Westminster Foundation

INTERMEDIATE YOUTH VOICE DIGITAL ASSETS

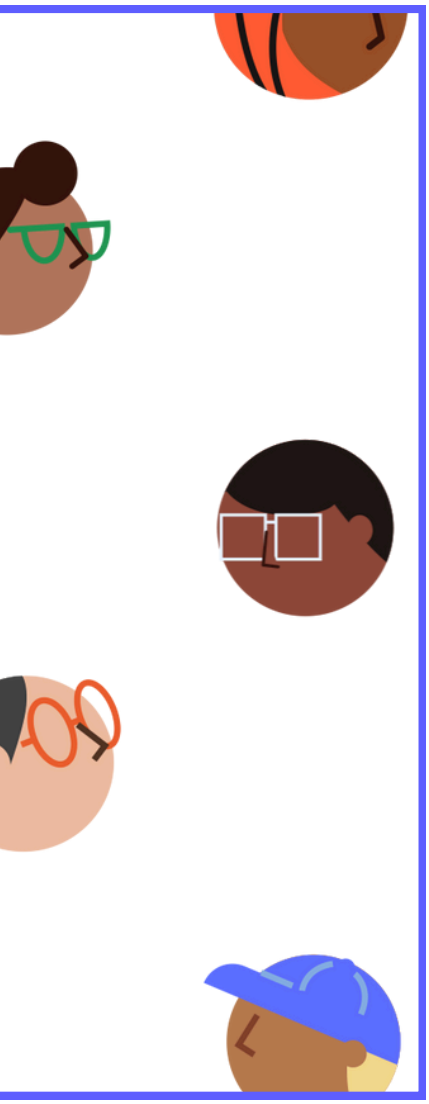


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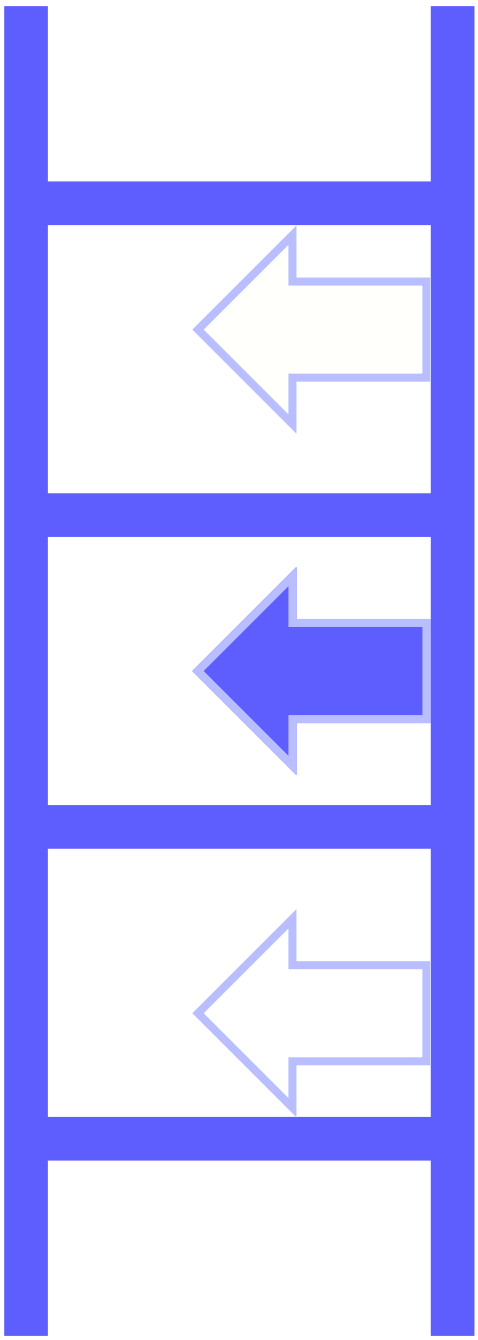
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The Westminster Foundation Youth Voice Digital Assets: *Intermediate*



Inspired by Hart's Ladder of participation and the work of The Westminster Foundation's grantee network, this guide presents a reimagined ladder of youth involvement and participation.

Step 7-8- Young people have multiple routes of participating in decision making, enabled by the organisation with adequate support and remuneration dependent on their output. They steer the key conversations, suggest changes which together with the organisation they work to enact. They are involved in discussions concerning the organisation's outputs and outcomes, including board representation.

Step 4-6 – Young people are offered opportunities to consult on some decisions on topics initiated by the organisation. This might come in the form of a steering board for example. They are well-informed, and decisions are shared. They are involved in some key discussions concerning the organisation's outputs and outcomes. They have the option to suggest areas of focus for the organisation.

Step 1-3 – Young people are assigned to take roles that involve their time and expertise based on the organisation's invitation. Their perspectives inform the organisation's decision-making. They might vote on some key discussions concerning the organisation's outputs and outcomes.

The Westminster Foundation Youth Voice Digital Assets: *Intermediate*



Once you have grasped the basics of Youth Voice, understood its importance, and heard from the communities of young people you support about what they need, the next step is to further your ideas by deepening engagement and building more sustainable strategies.

The Westminster Foundation's Intermediate Digital Asset is designed to support you through this process, offering practical tools and insights to enhance youth participation and ensure young voices continue to be centered.

By learning and reflecting on this information, you can create purposeful, well-supported opportunities that truly empower young voices in your organisation's development and decision-making processes.

At the end of this guide, you can use this information to evaluate the effectiveness of your initiatives in embedding youth voice.

Deepening engagement & building sustainable youth involvement strategies



	Top 10 tips to consider when creating spaces for young people in decision making
1	**Be led by young people and your shared values from the beginning** Authentically co-creating initiatives with young people has been evidenced to be most effective, particularly when the purpose of the action and clear roles are outlined and agreed upon with those involved from the outset. When engaging young people in shaping the direction of your programmes, ensure their perspectives are reflected in the core values of the work. This also applied when creating a youth board or advisory panel for example. Establish a sense of ownership and trust by offering constructive feedback and reflection touch points at each step. You want to maintain the initiative's relevance to the young people you support's insights and aspirations. Agreement on shared values between your organisation and young people creates a solid foundation for collaboration.
2	**Organisation resource and intention audit** It is important to conduct an internal audit of your organisation's resources and intentions when embedding Youth Voice. This step involves a thorough assessment of whether you have the staff experience, capacity, financial and other resources such as wellbeing provision or means to signpost when you engage young people. An intention audit is not restricted to organisations at the beginning of their Youth Voice journey, it is for everyone as it clarifies the purpose behind the involvement of young people in the way you intend to. It prompts you to ask the following: • What outcomes are you aiming for? • How does youth participation align with your organisational goals? Clarifying this helps to set realistic expectations for all involved.
3	**Create purposeful roles with different entry points for youth involvement** People have varying levels of experience and confidence, offering diverse opportunities for involvement is essential. This could range from ad-hoc consultations and short-term advisory roles to further responsibility and accountability in your organisation's decision-making positions. Purposeful layered roles mean young people have more choices and opportunities to shape initiatives. It provides a better understanding of the impact of their contribution and what the organisation benefits from their insights. Multiple entry points ensure inclusivity and help to foster a working culture where young people with different levels of commitment can participate meaningfully.

	Top 10 tips to consider when creating spaces for young people in decision making
4	**Embed feedback mechanisms at different stages** Feedback is essential to establish a continuous and evolving Youth Voice process. Implement feedback loops at different stages of your projects – at the beginning, during, and after key phases. The design of your feedback loops will consider the needs and communication styles that are suitable for your community of young people to be effective. Regular check-ins with them will allow you to adjust initiatives in response to their input, ensuring their needs are met and their contributions are valued. Moreover, this encourages a culture of openness and accountability within the organisation.
5	**Invest in and incorporate optional wellbeing support** Engaging in your organisation's initiatives may create further demands for young people, both emotionally and mentally. Our Youth Voice Beginner's Asset references to young people as not being a monolith. Your organisation's Youth Voice activities will not suit every young person's capacity or needs. Providing optional well-being support that considers this and demonstrates your organisation's commitment to its holistic experience is key. For example, this might include optional access to referral services, counselling services, peer support networks, or well-being workshops. Prioritising what the impact of their participation may be on their mental and emotional health, you create safer environments where young people feel supported to fully participate and have optional adequate aftercare.
6	**Streamlined communication channels** Effective communication is vital to the success of Youth Voice. Streamline communication channels so that young people have clear, easy-to-access information, as well as knowledge of the key trusted adults in your organisation and their roles. If additional materials are required to be reviewed by them, ensure they are located in one place that is accessible to all. Avoid jargon without a glossary of key terms to reference and unnecessary complexity. Whether you are using emails, messaging apps, or regular meetings; ensure your communication is lean, transparent, timely, and respectful of young people's time and preferred modes of communication.
7	**Ensure adequate resourcing in time, money & staff experience** Embedding Youth Voice isn't something that can be achieved without appropriate investment. You need to fully understand the initiative or project you want to involve young people in, research by learning from other organisations and communicating with your intended engagement groups. Allocate sufficient time, factoring in potential tension points where operations may not go to plan. Ensure your organisation has adequate financial resources budgeted to make the initiative as meaningful to young people as possible. Work together with different staff who offer varying perspectives based on their lived and learned experiences and make sure they can manage and support youth participation in the way your initiative intends to deliver. This means budgeting for youth-led initiatives, providing staff training on youth engagement, anti-racism and oppression for example, and allocating time to foster genuine connections with young people. This reduces the risk of Youth Voice being tokenistic, it makes it a well-supported, integral part of your organisation.

Top 10 tips to consider when creating spaces for young people in decision making

8	**Seek to develop better remuneration and processes and offering** Recognising the contributions of young people fairly is crucial. This includes financial remuneration for their time and expertise, especially when their input is on par with that of paid staff or consultants. Organisations should develop clear, fair processes for compensating young people, ensuring they feel valued for their contributions. Remuneration is not always financial as this depends on the organisation's resources and other factors such as safeguarding, potential tax implications and impact on the young people's statutory support for example. Remuneration can take the form of other incentives, such as access to training or professional development opportunities. The key is to have an open dialogue with young people before engagement to ensure their remuneration is appropriate to the level of their input and circumstances. Short-term initiatives may be able to offer financial remuneration whereas long-term initiatives may not. Careful planning and consideration of possibilities are imperative. The type of renumeration is dependent on your organisation's resources and the context of youth engagement.
9	**Offer Training** Providing young people with training aids their empowerment and encourages active contribution to your organisation. This might include training on transferable skills such as communication, leadership, or the specific skills required for their development internally and externally. Similarly, training for staff supporting young people is important to help them understand how to better their engagement approaches with young people, foster meaningful engagement, and avoid unintentional power imbalances. Additionally, continuous training opportunities are well-evidenced in the charity sector to support long-term engagement and growth.
10	**Prioritise Learning and Evaluation as key knowledge development points** View Youth Voice as a continual learning process. Prioritise regular feedback and evaluation of your Youth Voice initiatives to assess what is working and what areas can be improved. Learning from both successes of involving young people and challenges helps to refine your approach and ensures that young people remain at the heart of decision-making. Involving young people in evaluation processes is also critical – they should be part of shaping how their involvement is assessed and how their feedback is incorporated. Creative ways of engagement may be adopted for varying age groups to ensure the relevancy and suitability of the ask.





Notable examples of these tips in practice include:

Involving young people in programme design and acquiring relevant feedback loops

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation has involved young people in its designing and testing of new ways of working since 2020 by working alongside The Involving Young People Collective, a group of young people recruited to drive social change in the grant-making sector by contributing to decision-making in a range of Esmée work areas such as grant assessments, funding programme design and internal processes with an emphasis on collaboration. This included hiring staff with youth engagement expertise and dedicating funds to train and support young people in advisory and decision-making roles. By adequately resourcing their Youth Voice initiatives, The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation ensured that youth engagement was meaningful and well-supported.

Creating purposeful roles with different entry points for youth involvement

Barnardo's offers a variety of roles for young people, from local service-level advisory groups to national-level participation in the organisation's Youth Advisory Board. This range of entry points allows young people to engage in a way that matches their interests and availability. For example, young people can help shape local services they use or provide strategic input on issues like mental health policy at a national level.

Streamlined communication channels

Youth Futures Foundation uses dedicated platforms like Slack and WhatsApp for easy, streamlined communication with its Future Voices Group Ambassadors. By adopting the platforms young people are most comfortable with, they've created more accessible and efficient channels for engagement, reducing delays and ensuring that communication is clear, quick, and responsive to the needs of young people.

Monitoring and Evaluation: Incorporating youth voice into ongoing evaluation processes

Regularly reflect on relationships with young people involved in your organisation's projects. Accommodate feedback at the beginning, midway, and end of the project to ensure priorities are consistently addressed. External factors may lead to changes in the youth participants, so this approach ensures continuity and shared understanding. Remember, Youth Voice is a journey. As you map your project, plan for improvement steps beyond the project's end date.

Scaling Up: A successful strategy of increasing the scope of youth involvement across the organisation

Reverse the Trend, a mental health charity, makes it a priority for their Chief Executive to meet monthly with their Youth Board, and frequently attending the young people's meetings to actively listen to their needs and insights. An emerging leader from their Youth Advisory board was also recruited to join their governance team as a member of the board of trustees. The young person's understanding of the charity from being a beneficiary, their lived experience and their experience partaking in other decision-making opportunities provided by the organisation was acknowledged in their recruitment. This is an example of how youth voices can be developed and capacity furthered to contribute to the organisation's mission.

Policy development: Must-haves in developing organisational policies

Safeguarding

Develop safeguarding policies with training and informed guidance from young people's input or an assessment of their needs.

Accountability Mechanisms

Establish a shared code of conduct together with young people. When involving them in decision-making as non-contractual members, it is your responsibility to outline clear arrangements from the outset, such as terms of reference and shared values to uphold throughout their involvement.

Remuneration/Contribution

Consider remuneration when young people's contributions match those of paid adults or consultants. Value lived and learned experiences equally, recognising that activities like sharing their stories are vital for the organisation's understanding and operations.

Data Protection

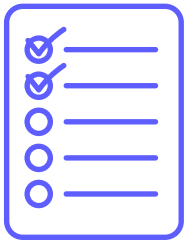
Regularly monitor data protection processes to ensure they are understood by all young people, staff, and stakeholders.

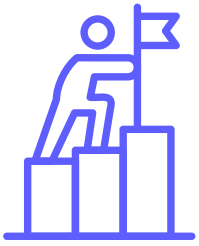


Youth Voice SMART goals

SMART goals are an effective tool for evaluating the success of your initiatives in embedding Youth Voice. They can be adapted for other Youth Voice initiatives as your organisation evolves. As an accountability tool, SMART goals help you foresee potential issues and plan how to address them from the early stages. By being specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound, you can create effective and sustainable youth voice initiatives that can be scaled.

Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Relevant	Time-bound
Clearly define the youth voice goal you aim to achieve. A simple, well-defined goal is easier to communicate and work towards.	Determine how you will measure success. How will you know when you have achieved success? For instance, aiming to make young people happier is vague. Instead, specify the actions that will contribute to their happiness and how you will measure these outcomes.	Be aspirational and realistic. Immediately placing a young person on your board might be too ambitious and could cause more harm than good if their needs are not adequately met. Ensure goals are within reach and consider the necessary steps for full participation.	Ensure the organisation's Youth Voice goals are meaningful to young people. Whose goal, is it? If young people don't see the relevance of something, it is much harder to get them motivated to contribute. Collaborate with them to set goals that align with their interests and values.	Set realistic timelines for your goals, allowing room for potential delays. Avoid rushing to meet early deadlines to prove success. Setting targets that consider what your goal is, who will help you get there and allowing time for potential delays as life happens will ensure you have a realistic timeline to follow. Continuous monitoring and setting new targets will help ensure the longevity of your initiatives.







Quiz - Test your Youth Voice knowledge

Question 1: What is a key benefit of offering young people the opportunity to co-create initiatives with an organisation from the outset?

a) It saves time for the organisation.
b) It ensures that the initiatives are based on shared values and build trust.
c) It increases the workload of young people.
d) It reduces the need for staff involvement.

Question 2: Why is conducting an internal audit of resources and intentions important when embedding Youth Voice?

a) To ensure the organisation has the right social media channels.
b) To clarify the organisation's financial standing only.
c) To assess staff capacity, financial resources, and align youth participation with organisational goals.
d) To avoid involving young people in decision-making.

Question 3: What is the purpose of creating purposeful roles with different entry points for youth involvement?

a) To make the organisation's programmes more complex and popular.
b) To give young people the opportunity to contribute based on their experience and confidence levels.
c) To reduce the number of young people involved.
d) To limit young people's roles to advisory capacities only.

Question 4: Which of the following is crucial when embedding feedback mechanisms at different stages of youth involvement?

a) Feedback is only necessary at the project's completion.
b) Feedback should be tailored to the communication styles of the young people involved and implemented regularly.
c) Only staff feedback is necessary.
d) Feedback loops should be avoided to save time.

Question 5: How can organisations support young people's emotional and mental well-being when engaging them in initiatives?

a) By providing well-being support that includes optional services like counselling or peer support networks.
b) By limiting their participation to help them cope such as one project per year.
c) By avoiding discussions about mental health and well-being if there is no specialist support.
d) By not prioritising their emotional needs.

Question 6: Why is it important to ensure streamlined communication channels when involving young people in decision-making?

a) To keep communication minimal and distant.
b) To ensure that young people have clear, accessible communication and avoid unnecessary complexity.
c) To reduce the amount of feedback received from young people.
d) To only communicate through formal letters.

Quiz Results

How Did You Do? Answer Key:

Question 1: B - It ensures that the initiatives are based on shared values and build trust.

Question 2: C - To assess staff capacity, financial resources, and align youth participation with organisational goals.

Question 3: B - To give young people the opportunity to contribute based on their experience and confidence levels.

Question 4: B - Feedback should be tailored to the communication styles of the young people involved and implemented regularly.

Question 5: A - By providing wellbeing support that includes optional services like counselling or peer support networks.

Question 6: B - To ensure that young people have clear, accessible communication and avoid unnecessary complexity.





If you answered mostly **A's**: You might need to review the guide again. It seems you are missing key elements about the importance of youth engagement strategies. Revisit the section on understanding how organisations can authentically include young voices.

If you answered mostly **B's**: Well Done! You've got a good grasp of how to build sustainable youth involvement strategies. Continue reflecting on the best ways to implement these insights in practice.

If you answered a **mix** of **B's** and **other answers**: You are on the right track, but there are some areas that need more attention. Take some time to revisit the sections where you got confused, particularly on the details of co-creation and resource planning.

We hope this guide has supported you to gauge your understanding and point you towards areas of Youth Voice that need further reflection.

Additional Resources

Below are some useful learning resources for staff on Youth Voice topics such as communicating effectively, encouraging participation, measuring engagement, co-design.

- Lundy model of participation
- Collective Discovery Shift podcast
- Listening Fund Blog: Listening to young people
- Commonplace: Engaging young people top tips
- Involving Young People Collective Values to Co-production

