Department
for Culture,
Media & Sport

Guidance
Methods for engaging young people
Published 28 January 2026

Applies to England

Contents

This guidance will outline different methods for engaging young people (YP) in policymaking.

The table below uses the ROAMEF cycle to show how young people can be best engaged at each stage in the policy cycle. Use the links to navigate to the relevant methods section, which provides information on when and how to use each method, along with guidance from youth sector organisation experts.

ROAMEF cycle stage	Method
Rationale (R)	Youth commissioners
	Youth Advisory Boards
	Focus groups
	User diaries
	Surveys
Objectives (O)	Roundtables
	Interviews

	User diaries
	Surveys
	Focus groups
	Workshops
Appraisal (A)	Workshops
	Youth Advisory Boards
Evaluation planning	Youth evaluators / inspectors
	Workshops
	Roundtables
Implementation / Monitoring (M)	Youth Advisory Boards
Evaluation (E)	Youth evaluators/inspectors
	Surveys
	User diaries
	Roundtables
Feedback (F)	Youth Advisory Boards
	Workshops
	Interviews
	Surveys

Whichever method you choose, the materials and approach taken should be age appropriate, fun, engaging for participants and beneficial for all parties.

Any session involving young people should be collaborative and participatory. Young people should have full control over their input.

The main aims of any session should be:

- to empower the young people involved
- to let young people know how their input will be (or has been) used
- to keep young people updated as to the next steps of the process,

Generally, it's a good idea to reach out to Youth Sector Organisations about methods to use and the session design or delivery, to see if they can provide help or advice.

Focus groups

When to use

Focus groups are useful in the early stages of development, to gather initial insights from groups of YP on a topic or issue.

An important factor to consider when designing focus group materials with young people is ensuring that the topics and materials covered are appropriate for the participants. As with any focus group, it is particularly important to treat the participating young people as the experts on the issue, whilst the researcher assumes the role of learner.

Focus groups: best practice checklist

When running a focus group, try to:

- set out aims early on and establish a code of conduct
- have a discussion surrounding consent and safeguarding at the offset
- start with a warm-up activity or icebreaker to facilitate discussion
- provide food and drink (if meeting in person)
- meet young people in a space that is familiar to them (if possible) or consider meeting online

If possible, avoid:

- making the session too structured or formal
- assuming the role of a teacher in a classroom
- having too large a group (generally, go for less than 10 participants)
- running the session longer than an hour
- asking young people to travel to you
- asking direct questions, or falling into the structure of a group interview

Interviews

When to use

Interviews are useful when collating more in-depth data regarding young people's perspectives and experiences of an issue, especially where their opinions or lived experience might be very subjective or individualised (for example, political perspectives, or medical histories).

Interviews: best practice checklist

When holding interviews, try to:

- let young people know what topics that will be covered in advance
- remind them they can leave the interview or have a break at any time
- use mixed media forms
- break up the questions with other activities for example, art or role-play
- ask them to show/demonstrate, rather than explain (for example, 'Do you have a photo?' 'Can you show me how you do that?')

If possible, avoid:

- conducting the interview in a formal environment; let the young person pick the setting, including online/in person
- wearing clothing that's too formal
- giving the young person the sense there is a 'right answer'
- assuming you know what they mean; ask them to demonstrate, describe or show an example of what they're talking about

Workshops

When to use

Workshops are a great tool for co-design and co-production and can be used at any time within the policy development cycle. This is one of the best methods for working collaboratively with young people to generate new ideas

and solve complex problems.

Workshops should be engaging and fun, striking the right balance between structure and creativity. There are plenty of online tools that can be used to make a virtual workshop just as engaging, but it is best to   use them purposefully, that a clear explanation is provided as to how to use them, and that access needs are considered.

For co-design workshops, try to include young people's ideas for the structure and content of the session. This will ensure that decision-making power is shared equally between facilitators and young people.

Workshops: best practice checklist

When holding workshops, try to:

- minimise input from facilitators; 90% should be participant-led

- switch up the tone of delivery

- use creative and engaging tools and materials for activities such as games, visual aids or physical movement

- reserve 10 minutes at the end for questions and a review

- if running a series of workshops, ask for feedback for the next session, and try to action it

If possible, avoid:

- staying on one single task for too long (5 to 20 mins is ideal) or making the delivery style and content like a lesson

- trying to fit too much into one session; prioritise quality of engagement over quantity of activities

- using too much text in materials

Youth advisory boards (YABs)

When to use

Once set up, youth advisory boards are continuously engaged throughout the life cycle of an organisation, initiative or programme.

A youth advisory board (sometimes also known as a youth steering group) is a

group of 10 to 15 young people who act as advisors to an organisation, local council, research project or other entity. They are often employed to give young people a say in an organisation's decisions, and provide a steer on internal issues that matter to them. They are particularly useful to establish strong relationships and foster partnerships between young people and adults.

YABs are sometimes critiqued for making inequalities worse or for lacking in diversity. When setting up a YAB, think about how to combat this in the selection and recruitment process. It is best to use selective sampling techniques to reach more diverse groups of young people.

[See the YAB Toolkit for more information](#)

YABS: best practice checklist

When setting up YABs, try to:

- establish a fair process for selecting YAB members
- prioritise diversity
- provide ongoing training
- ensure that people engage thoroughly with a YAB, and it is not just performative- identify an adult to liaise with the leadership team.
- ensure there is a clear and comprehensive feedback loop

If possible, avoid:

- asking too much; make sure to establish a clear scope for the group
- having a competitive 'recruitment' process; this could marginalise certain groups
- restricting input to 'youth' topics
- underestimating the time and resource needed for YABs: they require more buy-in than data collection, so young people's input should be appropriately valued

Best practice case study: St Basils Youth Homelessness Reference Group

St Basils (a youth homelessness charity in the West Midlands) ran a national youth homelessness reference group. Government departments used the group to test policy with young people throughout the year and allow them to share their views. The reference group ended with a national

Youth Homelessness Parliament session with a minister.

This is an example of engaging with young people on topics that are relevant to them, but also have wider policy implications. The opportunity allowed young people to engage with senior government officials and make their voices and opinions heard. This resulted in tangible outcomes, such as the 12 co-designed Youth Standards, to foster an environment where young people feel supported by their local community.

Read the St Basils' 2022 Youth Homeless Parliament report and information about their commitment to youth voice work.

Roundtable discussions

When to use

This is the most routine method for ministerial engagement with youth voice. These work best with smaller groups of YP who are familiar with each other.

The participants are usually given topics to talk about/touch upon and then given the opportunity to share opinions, experiences and thoughts with the group, often followed up by time for questions. Likely to be more useful to engage with older YP who feel more confident speaking in public.

Roundtable discussions: best practice checklist

When holding roundtable discussions, try to:

- keep the topics specific and well structured to avoid digression
- allow for sufficient preparation time
- give young people enough time to 'warm up'
- give young people control over the topic in the planning process
- provide alternatives to speaking, such as an online whiteboard tool

If possible, avoid:

- structuring the discussion like a task; ensure young people feel comfortable and not pressured to take part or speak

- using the discussion as a way to explore more sensitive or personal topics

Surveys

When to use

Surveys are useful for one-off mass engagement on more generalised issues. For example, they can be used as a starting point to gather insights before diving into more in-depth discussions through qualitative methods.

They are also useful for high-level feedback where choices are more constrained, such as during the evaluation process. They are not ideal for ideation or design processes.

To make sure the engagement is not tokenistic, it's important to avoid using surveys as a stand-alone method when working with young people; surveys should instead introduce future collaboration, or build on previous work.

Surveys: best practice checklist

When using surveys, try to:

- involve young people in the design to check the content is accessible and engaging
- include a user guide and use examples to illustrate trickier concepts.
- include visual elements
- liaise with adults (teachers, guardians, organisations) to get consent (where appropriate)
- follow-up with a summary of results and how they will be used

If possible, avoid:

- making the questions too long or numerous
- using surveys as a stand-alone method
- over-generalising findings; data may not be representative
- asking ambiguous questions or questions with wide scope
- using technical jargon, buzzwords, acronyms or abbreviations

Youth commissioners

When to use

It is best to have continuous engagement at the organisational level, similar to Youth Advisory Boards (YABs).

However, youth commissioners are more embedded into the strategic internal decisions of the organisation, as opposed to advising on the outputs of the organisation's activity as YABs do.

Youth commissioners are involved in the commissioning process of an organisation or entity; they are given a say in how to allocate resources, review organisational engagement, and support outcomes.

For examples of best practice, see the UEL (University of East London)'s young commissioners guide and the Scouts' youth commissioners guidance.

Youth commissioners: best practice checklist

If using youth commissioners, try to:

- spread awareness among young people about this lesser known method and how to get involved
- prioritise diversity in the selection/recruitment of youth commissioners
- provide in-depth training and support, including a management chain
- give young people autonomy and responsibility to make genuine decisions, and commit to following through

If possible, avoid:

- using youth commissioners without the appropriate resources; this model requires more organisational buy-in than other methods such as workshops, so young people's input should be appropriately valued
- setting up the commission without consulting the young people themselves; let them contribute

Youth/peer researchers

When to use

It is best to use youth/peer researchers when the topic being researched involves a specific group of young people, especially if this group is traditionally underrepresented. It is equally important when the young people themselves are interested in a specific topic to include them in the research process.

Peer researchers are young people who don't usually specialise in academia that are brought in to contribute to a research project or process due to having lived experience or expertise on the topic in question. This role is usually restricted to an older age range (14+) to ensure the young people are fully engaged with the methodology, processes and ethics of the research.

Read more about the role of peer researchers.

For best practice examples, see the UK Youth Belong Collective and the National Lottery Community Fund's youth led peer research

Youth/peer researchers: best practice checklist

When using youth/peer researchers, try to:

- ensure the brief is clearly defined

- provide upskilling/ training on data collection and analysis

- provide compensation for young people

- collaborate with young people to generate research questions

- establish a chain of management and make sure there is sufficient supervision to pick up on safeguarding issues

If possible, avoid:

- making assumptions about what young people know about other young people, based on supposed 'shared' experiences; age ranges can not be enough to recognise common experiences across different groups of young people

- underestimating the importance of safeguarding (see safeguarding guidance for additional resources)

Best practice case study: youth researchers

Peer Action Collective

The Peer Action Collective (PAC) is a network of peer researchers and changemakers funded by the Youth Endowment Fund. Young people with lived experience of violence collaborate with researchers to conduct research into the causes of youth violence. These insights are then turned into tangible actions. Their past work includes changing in-school responses to violence, working on local mental health service provision for young people, and co-producing violence reduction strategies.

The PAC collaborates with a variety of other organisations for their peer research programme, including the #iWill fund. See the PAC website for more information.

Youth/peer evaluators and inspectors

When to use

You can use youth/peer evaluators and inspectors in the monitoring and evaluation stages of a project or policy; early on if evaluating a new service or structure.

Youth evaluators assist in process, programme and impact evaluations of research, policies or services. They often take the form of a rolling group of young people recruited by an organisation for evaluation purposes, but they can also be brought on board for one-off input on specific projects.

Youth inspectors are recruited to train as inspectors, to provide feedback on projects, services or programmes from a young person's perspective.

For best practice examples, see Youth voice in the #iwill fund and the Young Inspector's Framework

Youth/peer evaluators and inspectors: best practice checklist

When using youth/peer evaluators and inspectors, try to:

- clearly explain this role, as it may not be obvious
- ensure young people are trained and well supported, including on the methodologies they are being asked to evaluate
- provide opportunities for shadowing or peer support to build confidence
- liaise with external organisations;

Try not to bring young people on board for ad-hoc 'sign-offs' of work. Their skills and expertise need to translate into the piece of work they are being asked to evaluate.

User diaries

When to use

You can use user diaries at the idea-generation stage of a project. They are helpful when trying to gain understanding of young people's experiences of an issue or process. You can also use them to monitor and evaluate the impact of a service or policy on young people.

User diaries are descriptive accounts of a user's experiences or activities relating to a service or product. User diaries for young people can, and should, go further than the traditional written diary entry format. Alternative formats include digital diaries (using social media platforms for example), video diaries and other creative mediums such as visual art, music and performance.

For best practice examples, see Our voices: Diaries and Life Stories and The Dos and Dont's of Diary Studies.

User diaries: best practice checklist

When using user diaries, try to:

- let young people decide how they want to document their experiences, ensuring they are consistent in their approach
- encourage creativity
- check in regularly with young people participating
- give the young people a template/structure with prompts for each entry
- ensure resource barriers are addressed, for example, the use of technology and providing materials

If possible, avoid:

- using the term 'user diary'; depending on the format, alternatives include video diaries/ vlogs, storyboards and podcast entries
- framing this as 'homework' or a task they are being set
- providing instructions that are too vague or abstract- give a specific brief

with simple instructions and ideas

Youth grant award panels

When to use

You can use youth grant award panels when deciding where to allocate budget, or deciding between different funding applications.

When choices need to be made about how to allocate budget or award grants for services that affect young people, this presents an opportunity to involve young people in making those decisions, either as part of a panel involving adults, or as a parallel panel. Youth grant panels are already used by various local councils to help allocate funding to projects or programmes that are supported by young stakeholders in the area. DCMS regularly invites young people to join panels and make decisions on grant applications.

For best practice examples read about the [Young Hammersmith and Fulham Foundation Youth Grants Panel](#).

Youth grant award panels: best practice checklist

When using youth grant award panels, try to:

- keep the application process for the panel simple, and if possible, use creative media forms
- offer a training session on the grant application and award process so young people feel well-informed
- be transparent about what factors young people need to consider when evaluating applications

If possible, avoid:

- assuming that young people are familiar with what youth opportunities are already in place in the area
- trying to fit too much into one session; break down the session over a few days to avoid overwhelming young people

Youth input in recruitment

When to use

This method is used when recruiting new staff (such as board members).

Young people can be involved in the recruitment process in various ways, including the design of the process (such as crafting interview questions or written tasks), as a youth interview panel, or in the deliberation process.

For a best practice example, see Participation People's guidance on involving young people in recruitment.

Youth input in recruitment: best practice checklist

When using this method, try to:

- make sure the young people that are providing input come from diverse backgrounds
- arrange for young people to provide input at times that are suitable for them
- make sure that young people are familiar with the assessment criteria for the role

You should not leave the young person alone with candidates if setting up youth interview panels; allocate two (or more) adult facilitators to oversee the process.

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