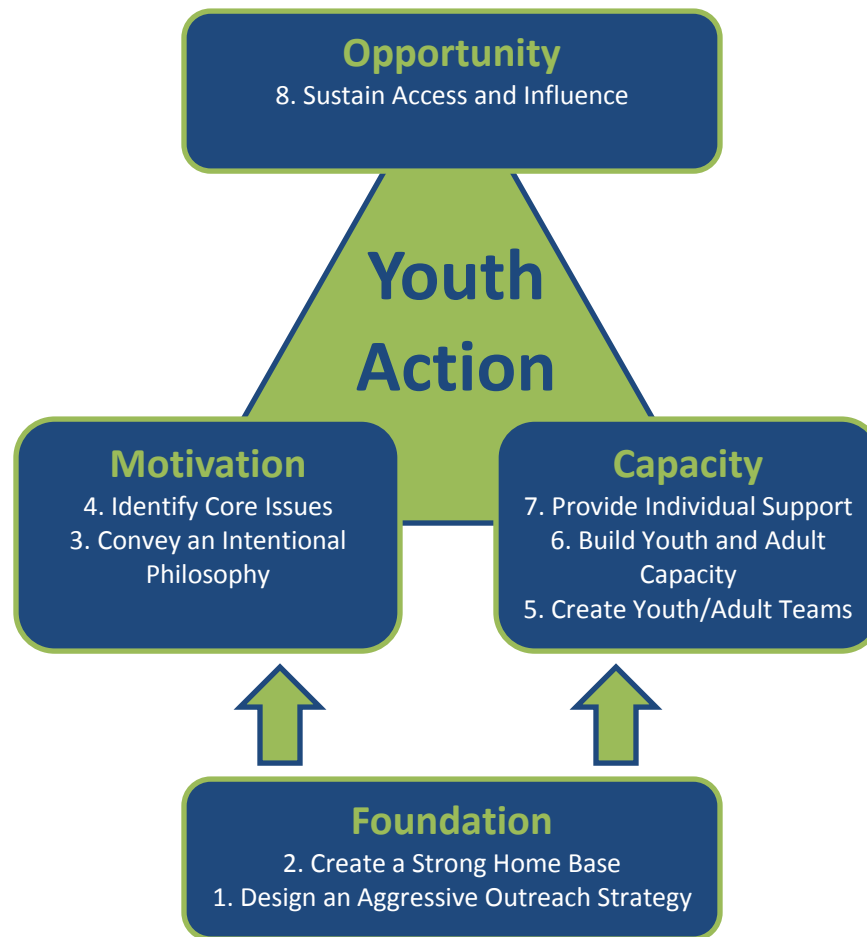Research suggests that youth who are actively engaged in social change efforts have three core strengths:

Capacity: Knowledge, leadership and action skills.

Motivation: Understanding and awareness of issues and root causes, systems, strategies for change, commitment, and a sense of responsibility.

Opportunity: Chances to act on passions, use skills, and generate change through relevant sustained action.

These strengths do not occur by chance. Young people build skills, acquire passions, come to understandings and take on responsibilities for changing their worlds as they grow, learn and develop. Practice suggests that young people are most likely to develop these strengths when they are connected to programs and organizations that have effective youth engagement strategies explicitly designed to address these core needs.

Opportunity
8. Sustain Access and Influence

Youth Action

Motivation
4. Identify Core Issues
3. Convey an Intentional Philosophy

Capacity
7. Provide Individual Support
6. Build Youth and Adult Capacity
5. Create Youth/Adult Teams

Foundation
2. Create a Strong Home Base
1. Design an Aggressive Outreach Strategy

The eight principles are explicitly organized around the three core strengths discussed above, and a fourth category: foundation. Organizations and institutions seeking to engage youth need a strong foundation and a stable operational infrastructure that is suited to the level (e.g., neighborhood, state) and type (e.g., policy advocacy, community mobilizing) of youth engagement desired.

Principle 1: Design an Outreach Strategy

Key Ideas:

- **Create an outreach strategy that connects with existing organizations and be intentional about asking young people to get involved.**

- **Plan a strategy that ensures diversity among youth involved in the program.**

- **Be intentional about creating a "revolving door" of youth leaders to ensure continuity.**

- **Balance the need for continuity in terms of issues with the integration of new young people who bring new ideas.**

Reflection Questions:

1. Does the makeup of your team reflect the broader population with whom we work?

2. Does the team have a breadth of ages and sufficient number of people focusing on a given content area to buffer the loss of young people through graduation or other issues?

3. Is there space for new youth to bring their ideas to the process while maintaining a focus on the overall mission?

4. Is there room for new adult staff to bring their own strengths and vision to the process while maintaining focus on the overall mission?

Principle 2: Create a "Home Base"

Key Ideas:

- **A "home base" provides a system of support that connects youth to organizational resources and designated reliable adults.**

- **Youth need designated, accessible work space, to access basic office resources and facilitated opportunities to engage in community change work.**

- **Creating a "home base" in the neighborhood is important to ground youth engagement work at the neighborhood or community level and to create ownership.**

Reflection Questions:

1. Based on the scope of our program or initiative, where is the best place to have a home base for young people?

2. Who is the right person for young people to connect to on an ongoing basis?

3. Is the workspace appropriate for the type of work being done, responsive to the needs of the team and tied to appropriate resources?

4. Have young people had a role in defining their own space in terms of how it looks and its operating culture?

Principle 3: Convey an Intentional Philosophy

Key Ideas:

- Be clear about why you are engaging young people in the first place.

- Have a clear roadmap that includes short and long-term goals and strategies.

- Short-term actions should be embedded within a long-term agenda.

- Be intentional about creating a "ripple effect" to increase impact.

- Articulate clear roles for young people and adults across multiple levels and strategies.

Reflection Questions:

1. Why are we engaging young people?

2. What are we trying to accomplish, in the long-term and the short-term?

3. What strategies will help us accomplish those goals?

4. What roles can young people and adults play in creating and implementing these strategies?

5. What is out plan for expanding the impact of our work beyond those immediately involved or affected?

Principle 4: Identify Core Issues

Key Ideas:

- Give young people authentic decision-making power.

- Issues should connect to youths' lived experiences.

- Connect immediate issues to broader systemic challenges.

- Link systematic challenges to root causes.

- Simple frames are important.

Reflection Questions:

1. How were our focal issues identified? Were youth involved in that process? Were other adults involved? How were they involved?

2. What are the systemic challenges and/or root causes that underlie our focal issues?

3. Do these issues connect to the lived experiences of the young people that we are trying to engage?

4. Where do the issues fit within a broader framework?

5. Have we researched our issues to better understand how it plays out in this community, how it links to other issues, what its root causes are and what strategies may be most effective to address it?

Principle 5: Create Youth/Adult Teams

Key Ideas:

- Youth/adult teams are made up of individuals that share a common purpose, goals, and strategies.

- Teams need to have clear and meaningful roles and responsibilities for all members that connect to the shared goal.

- All youth and adult team members are held accountable.

- Young people should be engaged as leaders across the organization itself, not just in the community.

- Compensating young people is key.

Reflection Questions:

1. Do young people take an active role in the development and realization of strategies for community change?

2. Do young people and adults understand and own the mission of the organization?

3. Do young people and adults understand their specific roles and responsibilities as they relate to the broader mission of the organization?

4. Do youth and adults share both workload and accountability for their work?

5. Are there structures and time in place for youth and adults to come together to celebrate small wins and bring personal or professional issues to the group?

Principle 6: Build Youth and Adult Capacity

Key Ideas:

- Have a dual focus on building skills and awareness.

- Balance formal training activities with "on the job" leadership development.

- Provide young people and adults with a range of opportunities to build personal, leadership, teamwork, and basic skills.

- Help youth and adult teams develop a shared awareness of the issues, systems, and root causes and how they relate to the community's local history.

- Develop awareness through active, collaborative research and reflection on real issues.

Reflection Questions:

1. Do young people and adults in our organization understand the systems that are at work in our community and how they affect our lives?

2. Have we identified the specific skills that young people working with our organization toward our mission's need to realize their goals?

3. Does adult staff have a clear vision and understanding of the mission on the organization and how to facilitate youth skill development toward that mission?

Principle 5: Create Youth/Adult Teams

Key Ideas:

- **Youth must feel safe and supported.**

- **Organizations should provide personal supports and develop their coping skills as well as their professional skills.**

- **It is important to strike a balance between supporting individual development and focusing on community change.**

Reflection Questions:

1. Do individual team members understand how their own personal development is a critical piece of the larger mission of the organization?

2. Is the process of individual skill development and support continually framed and informed by the larger community mission?

Principle 8: Sustain Access and Influence

Key Ideas:

- **Cultivate an audience and create demand for young people's work.**

- **Create deliberate linkages to other organizations in the community.**

- **Build a sense of collective efficacy around a shared agenda.**

- **Expand the range of concrete opportunities for meaningful youth participation.**

- **Create clear channels for youth to present their findings and recommendations.**

Reflection Questions:

1. What organizations that we already connect with might be interested in engaging youth?

2. What new organizational partnerships might we build thanks to our commitment to youth engagement?

3. What personal relationships might we build on or strengthen in order to expand opportunities for young people?