



We Asked - Youth Answered:

7 Tips for Meaningful Youth Engagement

Promoting inclusivity and valuing diverse perspectives is crucial for organisations to thrive in today's rapidly changing world.

“Youth are a significant segment of our society, if we are talking in terms of numbers, we are talking about **1.8 billion people** and we cannot sideline them.

Vanessa Chisakula (CIVICUS, Youth Action Team)

Including young people and valuing their perspectives is essential, as they bring fresh ideas, innovative thinking, and unique insights that can drive positive change and a better future for all.

Continue reading for 7 key considerations for organisations aiming to be more inclusive and ensure a more enabling space for young people to participate and make decisions.

1

Remember that young people have unique perspectives and experiences.

Allow them to input their own ideas and needs in their own words **without making assumptions!** Celebrate young people's fresh perspectives. Young people are innovative, and often come up with new, out-of-the-box, solutions to address old problems.

How?

One way is by asking open questions!

“How can this programme be improved?” would enable a wider range of responses than ‘Would the current programme be improved if we did XYZ?’.

2

Do not consider young people as a monolith - consider the intersectional identities that shape experiences and perspectives when consulting with young people.

Young people may be busy with school, family, or other commitments. **Consultations need to be carried out at times appropriate to their availability and interest.**

Make communications more accessible! Consider language and visuals. Appeal to your audience (this goes beyond young people)!

This means **avoiding jargon and tailoring your message.** It may be necessary to provide more background and context to provide young people with the information they need to feel comfortable sharing input - but remember to do this **without patronising** them!

“We're not meeting young people where they are. It's thinking about how we can reach out and be where they are... It's listening to what they have to say and adapting, making it easier for more young people to get involved.

Abiee & Maddie (Girlguiding SW England)

3 Equip young people with the support and resources they need to grow into confident leaders! Consider mentorship opportunities.

While young people may initially require more support than someone with more years of work experience, by hiring and supporting youth to learn and grow you are **investing in a more sustainable future and supporting young people to become confident leaders.**

Create a conducive environment for young people to engage, allowing them to connect with professionals in the field and setting them up for success.

Caleb Masusu (Restless Development, Global Voice and Democracy Manager).

To support young people - especially young women to lead, **World YWCA's Rise Up! podcast** series provides tools and resources on advocacy and training. Each episode features a conversation with a prominent feminist on the challenges that young women face today.

4 Check in often with your youth staff members. Make sure you are meeting their needs and that they feel able to thrive and grow.

Design mechanisms that encourage young people to share feedback and gather feedback in various ways. Some may not feel comfortable raising their voice to power holders so ensure they can share feedback in an anonymous way, through online and/or offline mechanisms etc.

Acknowledge power dynamics before entering into a conversation and **be intentional about flattening hierarchies!** Ensure that the tone of any conversation is **open and horizontal** so that young people feel comfortable expressing themselves. **Create a safe space** and lead by example - show that it is ok to ask questions or initiate conversations.

Example: When designing any internal communications strategy, include young people as one of the target audiences and develop messaging, feedback mechanisms, communications channels and materials with young people in mind. **Do not develop these strategies for but with young people!** Consult them when developing strategies to ensure their needs and priorities are reflected.

5 Close feedback loops! Ensure that you follow up with young people and show how their feedback was taken up.

This will **prevent young people from becoming disenfranchised and feeling that their participation was tokenistic** and that their ideas and opinions are not valued.

Psst - are you interested in how to build a great online feedback mechanism?
Check out our guide!

6

Take it a step further! Don't just allow youth voices to help shape your work but create spaces for young people to lead.

Engage young people throughout all stages of your work! Not only in programme design, but also to lead programme implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Shared ownership will **foster more buy-in** from young people and **drive more sustainable results**.

Also **avoid 'box-ticking engagements'** - as we heard from Vanessa in our accompanying **Accountability Pill podcast** - if a young person comes to a space with all the intention to participate, but the participation leads nowhere, it becomes a hindrance rather than an enabling space.

There are many ways that organisations can truly **provide spaces for young people to lead; for example forming youth advisory panels, or hiring youth coordinators**. Our member Restless Development goes one step further, establishing positions for youth board representatives and additionally inviting a young colleague to each Global Board Meetings to share their experiences within the organisation and **add their perspectives into leadership conversations**.

7

Allow young people to hold power holders to account!

Young people should be engaged to lead accountability processes and ensure that decision makers deliver on their commitments. With some support, resources and training to strengthen their capacities in holding power holders to account, young people help to ensure that programmes are delivering lasting positive impact for the communities they aim to serve.

Check out INTRAC's '**Cookbook for Youth-Led Accountability**', with evidence gathered through the **Development Alternative** (a project led by Restless Development and coordinated in collaboration with Accountable Now, Integrity Action, Dot Lebanon, War Child, Y Care International, and the YMCA Madagascar that aimed to challenge traditional development models and shift power to communities and young people so that they can hold development actors to account, and lead the design of solutions to problems they identify).



Want to learn more about engaging young people, from young people? Check out our **Accountability Pill podcast 'Youth Engagement' series**. In the first 3 episodes of the series, Accountable Now's Olivia Cox and Loveleen Kumari chat with Caleb Masusu (*Restless Development*), Abiee & Maddie (*Girlguiding South West England*) and Vanessa Chisakula (*CIVICUS*).

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