Local Trust
trusting
local
people

Giving power to young people through youth engagement

A COMMUNITY ACTION PLAN



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ABOUT THIS ACTION PLAN

Good youth engagement is about giving power to young people.

It creates the opportunity for young people to develop their skills and confidence and means supporting young people to take the lead in decision-making.

It's important to work with experienced youth workers who understand the value of engaging collaboratively with young people and the need to:



- take time to get to know young people, build relationships and trust
- create an inclusive and safe space where young people's views and perspectives are respected
- engage, encourage and inspire young people to share their views, test out their ideas and take on leadership roles



- support young people to develop their skills and confidence through their decision-making
- support young people to reflect on learning where things haven't gone to plan.

Left: Riverside Community Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Mark Massey

In this community action plan, we'll discuss best practice in giving power to young people through youth engagement. It includes some of the fundamentals you need to consider, as well as how to build frameworks of trust, empowerment and care with young people in your communities.

This guide is focused on using creative approaches to engaging young people. Many of the tips will be relevant to all work with young people.

> **"It's important for young people to have power because we are the future. We have so much potential to do incredible things and make a positive impact. We also just have loads of ideas – young people are some of the most creative people and we will have different viewpoints, approaches and opinions which can be utilised."**
>
> **Serena, C-Change volunteer**



Big Local Connects 2021
Photo: Local Trust / Richard Richards

GIVING POWER TO YOUNG PEOPLE: HESTON WEST BIG LOCAL

Heston West is one of 150 areas that received just over £1million of funding through the Big Local programme – and youth-led work formed a core part of their initiatives in West London. Having successfully spent their Big Local funding, their work is now continuing through a new organisation, C-Change.

Volunteers Layba and Serena, who have each been involved in youth-led and youth-focused initiatives for almost a decade, share their experiences.



LAYBA

"I was the first ever young person on a Big Local board. Being able to speak on behalf of the youth, for youth-led projects, just makes sense. I know I inspired other young people to get involved because if my voice is being heard, so can theirs.

"Having power means having responsibility and I believe that is crucial to self-development for future aspirations and careers. Not every young person has plans on going into further education, so having an organisation that is there to help them with developing themselves and their future will benefit with jobs and adulthood.

"Also, year by year the youth generation's interests change and as adults we can't understand them unless we give them the power and control of being able to articulate this, as well as enable and encourage them.

"I've been lucky enough to be offered paid work due to my experience and I believe that no matter what your role is in your community, as long as you are involved in some way, so many doors open for you."



Right: Layba, Heston West Big Local
Photo: Layba

SERENA

"I've been able to grow up being part of the community and being part of youth-focussed work. These experiences have been incredibly rewarding, allowing me to collaborate with passionate young people to address important issues, empower others, and create positive change.

"And it's not only about empowering – we've been able to make physical change in the area, from community clean up days to building flower beds and painting murals. We've actually been able to change things, which helps build a community.

"Working at summer schools with children and helping them to develop and grow through the arts has been amazing. Seeing them grow in confidence and be proud in what they create is heart-warming. Knowing that as a young person I have the ability to influence other young people to reach their potential is insane.

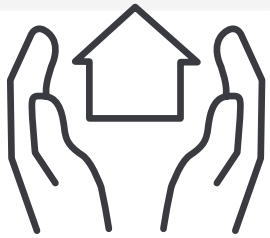
"Young people want to have a good future, it's just about giving them a space where they can make a difference and be heard, because we have so much to give. With power, young people can develop agency, confidence and responsibility, allowing them to become change makers and leaders in their communities."



Right: Serena, Heston West Big Local
Photo: Serena

Layba and Serena's advice for engaging young people

1. Create a safe and accessible environment



"You should pay attention to fostering safe environments where young people feel comfortable expressing themselves and feeling like they have a voice. These spaces also need to be accessible, to foster diversity within the community and make sure everyone feels welcome and safe."

Serena

"Mental health is a very important thing that people who work with young people should take into consideration, especially because they are still growing up. It's important to create a safe and happy environment and make them feel comfortable."

Layba

2. Take a flexible approach



"You need to be flexible in your approaches as not every young person works the same. Catering to their strengths is important, in order to get the best out of them."

Serena

3. Listen



"As adults sometimes we don't realise that just listening to someone makes a huge impact because nowadays it's so hard to be heard."

Layba

"Make sure you are respecting young people and not talking down on them, especially with teenagers and older young people. Be cautious on the language and tone of voice you're using, as shifting the way you speak can greatly improve engagement and willingness to get involved. Overall, just listen and take on what young people say. Pay attention to our concerns and opinions."

Serena

4. Ask for feedback



"Always ask for feedback from young people, so you know what impact you're having and so they can approve your approaches in engaging them."

Serena

WHAT TO GET RIGHT BEFORE YOU START



Before you start working with young people, it's essential that the environment is safe and secure.

Parents, schools, youth groups, funders, commissioners, local authorities, and other partners will want to know that you have taken the right steps to ensure a safe environment, including having the correct safeguarding policies and procedures in place and the right support to mitigate any risks.

Make sure you have these fundamentals covered:

1. **Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks:** Everyone who is successful in applying to work with young people, including as a volunteer, is required to apply for a DBS check before employment or engagement can be confirmed. To find out more, visit the DBS website.

2. **Duty of care and mitigating risks:** All staff and volunteers have a duty of care towards young people they are working with, interpreted in case law as the duty (not authority) to act as a careful parent would. There are many factors to consider in providing a duty of care plan for working with young people. A robust risk assessment for each activity and event is essential and should be shared, understood and discussed with any staff or volunteers in advance. See advice around this in the UK Youth Safe Spaces Framework.

3. **Safeguarding and training:** You will need to ensure all your staff, including volunteers, have safeguarding training. The NSPCC have a wealth of examples, training programmes and free advice and guidance to help you shape this, which you can find on the NSPCC website. You can also contact your local authority for advice.

4. **Keeping young people safe online:** You may need to communicate or work with young people in an online capacity, and you must put procedures in place for how to do this. The NSPCC offers guidance and support in their guides on keeping young people safe online.



5. **Confidentiality:** No service for young people can ever guarantee absolute confidentiality. A youth worker must pass on information to the appropriate professional when a young person is at risk of significant harm. Make sure you develop guidelines and processes for escalating disclosures as part of your safeguarding policies and procedures.

6. **Data protection:** The Data Protection Act 2018 is the UK's implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). Everyone responsible for using personal data has to follow strict rules called 'data protection principles'. Visit gov.uk and the ICO website to ensure you develop rigorous GDPR procedures for holding personal data on children and young people.

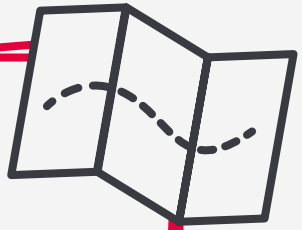
7. **Insurance:** Public liability insurance covers your legal liability to pay damages to members of the public for death, bodily injury or damage to their property, that occurs as a result of your activities. It also covers legal fees, costs and expenses. When deciding how much cover to buy, carefully consider the maximum claim that could be made against you. You should also check that the premises you are using have public liability insurance.

8. **Employers' liability:** By law, all employers with paid employees and/or volunteers must insure against their legal liability for injury, disease or death sustained by them and arising from their work. This is also the same for freelancers.



GETTING THE RIGHT COVER

Remember, there are different insurance policies to cover all types of organisations and individuals. Be sure to search for insurance specific to your context and ask for a conversation with the insurer to make sure it covers you correctly.



VISITS AND TRIPS

There are specific plans you'll need to make ahead of organising a visit, trip or residential activity with young people – including developing and sharing plans and procedures in case of an emergency. Visit the Department for Education and Council For Learning Outside The Classroom to find out more.

GETTING STARTED: THE FUNDAMENTALS

The steps below can help you get started with youth work in your area. They're designed to help you shape your thinking around the work you will deliver, whether you're setting up a project or hosting an event.

Step 1: INVITE YOUNG PEOPLE TO ENGAGE IN YOUR WORK

The most important way to engage young people is through the networks you already have in your area. Get started by working with local schools, youth organisations and other groups to host an event or opportunity for young people to engage with your work. Work with them to create an invitation and, to reach as many young people as possible:

- Find out what communication methods are already used by young people in your area (for example, social media platforms, community notice boards, word of mouth).
- Consider what you can offer that could make young people excited about coming along to find out more. Will there be food? Fun activities? Opportunities to build new skills? A chance to make change happen on the issues they care about?

Make it fun, clear and simple. Make sure you share that you are interested in THEIR ideas and you want to collaborate with them to shape a good project or outcome, so they know they can come and have a say.

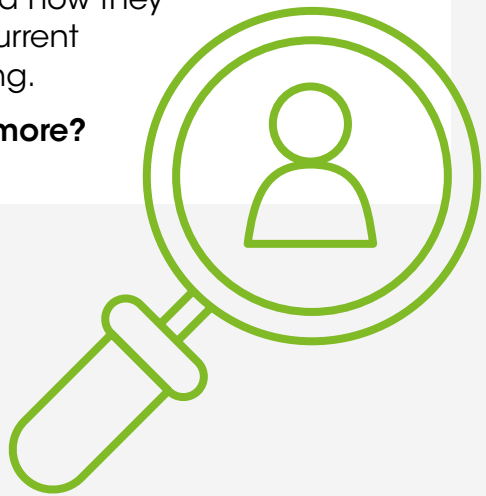


Right: Newington Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Mile 91 / Ben Langdon

Step 2: Think about your approach to recruiting young people

Consider how you will make your recruitment process open and inclusive and take time to challenge your own assumptions. Before approaching young people, it's important to consider the needs of the young people themselves. Use these prompts to get started:

- **What do you already know about the young people?** For example, about their interests and passions, the ways they like to do things, their existing skills and their personal and group values.
- **What are you assuming?**
- **What are the individuals in the group keen to do, experience or learn more about?** You might consider their goals and interests, what feels 'out of reach' to them and how they can get there, and the current challenges they are facing.
- **How could you find out more?**





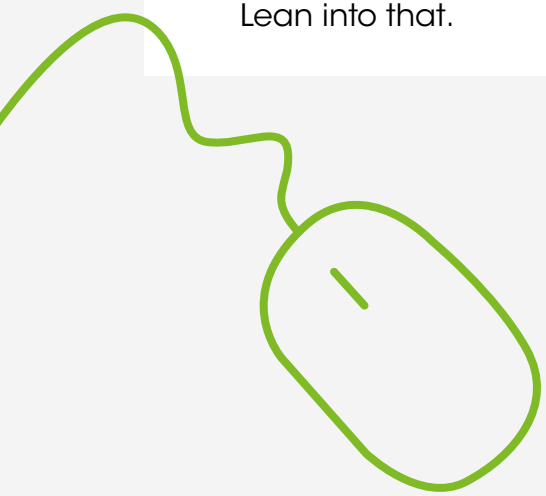
Step 3: Be clear on how you will engage with young people

1. Be open and non-prescriptive! Come to the conversation without preconceived ideas of outcomes or approaches.
2. Ask lots of questions and really listen, taking on board their ideas and approaches. They may seem radical and that is fantastic. Young people are not yet moulded into the ways of thinking that adults generally readily accept as the 'right approach'. They have fresh eyes and ideas, and they can think outside the box, so be prepared to encourage it.
3. Support young people to try new things out, to possibly make some mistakes, but also to learn a lot for themselves along the way that will help them grow.

Step 4: DO SOME RESEARCH TOGETHER

Once you have young people on board, the first thing to do is some research – and be creative about it! You could research local ideas, ambitions, potential projects and more by doing engaging activities like creating short films and interviews about the area, pop up dance or street games, opportunities to create art – or try a new activity or craft altogether.

Often, when being creative, people allow themselves to share important ideas. There is a magic to creativity that frees up possibilities. Lean into that.





WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

Working in partnership is important for identifying and supporting youth voice projects, to ensure the work has the best possible chance of successful outcomes. Sometimes other groups and organisations are already working on the sort of projects you are developing in your community, and it's best practice to talk to each other and pool expertise and resources.

Maybe your partners have connections to young people (through schools and youth clubs), maybe they have spaces you can use (like community centres), or maybe they have funding or other resources (such as access to funders or local authorities). Be sure to have lots of conversations in your local community to find out who can help you to engage local young people.

Visit the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement to read more about effective partnership working, and for advice on next steps.



CREATING BOUNDARIES AND TRUST

Once you have your group together, you can start to define the work with the young people. To achieve this, it's a good idea to map how you can work together respectfully, by agreeing some terms around collaboration.

There are different approaches you could take, for example creating a 'manifesto', 'learning contract' or 'group agreement'. This creates clarity around the expectations and accountability for the group, to ensure everyone knows the ground rules about how they will work together effectively.

Make sure the young people set the rules in discussion with you. That way, they are understood and agreed by everyone. This is a democracy of young people!

ACCOUNTABILITY, MOTIVATION AND COLLABORATION

In your agreement, be sure to cover accountability, motivation and collaboration. This will ensure you have a solid basis for the group and your partners to evaluate how the project is progressing, both during and after an activity has been delivered.

Left: Newington Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Mile 91 / Ben Langdon

SPOTLIGHT ON: PRIMEDESIGN

PRIMEdesign was a free community project set up by Take A Part and Prime Skatepark in Plymouth. It used skateboarding to engage young people at secondary school in a programme of creative activity.

A crucial first step in working together involved the group setting out a manifesto, to highlight their values; models of behaviour for themselves; and the behaviours they wanted to see reflected by the rest of the local skate community.

While the group came together as a 'community of interest' through their passion for skateboarding, they came from different backgrounds, lived in different areas, went to different schools, and were different ages and genders.

Before the group set their manifesto, individuals sometimes crossed boundaries or expressed things in ways that others did not agree with. Once they set their manifesto, they collaborated and shared space by their unifying principles.

This further helped them to set out important issues to the group, which they then discussed in two zines that they wrote, designed and published together as part of the project.

Alongside the manifesto, the PRIMEdesign group also developed a policy on how they would stay accountable to these principles – namely that if group members contravened the agreement, there were a set of steps and consequences in places that they had all agreed to.

Find out more about the project on the Take a Part website and PRIMEdesign Instagram page.



Right: PRIMEdesign
Photo: Take A Part / Dom Moore

TIP!

Consider a **strengths-based approach to learning**, focused on identifying and utilising the strengths and talents of individuals to promote learning and growth. This approach can:

- foster a positive and supportive learning environment that encourages personal growth, self-reflection, and motivation.
- help young people develop a sense of self-worth and empowerment, which can have a positive impact on their learning and overall wellbeing.

It can be particularly effective in a group of young people, as it recognises and values the unique qualities that each individual brings. You can develop this approach by:

- Identifying and building on strengths.
- Fostering a positive learning environment.
- Encouraging self-reflection.
- Using a variety of learning strategies.
- Providing opportunities for feedback and growth.

FURTHER RESOURCE

Read more about the origins of this approach from the field of social work on the ResearchGate website.

Co-design: the best way to build engaging programmes with young people

Young people don't just want to take part in things, they want to make decisions and take a leadership role on projects.

You can use a co-design process to make projects happen. This brings a wide range of benefits, which include:

- building skills and confidence through doing
- giving young people ownership and a sense of pride
- challenging negative perceptions of young people in the community
- encouraging creativity and a problem-solving approach.





Left: Heart of Pitsea Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Mark Massey



You can facilitate the young people to define a need (for example, more activities, cleaner streets, etc) and then discuss together the best approaches to how to solve that need. They can decide things like:

- **How** is the need going to be tackled? A series of activities or a one-off event, etc.
- **Who** is going to do this work (manage budgets and communications, set up the space, etc)? Get the young people to define all the jobs and then agree who will take them on.
- **When** is this work taking place? Set a goal date.
- **What** are the resources needed to tackle it (space, money, time, people etc)?

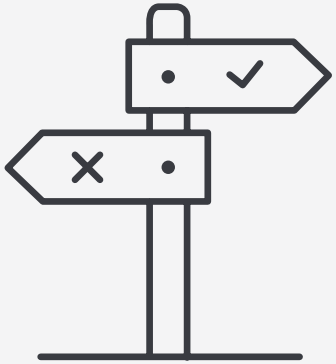
This may take a few sessions. Document it, share it back, change it … Share it with other young people if that is what is important. This is about making an approach that is agreed and tested through conversations and is strong.



Left: Newington Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Mile 91 / Ben Langdon

What to do when things 'go wrong'

Things **will** go wrong and the group will wax and wane due to energy and attendance. At all stages, you need to be ready to regroup and replan your activity. Remember that's okay, and a normal part of the process.





Evaluation and what happens next?

It's important to discuss together how your co-designed project or event went and what you learnt. This gives everyone the chance to think about how they would do it again better and stronger.

Questions to ask include: What went well? What did you learn? What would you change if you could?

You can then decide whether to co-create another project; collaborate with another group (and widen impact); build on what you learnt and did; or even stop. This is about making sure the young people are centred in the decision-making and own the outcomes.

"Young people can create fairer processes. It allows us to advocate for our needs and interests, allowing for inclusivity and diversity in decision-making processes. It is essential to give young people power to build more equitable, just and prosperous societies for future generations."

Serena, C-Change volunteer

Left: Ramsey Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Adrian James

AWARDS SCHEMES: ACCREDITING AND RECORDING YOUNG PEOPLES' ACHIEVEMENTS

It is hugely important to celebrate the work of young people and their learning in the projects you develop together.

There are some excellent awards schemes available for young people, to help them achieve accredited results and recognition – as well as huge personal satisfaction.

Young people may also want to have a 'close of project' party or celebration. This is another opportunity to give young people ownership. Could you allocate them a budget, so they can decide how they want to use it to celebrate their achievements?

Make sure you understand what young people want to gain from their involvement in the group or project. If employability is important to them, then having an award scheme can provide evidence for their CV that they have volunteered to support their community.



Left: Newington Big Local Photo: Local Trust / Mile 91 / Ben Langdon

There are other awards you can look to obtain for the young people you work with via schemes and local authority programmes. For example:

- Duke of Edinburgh's Award
- National Children and Young People Awards
- Jack Petchey Achievement Award Scheme
- AQA Unit Award Scheme
- Recognising young volunteers (usually as part of National Volunteer Week or local authority yearly awards, which you could search for or contact your local council about)

Consider including rewards throughout all your activities. These can be as small as yummy snacks or prizes to be awarded when your group achieve their goals!

"Every year, Heston West Big Local had an award ceremony. When I was younger, this ceremony was something that made me very excited, because being able to celebrate yours and each other's successes and achievements is a really wonderful thing to do. When I'm feeling down, I know I can always go down memory lane, and see that I was given an award for a reason and I made a positive impact on my community!"

Layba, C-Change volunteer



Right: Newington Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Mile 91 / Ben Langdon

SPOTLIGHT ON: HESTON WEST'S YOUTH FILM CLUB

Heston West Big Local's Youth Film Club is a community filmmaking project, designed for young people to learn the art of filmmaking and community work. It is a key legacy project, continuing to develop its impact after Big Local.

In the last seven years, young people involved in the project have been involved in making documentaries, short films, music videos and community-related content. It has also provided an opportunity to learn leadership, communication and creative skills in a safe, friendly, fun environment.

Although it is aimed at young people, parents and film experts volunteer their time to support the project and help the young crew. Young people have unique access to the film industry; an opportunity to network, visit film studios and festivals; and to get involved with other Big Local projects aimed at helping young people gain new skills and work experience.

The club provides an opportunity to actively contribute to the local community, while gaining the skills that the Duke of Edinburgh's award, employers and universities value.

Find out more on the Heston West website.

> "The freedom and creativity that came with the film club really shaped who I am today because I was able to express myself from so many different ways."
>
> Layba, C-Change volunteer

> "Activities like film club are really important for young people. It gives us creative agency to make content on topics important to us. It's also an opportunity to develop our skills which will help us in the future. The confidence it gives young people is massive."
>
> Serena, C-Change volunteer



Right: Heston West film club
Photo: Heston West Big Local

JUST THE BEGINNING

This action plan has been created to help you give power to young people through youth engagement, with a focus on using creative approaches, creating boundaries and trust, and building engagement through co-design and a strength-based approach to learning.



If you've found this action plan useful, share it with someone else who might too!

SHARE IT

Left: Selby Big Local
Photo: Local Trust / Jonathan Pow

About Local Trust

Local Trust is a place-based funder supporting communities to transform and improve their lives and the places in which they live. We believe there is a need to put more power, resources, and decision-making into the hands of communities.

We do this by trusting local people. Our aims are to demonstrate the value of long term, unconditional, resident-led funding, and to draw on the learning from our work delivering the Big Local programme to promote a wider transformation in the way policy makers, funders and others engage with communities and place.

localtrust.org.uk
𝕏 @LocalTrust

About Big Local

Big Local is a resident-led funding programme, providing 150 areas in England with £1.15m each to spend across 10 to 15 years to create lasting change in their neighbourhoods. The programme is funded by the National Lottery Community Fund.

Front cover image: Devonshire West Big Local
Credit: Local Trust / Michael J Hogan

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About Take a Part

Take A Part is an arts organisation who are experts in commissioning creative projects for communities to take action where they live – improving their local environment and in turn, instilling pride, ownership and agency, improving mental health & wellbeing, and increasing appreciation for understanding of the value of culture in everyday lives.

takeapart.org.uk

Local Trust

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