



Youth Aspirations

Imagining and Navigating Futures in Higher Education

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A 4-H GUIDEBOOK TO PREPARE YOUTH TO THRIVE IN EDUCATION



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UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
EXTENSION



Introduction

About this guidebook

This guidebook takes a new approach to preparing youth for higher education. Rather than focusing on grades, test scores or financing, the activities and program suggestions in this guidebook help young people envision higher education in their future and help them take steps toward aspiration achievement that includes relying on supports, navigating barriers, and reimagining what is possible for them. At its core, this guidebook is about fostering the belief among young people that higher education is for them (i.e. they belong) and that it is within their reach.

About Minnesota 4-H Youth Development

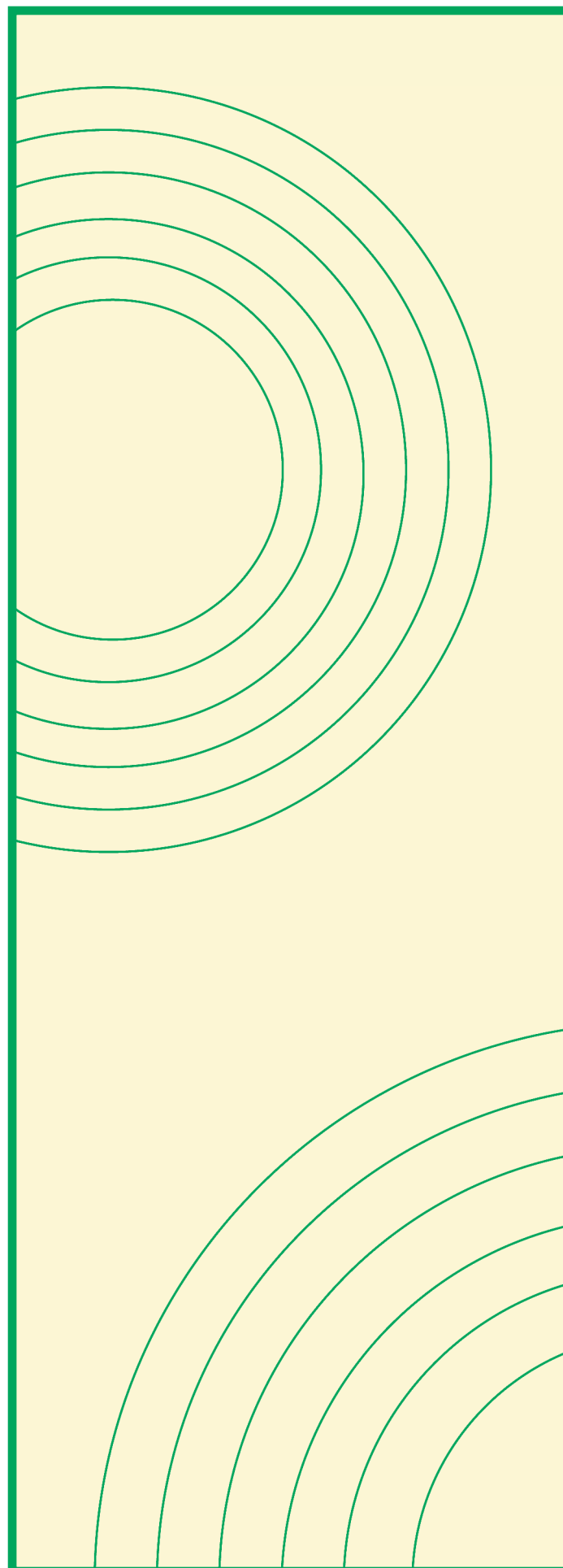
Minnesota 4-H youth development is part of the University of Minnesota Extension Center for Youth Development. It is the largest youth-serving organization in the state and its programming is grounded in research-based practice. Minnesota 4-H is committed to creating a force of young people who are able to learn and lead in a global society. z.umn.edu/mn4h

About University of Minnesota Extension

Extension conducts community outreach in the areas of land, food, community development and vitality, and youth development and family living. Extension has been part of the University of Minnesota since 1909. Extension's mission is to connect community needs and University resources to address critical issues in Minnesota. extension.umn.edu

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Overview of Youth Aspirations

Introduction

The content of this guidebook is rooted in elements of positive youth development and critical pedagogy. It draws from research on educational attainment and youth aspirations of young people in the United States and around the world. This guidebook helps youth aspire, while also supporting them to become active agents in attaining their aspirations by acknowledging and addressing any social constraints and opportunities along their pathway.

This guidebook *recognizes* that higher education attainment is important for young people to secure employment, but it *emphasizes* the idea that higher educational attainment holds deep **intrinsic value** for youth. Higher education attainment can broaden opportunities for youth to feel respected, secure a sense of dignity, and be a force for social change. The program model and activities included in this guidebook are designed to effect the broader well-being of young people through supporting their abilities to achieve their aspirations in and *through* higher education.

This guidebook is not intended to be prescriptive. Instead, it offers **four research-based elements for success on youths' pathway to higher education** that educators can implement flexibly in a way that best meets the needs of organizations and the youth they serve. These are elements that prepare youth for higher education in a way that complements more traditional academic and financial preparation that are commonplace in the formal school setting. This guidebook is designed with middle school-aged youth (who might be the first in their family to go to college) in mind and to be implemented on a college campus, but can be adapted for other age groups and other learning environments.

The essential elements are demonstrated by Figure 1. By including these essential elements in programs, **youth workers** will be granted opportunities to deepen their understanding of youths' lived experiences, identities, and values related to education, with the hope that this will better equip them to provide support. **Youth participants** will have a chance to deeply and critically imagine futures in higher education. They will also reflect on, understand, and make plans to act on barriers and supports they face along their pathways toward aspiration achievement.

Essential elements for aspiration achievement

1. Youth need opportunities to connect their educational aspirations to concrete experiences, such as exploring their interests with university faculty, staff, students, and industry professionals (Appadurai, 2004).
2. Youth need to feel at ease and have a sense of belonging in a higher education setting (Tinto, 2017).
3. Youth need to engage in future planning activities that encourage them to address barriers and to rely on supports (DeJaeghere, 2018).
4. Youth need to imagine their futures with others so they can build a system of support and enrich their visions for their futures (DeJaeghere, 2018).



Figure 1: Essential Elements

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