to monitor progress and determine which areas to focus on for continued efforts

TALK ABOUT IT WITH YOUR TEAM

1. Reflect on the implementation team recommendations outlined below: Which implementation team competencies and exposures do you see yourself fulfilling during the Pilot?
2. Talk it over as a team: Discuss the implementation team members' competencies and expertise. Identify any gaps and overlaps. Clarify roles and responsibilities if necessary.
3. If there are any gaps, what organizational supports (e.g. time allocation, training) or additional implementation team members could be considered to address them?

IMPLEMENTATION TEAMS

We recommend a minimum of 3 to 5 individuals serve as core CDLI Implementation Team members. Other individuals may be invited to *participate* in Implementation Team activities from time to time based on their expertise. However, these individuals may not have the same amount of time to participate in ongoing work (e.g., between meetings).

One or more of the members of the core Implementation Team should have competency and exposure in at least one of the following areas:

- **Communicate regularly** with the C-Suite staff on a regular basis
- **Help leaders understand** how to lead through change and ambiguity
- **Be interested** and **experienced** in creating a sustainability plan.
- **Embrace a growth mindset.** Be willing to learn about or have a working knowledge of the 5 practice areas and how they can be applied to youth development
- Commit to continuous improvement. Know how to or have a desire to **use the assessments to better inform decisions**
- **Promote** and **participate** in system changes

NATIONAL REPORT: RECOMMENDATION 5

LEVERAGE POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH TAs TO PROVIDE TAILORED, RELEVANT, FLEXIBLE SUPPORTS.

- Clarify and strengthen the work of the CDLI Technical Advisors.
- Think carefully of how to match TAs with Y programs and balance caseloads.
- Consistently leverage the expertise and talent of the TAs to provide high quality interactions.
- TAs should develop tools and resources with an eye toward sustainability.

WHAT HAS THE CDLI TEAM AT Y-USA CHANGED IN RESPONSE TO THIS RECOMMENDATION?

Standardizing the peer-to-peer sharing meetings and critical examination meetings that will be led by TAs

Structuring peer learning sessions with standard agendas and facilitation guides

Supporting TAs in reviewing assessment results in order to work with sites to create individualized program implementation plans

Developed self-directed learning resources for sites (e.g., toolkit, vILT, short video 'commercials') that can be used without TA support

TALK ABOUT IT WITH YOUR TEAM

1. How does your collaboration with your TA and the information shared get disseminated to other members of the team?
2. What are additional means in which your site can leverage your TA's expertise?

NATIONAL REPORT: RECOMMENDATION 6

CONTINUE TO THINK ABOUT THE EVALUATION AS THE INTERVENTION IS BUILT AND EXPANDED IN PHASES.

- Consider: What is the dosage for youth participation? Will TAs have much larger caseloads in Scale-Up as compared to the Pilot? Is the role of the TA to help build capacity of Y programs so that they can also serve as resources to other Y programs before the CDLI is scaled up? Will the TA role be phased out in the long-run or will Y-USA support these roles in the long term on a smaller scale? If the regional hub will be sustained through Y-USA, should that be a more central feature of the Pilot phase evaluation work?

WHAT HAS THE CDLI TEAM AT Y-USA CHANGED IN RESPONSE TO THIS RECOMMENDATION?

Articulating “what are we testing for” in order to make thoughtful decisions about the study design as we move into Scaling

TALK ABOUT IT WITH YOUR TEAM

1. What challenges do you anticipate in conducting the assessments for CDLI?
2. How will you overcome the challenges you anticipate in conducting the assessments for CDLI?
3. What supports do you need to overcome those challenges?