

PETROC



Developing the involvement of
young people in the management
of projects and initiatives

STRAND 4



HM Government



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Introduction

Actively involving young people with the management of projects and initiatives enables them to share their lived experiences to help inform and shape a project. By listening to young people's insights, service providers, youth workers, or placement providers can better understand their challenges and needs. In addition, encouraging young people to participate increases their sense of ownership which in turn increases confidence and motivation to engage with a project or initiative.

This guide was constructed based on a collaborative work undertaken between March and June 2022, as part of the 'Innovation for Youth and Community', a project funded by the UK Community Renewal Fund and Devon County Council is the lead authority. The project partners who conducted the research were: Battling On CIC, Seadream Education CIC, Whiz Kidz UK CIC, Young Devon, and one of Petroc' projects – Experience Works, part-funded by the European Social Fund.

During feedback sessions, project partners reported that young people accessing a service or placement may have had a negative experience of support services or have felt silenced or dismissed in the education system. They may feel their views are not taken seriously and they can't influence the things which directly affect them. Although there can be reluctance from young people to be involved in sharing their views, for those who do, there is a great feeling of empowerment in having an opportunity to create change in services and have their voices heard. Throughout the partnership, some young people participated in mentors' meetings, others were involved in Youth groups or Youth Councils. The process must keep promises for change and inform participants or else further entrench young people's views of not being valued or heard.



"Even when we speak to them and they say, "I haven't had a huge amount of experience", they all have something that they can share with us that has a big impact and it is really valuable listening to them."

Youth Worker

"Young people consulted with, discussed the importance of having their voice heard. Many had come to us after negative experiences of services and felt empowered to have the opportunity to change this. Recently we have involved several young people in a project run by Children and Family Health Devon where individuals' experiences of health services are voiced, unpicked and used to promote change within the health service. Young people did report that they needed time before they were able to be involved in participation as for many, they felt let down [...]. [The] Young people consulted with also put value on feedback, where they have been courageous enough to use their voice and become involved in participation the team have been gracious, receptive, encouraging and have given constructive feedback, they have also been able to see where their involvement is being used and the outcomes of this. To summarise, it's affirming for young people to be a part of end user involvement."

Youth Worker

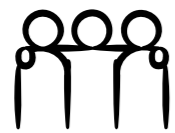


Chapter I: User involvement activities: Passport to Participation

During the project, one of the partners, Young Devon, created a 'Passport to Participation'; a series of practical workshop sessions which were designed to give young people the chance to explore their views and beliefs, whilst also learning to represent the views of others. During the training, young people worked as a team to develop both their personal and social skills. By taking part in the activities, they developed the necessary skills to take on roles to improve dedicated services for them. Activities are a great way to engage young people who may have no previous experience in direct involvement of a project or initiative. Below are tips and general advice on getting started with end user involvement, followed by a summary of participation activities, which can be adapted and tailored as needed. An important outcome of this Passport to Participation, is to develop a social action project or initiative by the young people involved in the activities.

General advice

Getting Started



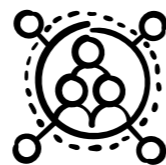
Prioritise Safety, Socialising and Fun

The first steps towards user involvement should prioritise 'icebreakers': introductions and the social side, so that the activity feels light, safe and fun – before any significant contribution. Young people will likely need time before being involved in participatory roles.



Be Receptive and Show They are Valued

There is a common feeling amongst young people of 'Why do they want me?' and that their views are not important, they may feel they will be bullied or pressurised by others and not be able to contribute. Recognise the courage it takes to speak up, be truly receptive and encouraging.



Involve People on Day-to-Day Matters

Topics which relate to the day-to-day will keep individuals motivated and interested, this can include 'basic' matters such as choice on refreshments, budgets, and venues.



Reward and Incentivise

There is a common feeling that their views are being 'taken' in an exploitative process. Where possible, remind young people the skills they are gaining by speaking up or getting involved and provide certificates of involvement. Provide constructive feedback to help individuals develop and meet their goals.



Explain the Process

Make sure to explain clearly what to expect from being involved, how they will share their views, where their input will go and how it will be used. Double check their consent to use their words and views and show them any resulting changes from their input.



Varied Types of Activity

Offers for participant involvement can be broad and young people can be involved in many different ways and at different levels. They can be involved in ways which are accessible for them; this could be simply answering a survey (see Appendix). Or they can be involved in a more in-depth capacity via co-design, as a Young Leader or Youth Council member.



Activity principles

Prioritise Face-to-Face	While social media and electronic communications are quick ways of reaching large audiences, face-to-face is more personal and secures stronger engagement. Surveys can work, but young people often feel like they 'have to' take part or that it is hard work. They might feel more comfortable holding conversations and meeting in person. These are ways which facilitate their enjoyment and their wanting to be involved.
Creativity is Key	It can be a fun, creative, enlightening process with no limits to input or ways to build conversation. This could be via drama, painting, song, photography, collaging, or web searches. 'Adult' meeting scenarios (e.g. round tables with agendas) are unfamiliar and can be frustrating experiences for all parties.
Group based and Interactive	Activities should be interactive and enjoyable, as this will help individuals feel comfortable and motivated, as well as allowing them to think with one another leading to deeper insights.
Physical Movement	Although not all, the majority of the activities involve physical movement which aids to build a fun atmosphere. Movement impacts positively the mood and helps the understanding and building of relationships. However, physical movement may have to be tailored for individual groups and participants.
Debate and Define	Key terms (e.g. 'advocate' or 'participation') should be explored and defined together to ensure everyone understands terminology before beginning any discussion. When talking about participation, one Young Devon's participant stated: "I didn't know it existed" "I don't understand what it is" Young Devon
Shift focus	Help individuals look at situations on a wide scale (e.g. policies, laws, rights) as well as on the day-to-day life of young people. This provides some perspective for both daily life and brings in different viewpoints.



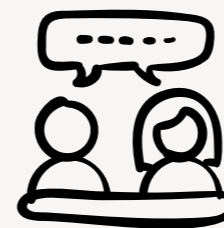
Chapter 2: Activities

Below are some activities which can provide inspiration and be adapted for an organisation's purpose. Some of these activities are exclusively for young people, but most can be done in combination with other volunteers and team members:

Activities to get started

The following activities help create a relationship between the group and explore some terminology that can be used to ensure a similar level of understanding from all parties. These activities can be spread out and organised over a few meetings, or all at once. This will depend on the organisation and the group involved.

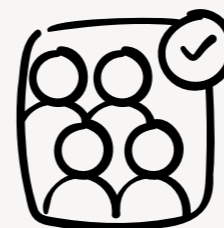
Signing in



Purpose: Allow the group to get to know each other a bit better

Description: Each person signs their name on a piece of paper and declares a fact about themselves. (Approx. 1 minute needed per person).

Group Agreement/ Ground Rules



Purpose: Allow the group to respect and manage what they are doing and take ownership

Description: The group (including mentors/youth workers) are asked to suggest rules to all agree to, and consequences for breaking the rules. Rules are recorded by pen or film. (Approx. 10 minutes).

What is a right?

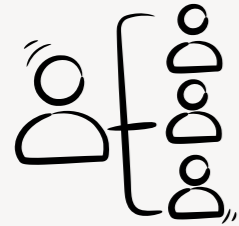


Purpose: To understand what the basic human rights are and why we have them.

Description: Stick 3 pieces of flip chart paper together and draw around a young person laying down. Discuss what are felt to be human rights and write these on the outline, discuss these and if desired introduce Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Available here: www.unicef.org.uk/what-we-do/un-convention-child-rights. (Approx. 20 minutes).

What is 'Participation'? – a mind map

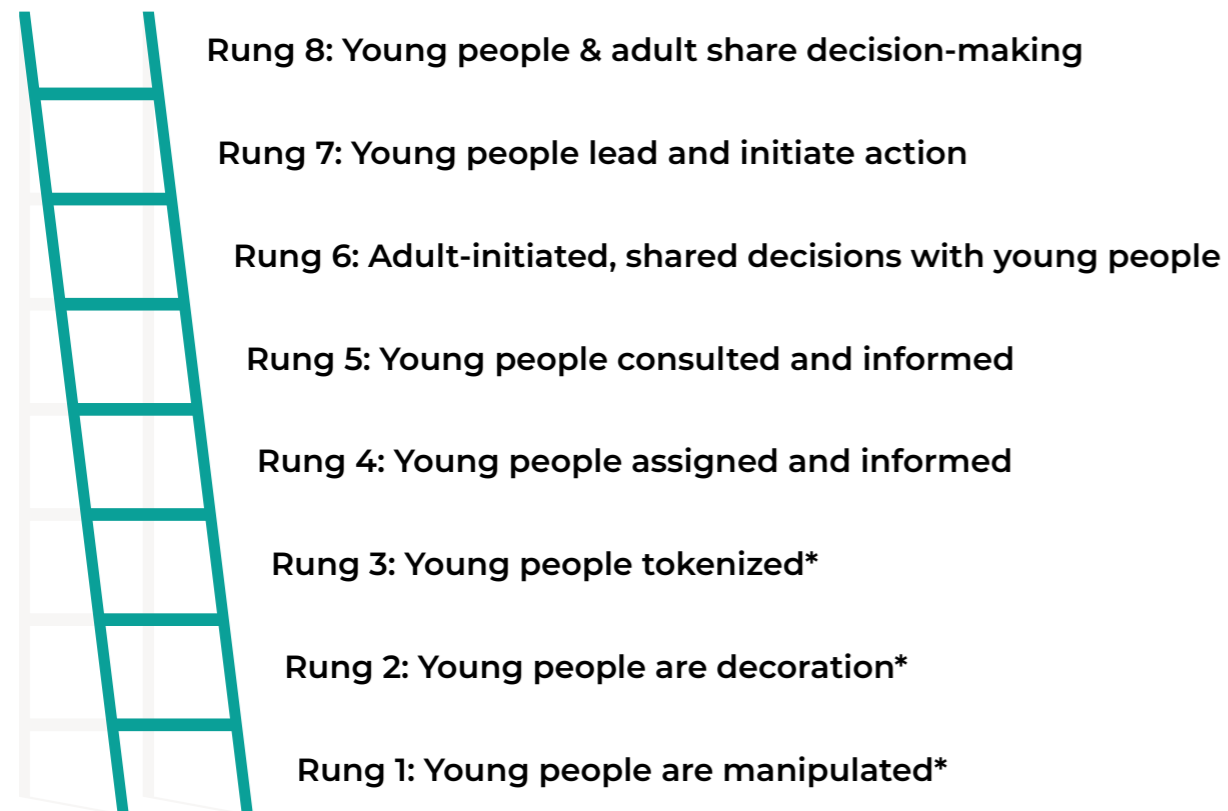


Purpose: For young people to understand what participation is and how they feel about it.

Description: Youth workers use the word 'participation' as the centre of a mind map. Young people name all their ideas and feelings around the topic. A dictionary definition can be used to prompt conversation. The following questions could be used: "Does participation mean different things for adults and young people?"; "What does participation mean to you personally?"; "Do you think that participation is important to young people (in your area)?". (Approx. 20 minutes).

Complement discussion with image of Hart's Ladder of Participation:

Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation



Note: Hart explains that the last three rungs are non-participation

Figure 1
Adapted from Hart, R. (1992) Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre

What is an Advocate?



Purpose: For young people to understand what an advocate is, so that they can start to be one.

Description: Youth workers should discuss with young people what an advocate is and when young people feel they have been an advocate or been advocated for. Use a dictionary definition if needed. Reference the 'Straw debate' activity, below, if an example is needed. (Approx. 20 minutes).

What is stereotyping?



Purpose: So that young people and team members can think about what stereotyping might feel like and what can be done to stop this. To help think through and manage expectations.

Description: Youth workers should ask young people (and others present) to think of stereotypes that are used by others to describe them and discuss how this might make people feel and how to stop this being done. (Approx. 20 minutes).



Simple activities

Depending on the activity, different ways can be adopted to generate engagement. Here are examples of simple activities an organisation can use to promote discussion and participation.

Brainstorming and grouping



Purpose: A way of getting lots of voices heard and energy directed, before grouping similar ideas and gaining direction. This can be used for many activity types, such as planning an event, developing a poster and more.

Description: Set a question to be answered or topic to be explored and ask everyone to write 2-5 answers on a post-it-note. This ensures everyone has a say. These can be read out loud and the youth worker helps to group ideas together (such as food, format, stall types, etc.) and places them on a wall/board/sheet. More time can be given to add further post-it-notes, or to build on existing post-it-notes.

With the support of youth workers, individuals or small groups can take responsibility for an area which interests them. (Approx. 20-30 minutes).

Photo Images



Purpose: To help young people convey emotions or situations in a dramatic way, better understand body language and help develop teamwork.

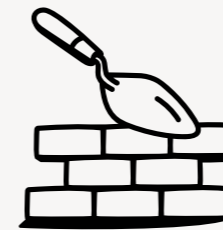
Description: Young people are divided into groups of 3-6 and the worker shouts out images/scenes for the groups to silently organise themselves into (e.g. 'At a party'; 'At a funeral') or to all portray an emotion using only body language. Groups can decide their own scene/emotion and ask the other groups to guess.

If the group is happy, they can capture this exercise on a film/photo to help build awareness of body language. Prompts and discussion can explore the concepts of inclusion, exclusion and participation. (Approx. 20-30 minutes).

Planned activities

Building on the relationships and discussions developed in previous activities, the activities listed below take some greater preparation and resources from the youth worker. These activities allow for a deeper consideration of a topic or scenario and specifically the young person's role and where they can take action.

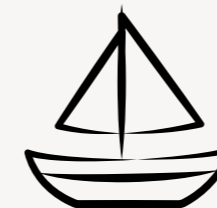
Barrier Wall



Purpose: To help young people think about the types of barriers they may face and understand what needs to be implemented to overcome these. For example, around being active participants in a placement, generally in a workplace or around their future aspirations.

Description: Participants are given 5 pre-prepared 'brick' shaped card/paper. A separate large image of a young person is displayed. Each person is asked to write one barrier per 'brick' These are laid on-top of the image of the young person and discussed. Young people then choose a selection of 'bricks' each and write a solution to the barrier on the back – these are then visually laid out as 'steps' rather than a wall. (Approx. 20-30 minutes).

Planning Boat



Purpose: To help young people to plan a project they are running or could be involved with.

Description: Young people draw a sailboat image either as individuals on A4 or as groups on a flipchart paper. The image should include a sun, ropes, sails, anchor, and clouds.

On the ropes to the anchor, young people should write about what is or might 'hold them back'. In the boat, they should write who/what they need to help their project to be a success. On the sails, they should write what they will need to help their project get started. In the clouds, they should write what might 'blow them off course' or distract them from the task. And in the sun, they should write what success would look like at the end of the project. (Approx. 20-30 minutes).

Strawing Debate



Purpose: To teach young people debating skills and encourage them to support opinions which are not necessarily their own and to be advocates.

Description: Divide the group into 2 and seat them on opposite sides of the room (one side is FOR, the other AGAINST). Young people are given 2 or 3 'straws' (or tokens) each.

A topic of interest is chosen by the youth worker or young people, this could relate to a societal topic or a more local/organisational one. The team's debate, and every time a point is made it costs 1 straw/ token.

Youth workers lead a discussion after the debate to see how people felt. (Approx. 20-30 minutes).

Designing workplace



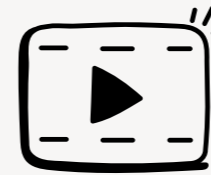
Purpose: For young people to work as a team to think about the laws, expectations and challenges of a work environment. This activity should make young people think about their own values and aspirations and how to ensure everyone is being treated fairly.

Description: In groups, young people should work on a piece of flip chart paper and they are asked to make their own placement/workplace. The groups should create: A name, a logo, a mission statement/ tagline, 2 company policies, 2 company ambitions, 1 benefit of being at the placement, 1 bad thing about being at the placement. The groups then present their descriptions and at the end all those who are present can vote on where they would like to work. (Approx. 20-30 minutes).

Involved activities

The below activities are focused on creating a product and explicitly require the young person to take responsibility for the final result. These activities require a young person, with support where needed, to understand that their views and words will be shared with a wider audience.

Case study/ video diary



Purpose: To track young people's development through the placement, allowing them to express the strengths and weaknesses they have discovered about themselves and to reflect at project end.

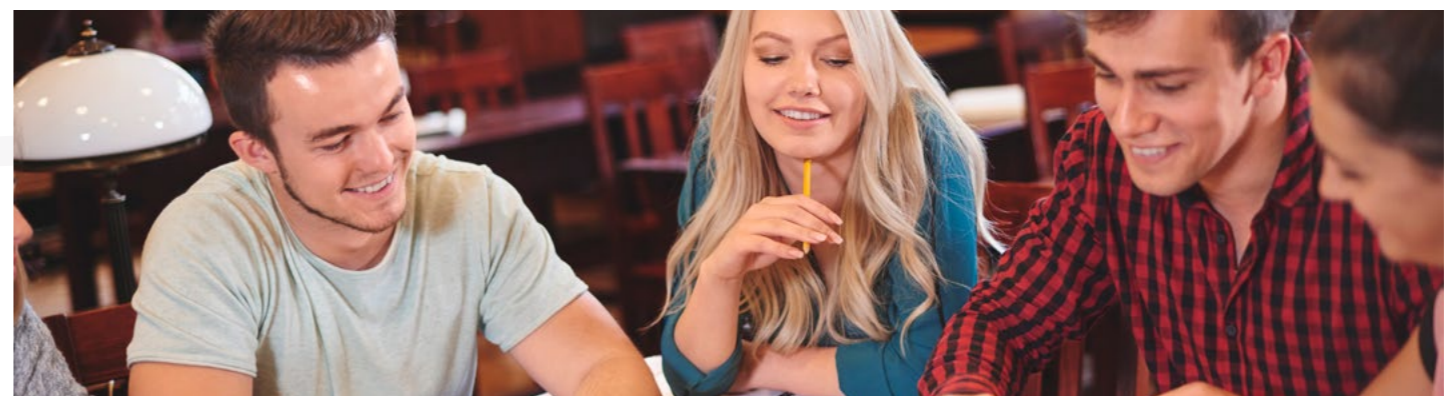
Description: At regular intervals, and at the end, young people should record their thoughts and feelings, especially related to their goals. This can be done with creative methods and with the support of youth workers or not. Prompt them to record their, the project/sessions they were involved with, what went well, what could have been done better, what they have learnt – and if possible gather a final quote and a picture. (Approx. 20-30 minutes).

Making a newspaper article



Purpose: An important publicity tool. It allows young people to show their colleagues, support networks and other young people what they have been doing. Celebrating achievement and encouraging others' involvement.

Description: Create a newspaper/website article about their project, either to promote the planning and what is coming up or to describe what has happened. Use images and quotes from the process so far where possible. (Approx. 20-30 minutes)



Conclusion

There are an almost infinite number of ways to involve young people in an organisation or project – whether with problem solving, firm decision making, sharing of opinions, or selecting of tasks they feel confident contributing with. This guide provides a selection of activities and principles which not only provide an opportunity for young people to be heard, but develop the skills and vocabulary along the way which will aid ongoing engagement, whilst always prioritising a social atmosphere.

By attempting some of these activities, an organisation's staff will build an understanding of the individuals and groups they work with. The youth worker and the young people involved will learn of the motivations and skills present and find the level of ongoing involvement they are happy with. Potentially working towards a dedicated initiative, project or social action of their own where they can apply the same techniques and discussion points.



Appendix: Feedback sheet

The below is an example template for the simplest form of user involvement, gathering feedback. This template can be adapted to your needs and circumstances. Remember, a young person may feel most comfortable filling this out with support, explaining their answers rather than writing them, or may find it easier to complete in pairs or groups.

End of course/project/activity review



Download the template

Tutor Name:	1 = disagree 4= agree				
I received good advice and guidance before the course/activity/project started?	1	2	3	4	How did it help you?
Staff supported me to achieve my targets	1	2	3	4	
My support worker was organised and explained things clearly	1	2	3	4	
The feedback the support worker gave me helped me improve	1	2	3	4	
The course/activity/project was interesting	1	2	3	4	What was interesting?
I have developed new skills	1	2	3	4	What new skills have you developed?
My awareness of equality, diversity and Fundamental Values has increased	1	2	3	4	What have you learnt?
I knew who to contact if I had a problem?	1	2	3	4	
How did you find the facilities?	1	2	3	4	What could be improved?
I feel the skills I have learnt will apply to my employment goals	1	2	3	4	
Please tell us what you liked most about the course/activity/project					
Please tell us what you like least about the course/activity/project					
Would you recommend the course/activity/project to others?					



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