

Mechanisms for Youth Engagement in Research

03

GUIDEBOOK
SECTION

Youth Engagement
in Health Research



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Overview

A recent review of young people's advisory groups in health research¹ found that of all studies that collected primary data from young people aged 12-18 years, only 21 reported using youth advice during their research – less than 1% of all published empirical child and adolescent studies.

When seeking to engage young people in your research, it is important to consider what mechanism/s you will use. Youth advisory groups are most commonly used in health research, but they are not the only or necessarily the best way to engage young people. Instead, consider what mechanism will most effectively advance the research needed to meet young people's needs.



Prepare

Fit-for-purpose mechanisms for youth engagement

There are many ways young people can guide and contribute to research and translation, better policy, services and professional practice. On the following page are some examples of different mechanisms commonly used for involving young people - from consultation to shared decision-making. It's important to take the time to do your research and consider carefully the best mechanism that will work for your project.



As you consider what approach you will take, you should reflect on:

- Who has power to make and implement decisions? Can this be extended to young people?
- Who has access to the material resources required to deliver the project? Can these be transferred to young people?
- Who can influence other stakeholders to support or pay attention to the project and its findings?
- How do young people say they want to be involved? What level of interest do they have?
- How can involvement benefit young people the most?
- What resources (time, budget, staff) are available to support youth engagement, and how sustainable are these?

The answers to these questions can help identify what approach to engagement is most desirable – for the young people and the senior researchers involved.

Spectrum of approaches

This spectrum has been adapted from the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

| Approach * | Consultative | Involved | Collaborative / Partnership | Youth-Led |
|-----------------------------|---|--|--|---|
| Role of young people | Contribute Young people are invited to respond to ideas developed and initiated by senior researchers. | Participate Young people take on project responsibilities that may include decision-making and delivery within a defined remit. | Partner Young people share responsibility for agenda setting, project design and delivery and/or dissemination of information with senior researchers. | Lead Young people conceptualise and lead the project. |
| Role of adults | Lead Researchers conceptualise and lead the project. They secure the resources, hold decision-making power and are responsible for delivery. | Involve Researchers lead the project and ensure resourcing. Roles for young people are created within the governance structure and delivery team. | Partner Researchers share responsibility for agenda setting, project design and delivery and/or dissemination with young people. Adults still retain duty-bearer responsibilities. | Support Researchers support, enable and strengthen initiatives led by young people and help amplify youth voice and influence. |
| Mechanisms | Youth advisory Youth reference group Youth summit | Youth Consultants Youth council Co-design workshops Living Labs | Steering committees Youth researchers Research-practice partnership | Youth-led enterprise Youth-led advocacy organisation Youth-led campaign or small scale project |
| Examples | <u>Access 3 Study</u> | <u>MYAN Youth CALD Disability Collective</u> | <u>CMY Explorers</u> <u>WH&Y Commission</u> | <u>NIYEC</u> |

*Approaches have some overlap in practice and within a project or initiative.



Typologies are never perfect and the quality and impact of any of these mechanisms comes down to the ways in which relationships and commitments are built between young people and senior researchers – and the extent to which they are underpinned by values and actions which foster mutual trust and accountability, diversity and inclusion, and equity and responsiveness².

In practice, a genuinely consultative process can be very meaningful. Similarly, partnerships may result in misrepresentation or co-optation of young people. The kind of approach you take to youth engagement does not necessarily determine the quality of the experience. How you go about implementing whatever approach you choose makes the difference.

It is also important to consider that within one project or initiative, the approach might change over time depending on the needs of young people and the senior researchers involved. Being open to revisiting the dynamics between young people and adults along the journey is core to best practice. There may be times when it is best to change approach for the benefit of the people involved and the project.

Further case studies on mechanisms for youth engagement

- [Case study: Co-Researching Young People’s Priorities – the ‘Youth Health Matters’ project](#)
- [Listen Carefully Project Report](#)

Connect

Youth advisory groups & research-practice partnerships

Based on our knowledge and experience at the WH&Y Commission, we have developed a mini guide to youth advisory groups as a mechanism for engaging young people in health research. We have also included a Terms of Reference for a Research-Practice Partnership template for you to adapt. Note that these are simply two suggestions

Other steps to implement your youth engagement mechanism

Once you have determined the best fit-for-purpose mechanism, you will want to take further steps towards implementing this. See Guidebook sections on:

- [Child Safeguarding and Duty of Care](#)
- [Recruiting Young People to Partner with you in Research](#)
- [Implementing and Sustaining Youth Engagement](#)

Further Resources

- [Mini Guide: Youth Advisory Groups](#)
- [Template: Terms of Reference](#)



Reflect

Applying the WH&Y framework: reflection questions

Mutual trust & accountability

- How is power balanced between young people and adults?
- Who in your staff team is responsible for supporting young people's engagement?
- How can you prepare young people with the information they need to be involved meaningfully?
- How will you regularly report back to young people on the outcomes of their input/involvement?
- What plans have you made to ensure you hear from young people about how they want to be involved and what they would like to gain from the experience?

Equity & responsiveness

- How are you planning to value young people's time and contributions, and have you been upfront about this from the recruitment phase?
- How do you intend to engage with young people, eg Zoom, face to face? Are these the most accessible options for the young people involved?
- Have you considered the varying abilities or accessibility requirements of individuals involved? How will you adjust your methods to be inclusive from the beginning? The responsibility rests with you to reach out to young people and ask what support they need to fully participate.

Diversity & inclusion

- How are you tailoring your recruitment strategy and selection criteria to ensure a representative group of young people apply and are selected?

- How will meetings, workshops or other forms of engagement be run?
- What can you do in your regular methods of engagement that build a safe and respectful environment for diverse young people? For example, having pronouns on name tags/zoom names, having an Acknowledgement of Country at the start of every meeting.



Footnotes

¹ Sellars, E., G. Pavarini, D. Michelson, C. Creswell and M. Fazel (2021). "Young people's advisory groups in health research: scoping review and mapping of practices." *Archives of Disease in Childhood* 106(7): 698-704.

² <https://why.org.au/why-research/ethics-of-engagement/WHY-engagement-framework>