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ADD Something Meaningful

Manual for representatives of local authorities: How to actively involve young people at the local level



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Project and Manual: What Is It About?

The [ADD Something Meaningful](#) project aims to improve young people's involvement in acting in and giving the lead for their local communities. This, in most cases, deals with the fact that there is a gap between young people and the local decision-makers: youth feel unheard, their energy underutilized, and ideas unused. This project aims to fill that gap by offering the space for young people to start directly engaging with local authorities and working together on concrete solutions to local challenges. The root of this endeavor is the [methodology of IDEATHON](#), a creative, hands-on approach that equips youth with the ability to brainstorm, develop, and implement their ideas to make positive changes to their surroundings.

This manual is purposely designed for local authorities to assist them in understanding and better involving young people in decision-making processes. Concretely, it provides **recommendations**, inspiring **examples** of strategies that work, and **tools** to improve communication between local governments and their younger citizens. It is a resource that helps local leaders connect with the creativity and energy of young people while providing them with meaningful opportunities to make a difference in their communities.

Why Was This Guide Developed?

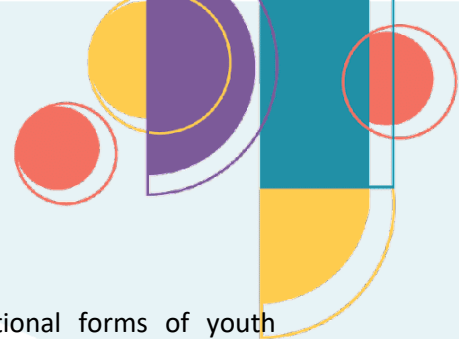
Too often, young people are left out of important conversations about their communities' future. Yet, they bring unique insights and creative solutions that can help drive actual progress. This guide provides local authority representatives with resources on how to ensure that young people's voices are heard.

Involving young people is a proven strategy to improve the quality of life for all. Research consistently shows that their active participation often leads to better environmental outcomes, enhanced urban design, and vibrant public spaces. Young people are specialists in their own environments—they are deeply familiar with their neighborhoods, spend significant time outside, and often navigate their communities on foot, offering a perspective rooted in lived experience. Moreover, their engagement strengthens social cohesion, bridges generational divides, and helps avoid segregation by building a shared vision for the future.

For instance, the United Nations emphasizes that youth participation is vital for promoting inclusiveness in policy processes, increasing legitimacy and ownership of policy decisions, and holding governments accountable to their commitments.¹

¹<https://www.un.org/development/desa/dpad/wp-content/uploads/sites/45/publication/PB149.pdf>





Additionally, the Council of Europe advocates for recognizing non-traditional forms of youth participation as legitimate acts of democratic engagement, underscoring the importance of youth-friendly information and quality education about democratic participation.²

The guide offers structured recommendations on improving youth participation through two complementary approaches: **structures** and **methods**. Structures refer to formalized bodies like youth councils, advisory committees, or municipal frameworks that provide long-term opportunities for youth representation in decision-making. Methods, on the other hand, are participatory tools and techniques, such as IDEATHON events, workshops, or participatory budgeting, that foster hands-on engagement and empower young people to address local challenges creatively and collaboratively.

The manual uses the knowledge acquired from practical experiences in various European settings; offering **case studies** and **best practices** that local authorities can adapt to their context. It also builds on and capitalizes on the results of 2 previous outcomes of the project, the [Expert Material on Youth Participation on a local level](#) and the [Good Practices Analysis](#) does not simply aim to increase participation in the short term but also seeks long-term systemic changes in how young people are involved in local governance.

Beyond the immediate engagement, this manual aspires to foster long-lasting change. By incorporating youth participation into local governance frameworks, municipalities can guarantee that the voices of young people persist in influencing their communities over time. The establishment of trust and sustainable strategies for engagement will enhance current projects, but on top of that will also cultivate a culture of civic involvement that lasts for future generations.

Framing the topics: Challenges of Young People in Local Participation

Today, youth face a lot of challenges that impact their potential to be part of local decision-making. They have the energy, creativity, and enthusiasm to help their communities, but several obstacles often hinder them from fully contributing to civic life. These challenges are not only at the local level but also at the European level, and they are identified through wide-ranging surveys, involving more than 900 youth in the partner countries, and consultations amongst youth and local authorities under the ADD Something Meaningful project³.

The current section highlights some of the important challenges young people are facing in engaging with their communities today, informed by findings from research and consultations carried out across participating countries.⁴

²<https://www.coe.int/en/web/democracy-here-now/meaningful-youth-participation>

³ Resource: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BCmR0hdGOLwe8FJgt8tyQO0sAjQbbNaH/view>

⁴ Same resource





1. Alienation from Politics and Processes of Decision-Making

The first of many challenges identified is general disaffection with traditional decision-making processes. Many young people feel that their views are not actually considered and that, when they do take part in activities such as voting or public consultations, the result of their contributions is not observable. This leads to mistrust of the institutions, which in turn has the effect of discouraging further participation.

This attitude was amply reflected in the surveys conducted across Slovenia, Italy, France, and Finland⁵, where the young people said that, even as they are worried about the development of their local environments, they hardly feel that they have any relationship with the formal political structures regulating their lives. They often looked at the systems as controlled by older people and inaccessible to their ideas or concerns.

2. Lack of Social Spaces for Engagement

Another fundamental obstacle lies in the total lack of social spaces for young people to come together, discuss issues, and plan events. In many regions, especially rural or socially disadvantaged regions, there are no youth centers, cultural facilities, or other meeting places at their disposal that favor involvement in civic life. Without these spaces, it is remarkably harder for young people to relate to each other, share ideas, or even learn about opportunities to become civically involved in their communities.

For example, in some municipalities - among them those in Slovenia and southern Italy - youth have pointed out a lack of physical and digital spaces in which to engage with one another and local authorities. This lack of space gives way to exclusionary dynamics and may be one cause of youths' disengagement from their communities.

3. Lack of information on the participation/engagement opportunities

Young people are often unaware of the opportunities for engagement that exist. Many local governments have participatory mechanisms, such as a youth council or a community forum; however, the communication of these opportunities is poorly done.

Information is sometimes provided in ways that young people do not relate to—like formal notices or official government websites—instead of systems young people might be using, such as social media or school networks.

In questionnaires completed for the project⁶, many young people declared their own lack of knowledge about how local government works, as well as about all of the ways available to participate. They

⁵ same resource

⁶ Same resource [EXPERT MATERIAL Youth participation at a local level](#)





expressed a wish for more information but repeated that the information provided should be made approachable and interesting for them.

4. Impact of Youth Migration and Economic Obstacles on Participation

In many parts of the world, youth migrate from their hometowns in search of opportunities for education, finding jobs, or living a better life. Such emigration of youth significantly affects the local level since only a small number of them are left to engage in civic activities. This migration, in the case of Slovenia or Italy⁷, for example, is very often based on a lack of local jobs and the hope for a better quality of life across the border in larger cities or abroad.

The economic pressures young people are facing, especially in those areas hit by unemployment quite hard, also play a significant part. Where young people are struggling to find work or are preoccupied with worries about economic security, their participation in local life often takes a back seat. For local government, this means that addressing the economic circumstances forcing young people out of their communities has to be part of any effort toward their participation.

5. Mental Health and Social Isolation

The mental health of youth has become increasingly concerning in recent times, even more so after the COVID-19 pandemic. Many young people reported feelings of loneliness and disconnection with communities, and this can make any engagement in civic life overwhelming or, even worse, irrelevant. In regions such as Finland and France⁸, these feelings of solitude have been exacerbated by poor access to mental health services and the stigma associated with talking about one's mental well-being.

People in the youth bracket facing mental health issues may not have the energy or even potential to engage with local authorities, regardless of the level of engagement desired. It follows then that addressing mental health needs will be a necessary component of any comprehensive approach towards engaging young people in local decision-making.

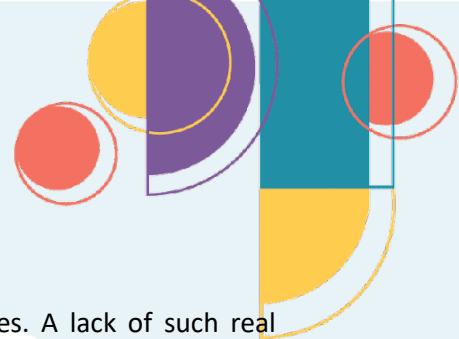
6. Decision-making representation remains limited

Finally, there is a lack of youth in local decision-making structures. Where structures like youth councils or advisory boards exist, they are often tokenistic, limiting young people's real influence in decision-making processes. Moreover, there are big differences in whose voices are heard on these platforms. Although the importance of youth participation is acknowledged in many places, the barriers to participation for marginalized youth are not always recognized. Participation is not automatically equal, and the voices of marginalized youth often remain unheard—even for unintentional reasons. Addressing these disparities is essential for ensuring that all young people have an equal opportunity

⁷ Same resource

⁸ Same resource





to contribute to shaping policies and practices that affect their communities. A lack of such real representation can make young people feel that their actions do not matter; hence, further discouraging them from doing so.

The research of this project has shown that young people want to be heard; however, they also want to see something happen due to their participation. They are looking for participation that is significant and where their input can bring about changes in policy or in community programs.

To summarize, the issues facing youth currently are complex, and it will take several different avenues on the part of municipalities to find solutions. Whether bridging the information gap, providing further space for youth engagement, or improving economic and mental health, these solutions have to be tailored to the realities of young people's lives. It is by understanding these obstacles, and by looking critically at existing power structures that local governments can begin to create enabling environments for the meaningful involvement of young people, ensuring participation would be far from mere encouragement but, rather, full involvement.

Local authorities need to identify and address these challenges. Youth participation helps in building active and interactive communities where innovation prospers along with the building of social bonds.

When given a chance, young people bring in new ideas and dynamism that often help drive innovative solutions for the benefit of the entire community. This way, local governance obtains an approach that is much more inclusive and responsive to community needs.

The next part of the manual will focus on some practical recommendations and guidelines to help local authorities overcome these challenges and involve the active participation of young people in decision-making processes.

The following sections provide practical, tested strategies that local authorities can use to address these barriers and create inclusive participation opportunities

How can we improve?

This chapter provides local authorities with practical recommendations that can help bridge the gap between young people and local-level decision-making processes. These recommendations are divided into three key categories:

1. Communication,
2. Formal Mechanisms, and
3. Non-Formal Mechanisms, focusing on the IDEATHON methodology.

Each category includes an introduction to the theme, actionable recommendations, and a best-practice example aimed at inspiring effective implementation.





1. Through Communication

Effective communication is critical to the engagement of young people in local decision-making processes. Large numbers of young people feel disengaged from the formal lines of communication employed by municipalities; these are often not designed to meet their needs. If local government wants to effectively engage the youth, it needs to communicate in ways and through channels where young people are most active, using a vocabulary and style that reflects and speaks to their concerns and values.

In diverse communities with immigrant or minority youth populations, it is essential to communicate in their own languages to ensure they fully understand opportunities for participation and feel included in local governance. This might include translating materials into commonly spoken languages within the community or partnering with cultural organizations to disseminate information. Additionally, using simple and accessible language can help bridge gaps in understanding, especially for youth with varied educational backgrounds or for whom the primary language is not native. This ensures that communication is clear, relatable, and effective for all young people.

It is also important to remember that communication is not only a question of language but also of representation. Local authorities should pay attention to who is visible in communication materials, whose voice is heard, and who can identify with the content and the people featured. By ensuring diverse representation, municipalities can foster a sense of belonging among all youth, making it more likely that they will engage actively with local decision-making processes.

Recommendations:

1. Collaborate with Schools and Youth Centers:

Schools and youth centers can be principal allies in disseminating information to youth. These local authorities should be working together with educators and youth workers in sharing opportunities for civic engagement directly inside the schools' premises. Guest speakers, workshops, and information campaigns conducted at schools can reach more young people.

This can be achieved through information sessions or workshops initiated by local authorities directly in schools and youth centers, where civic leaders introduce opportunities for engagement. Another good practice is the creation of "**Youth Ambassadors**" in schools—designated students find themselves in the role of liaisons between the school community and the local government. In youth centers, discussion groups or workshops on themes related to civic issues, co-facilitated by youth workers and representatives of local authorities, can spark engagement on community challenges.





2. Exploiting Digital Engagement Platforms:

Local governments can leverage existing digital tools and platforms to make information on local governance, current events, and participation opportunities readily available. Tools such as **Facebook Groups**, **Slack**, or **Discord** can serve as accessible hubs for discussions, event updates, and community engagement. **SurveyMonkey** or **Google Forms** can be used for polls and surveys to collect youth feedback and opinions.

For two-way communication, platforms like **WhatsApp Business** or **Telegram Channels** are excellent for providing updates while also enabling youth to ask questions or provide feedback. Additionally, apps like **Mentimeter** or **Kahoot** can make engagement more interactive and fun, especially during live events or virtual workshops.

Gamification can still be introduced through these existing platforms. For example, creating badge systems within a Discord server or running fun challenges on Instagram can motivate participation. By utilizing platforms youth already use and trust, municipalities can maximize outreach and engagement while minimizing the need for extensive resources or new infrastructure.

Ensuring all communication tools are mobile-friendly is critical, as most young people access digital content through their smartphones.

3. Use Social Media Effectively:

Young people are mostly active on social media platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat. Local governments should utilize these platforms to share information on opportunities for civic engagement, focusing on practicality rather than highly creative campaigns. Even simple and straightforward posts can be impactful if they are clear, relatable, and visually appealing.

Instead of allocating significant resources to complex campaigns, municipalities can repurpose existing content, use community-driven stories, or partner with local youth organizations to co-create posts. Short videos, basic infographics, or interactive features like polls can go a long way in capturing attention without requiring extensive budgets or resources.

Tailoring content to each platform remains important. For example, using concise and visually engaging videos on TikTok, straightforward updates on Instagram, or hosting basic Q&A sessions through stories or posts can ensure effective engagement without straining resources.

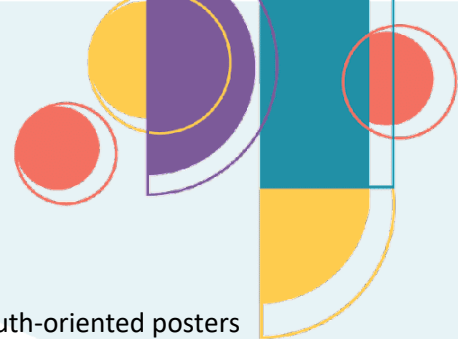
4. Posters and Billboards:

Recognize that traditional communication channels still play an important role. Feedback from many young people we talked to indicates a strong preference for receiving information via posters and





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billboards. Local authorities are encouraged to allocate dedicated spots for youth-oriented posters and billboards, ensuring that key participation messages are visibly displayed in public spaces.



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Good Practice: [YouthMetre Project](#) (Italy):

The **YouthMetre** project developed an innovative e-tool designed to empower young people by providing access to data on EU youth policies and facilitating engagement with policymakers. This tool features interactive maps and infographics that display how different European regions perform across various youth-related policy areas, such as education, employment, health, and participation.⁹

The YouthMetre e-tool is configured for mobile use through a browser, allowing users to access its features on smartphones and tablets. This mobile compatibility ensures that young people can engage with the tool conveniently, regardless of their location.

YouthMetre was utilized to bridge the gap between young people and policymakers by providing transparent data on youth policy achievements. The tool collected and visualized data across eight key areas of youth priority¹⁰:

1. **Education and Training**
2. **Employment and Entrepreneurship**
3. **Health and Well-being**
4. **Participation**
5. **Voluntary Activities**
6. **Social Inclusion**
7. **Youth and the World**
8. **Creativity and Culture**

By presenting this information interactively, YouthMetre enabled young people to assess how well their regions were performing in these areas compared to other regions and to advocate for necessary policy reforms.¹¹

The implementation of YouthMetre involved several key steps¹²:

1. A comprehensive research process examined youth policy documents and statistical data to establish a data dashboard. This dashboard provided visualizations of EU policy achievements using geotechnologies.
2. The project offered training resources to youth workers and young people, equipping them with the skills and knowledge to utilize the data for advocacy and to engage effectively with policymakers.
3. By facilitating access to open data and providing tools for analysis, YouthMetre supported the engagement of young people in developing relevant youth initiatives, addressing the European Union Youth Strategy Priority 7, which focuses on using e-participation to foster youth empowerment and active participation in democratic life.





Through these efforts, YouthMetre aimed to support EU Member States, municipalities, and regions in carrying out effective policy reforms in the field of youth, aligning with the priorities perceived by young Europeans.

⁹ <https://youthmetre.eu/>

¹⁰ <https://youthmetre.eu/youthmetre/>

¹¹ <https://youthmetre.eu/using/>

¹² https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-17783-6_5





2. Through Structured Mechanisms

Formal mechanisms, such as youth councils, participatory budgeting, and advisory committees, are structured channels for young people to participate in local governance. However, these have often needed to be more utilized or perceived as out of reach by young people.

Also, increasing transparency and accessibility in formal mechanisms can help local governments ensure that young people really have an opportunity to have a voice in decision-making.

Notably, in several countries, including all Nordic nations, the establishment of youth councils is mandated by law. For instance, since 2020, Norway has required municipalities to have formal consultative bodies or youth councils at both municipal and county levels. The municipal and county councils determine the composition and operational procedures of these youth councils, ensuring that young people's perspectives are integrated into local governance.¹³

Similarly, Iceland has mandated youth councils since 2007, aiming to institutionalize youth participation in local decision-making processes.¹⁴

Recommendations:

1. Setting up or developing youth councils:

Youth councils are considered a **very useful tool** in local contexts. Inclusive youth councils represent several groups of young people with fewer opportunities. Youth councils should be able to exert real influence over decision-making with clear roles and responsibilities defined and with direct access to decision-makers at the municipality level.

Moreover, youth councils require dedicated support to thrive. It is crucial to have a designated individual, such as a youth coordinator or facilitator, responsible for managing the council, providing guidance, and ensuring it remains organized and operational. This person can help with logistics, agenda-setting, and bridging communication between youth council members and local authorities.

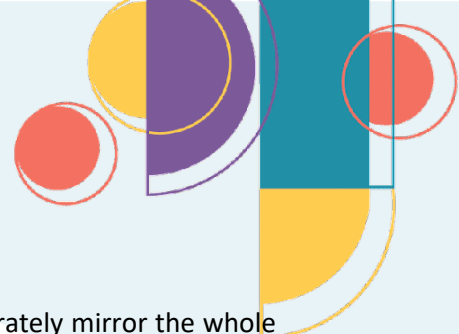
In many cases, youth council members are selected through a voting process to ensure democratic representation. This voting process empowers young people by giving them a direct say in choosing their representatives and fosters greater trust and legitimacy in the council's work.

It is worth mentioning here that to be inclusive, local authorities should consider establishing youth leadership training programs, particularly for underrepresented groups, such as young people from minority communities, rural areas, and/or those with fewer opportunities. This would lend a louder

¹³ <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/norway/53-youth-representation-bodies>

¹⁴ https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-44794-6_13





voice to a more varied number of voices and ensure that youth councils accurately mirror the whole range of the community.

This could be initiated through consultation with youth organizations or schools to recruit several diverse representatives in the youth council. This will ensure that those are more effective through training on governance and civic responsibility. With increased impact, municipalities could provide resources for council initiatives where youth members would get an opportunity to propose and implement small-scale community projects.

Some good practices for **Sustainability of youth councils**:

- Provide a dedicated budget to Youth Councils to fund their initiatives, training programs, and operational activities. For example, allocate a percentage of the municipal budget to youth-led projects.
- Assign a **youth coordinator or facilitator** as a dedicated technical resource to support the council, manage logistics, and liaise with decision-makers.
- Ensure funding for capacity-building workshops to equip council members with governance, project management, and leadership skills.

2. Participatory Budgeting with Young People:

Participatory budgeting gives young people the chance to propose and vote on projects that directly impact their communities. This is how municipalities can allocate a portion of the municipal budget to youth-led initiatives, ensuring that there is ownership and accountability by young people, and that their ideas are realized. Giving young people the real power to decide on the use of financial resources demonstrates in practice that their participation and ideas are genuinely valued, rather than merely being a token gesture.

Phased and Low-Cost Approaches:

Municipalities with limited resources can adopt a phased approach to participatory budgeting. Start by allocating a small symbolic budget to pilot youth-led initiatives. For example, setting aside a minimal amount (e.g., 1% of discretionary funds) for community improvement projects proposed by youth. Over time, as the program gains visibility and support, the budget can be incrementally increased

3. Ensure Representation in Municipal Advisory Bodies:

Youth shall be included as representatives of the local advisory boards and committees, with youth members who are actively involved in the decision-making process concerning policies and development initiatives. Such youth members shall have full voting rights and the potential to contribute substantially to decisions.





Youth should be included as representatives on local advisory boards and committees, actively participating in decision-making processes concerning policies and development initiatives. Youth representatives should have the right to be present and voice their opinions during discussions, ensuring that their perspectives are heard and considered.

Where possible, granting youth members voting rights can further enhance their ability to contribute meaningfully to decisions. However, the primary focus should be on creating an environment where youth participation is valued, and their insights are integrated into the policymaking process.

Good Practice: [Münchner Jugendrat \(Munich Youth Council, Germany\)](#).¹⁵

The Münchner Jugendrat is one of the oldest and most successful examples of a youth council in Europe. Since 1973, young people between 14 and 21 years have been given the possibility to participate in city politics. The Council consists of 40 young members elected by peers every two years to ensure that there always exists a direct representation of youth within the local decision-making level.

It has left its mark on policies pertaining to education, public spaces, and transportation in Munich, thereby proving that formal mechanisms do indeed work when young people are given an authentic voice in governing.

The work of the council goes beyond the advisory function; it actually works in cooperation with the municipal government to try and put into practice youth-led initiatives. This exemplifies the importance of giving young people voting rights and responsibilities within the structures of local government.

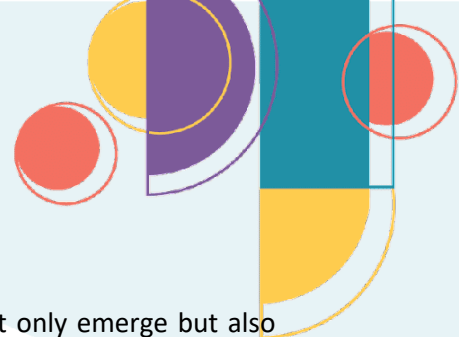
The Münchner Jugendrat has been involved in just about everything from youth centers to transportation improvements and public spaces catering to the younger generation when it comes to policy design. One of the biggest achievements of this council was in the planning of educational facilities for Munich, where, together with city planners, the youth council made sure that schools and education settings would meet young people's needs.

It also plays a continual budgeting decision role, whereby it provides funding for youth programs and infrastructure. In fact, the success of the Münchner Jugendrat is supposedly based on its autonomy and great influence within the city government—it is a model that other municipalities can easily emulate.

For cities that aspire to replicate this model, it is essential to confer genuine decision-making power and access to resources to youth councils. By allocating funds and granting voting rights to young

¹⁵ [GOOD PRACTICES ANALYSIS.pdf](#)





representatives, municipalities can ensure that ideas generated by youth not only emerge but also influence tangible policy outcomes.

Institutionalization Strategies:

Local authorities can ensure the longevity of youth councils and advisory boards by:

- Embedding youth participation policies into municipal charters.
- Allocating a fixed percentage of annual budgets to youth-led initiatives.
- Establishing formal reporting structures where youth representatives regularly present to municipal leaders.

Municipalities interested in replicating successful models like Münchner Jugendrat can begin by:

1. Establishing a pilot youth council with a limited scope (e.g., focused on education policy).
2. Partnering with local schools and youth organizations to recruit members.
3. Gradually expanding the council's role and responsibilities based on pilot outcomes.

3. Through Non-Formal Mechanisms

Non-formal mechanisms are flexible and accessible ways to involve youth, particularly those who may feel alienated by traditional governance structures. These methods focus on collaboration, creativity, and inclusiveness, making them highly effective for fostering youth participation in civic life.

Non-formal mechanisms are participatory approaches that exist outside traditional institutional frameworks. They emphasize informal, flexible, and community-driven methods of engagement. Prioritizing experiential learning, collaboration, and creativity are particularly effective in engaging young people who may not easily relate to formal governance structures.

Importance of Non-Formal Mechanisms

Non-formal mechanisms create a bridge between young people and local authorities, fostering trust and collaboration. They allow youth to contribute to decision-making processes in less intimidating and more engaging ways compared to formal structures. Examples include:

- Workshops
- Participatory projects
- Community events
- Collaborative initiatives

Collaboration with Youth Organizations

Working with youth organizations is vital when applying non-formal approaches. These organizations have built trust with young people over time and can act as intermediaries between youth and local governments. By collaborating with youth organizations, local authorities can:





- Reach a broader and more diverse group of young people.
- Leverage the expertise of youth workers in facilitation and engagement.
- Design programs that are interesting and relevant to young people's needs.

Recommendations

Organize Participatory Events

- Host community workshops, hackathons, or forums to bring young people together to identify challenges and propose solutions.
- Design activities to be inclusive, engaging, and action-oriented.

Leverage Existing Networks

- Collaborate with schools, youth centers, and grassroots organizations to promote participatory opportunities and ensure broader outreach.

Provide Continuous Support

- After participatory events, offer mentorship and resources to help young people implement their ideas.
- Provide guidance through mentors, access to expertise, and funding to ensure sustainability and build trust in the process.

Encourage Experimentation

- Allow young people the freedom to experiment and learn from their experiences.
- View mistakes as opportunities for growth and learning.

Include Diverse Voices

- Ensure mechanisms are accessible to youth from diverse backgrounds, including those with fewer opportunities.
- Adapt materials and outreach strategies to different languages, abilities, and socio-economic contexts.

Good Practice Example: Largo alla Scuola (Italy) ¹⁶

The Largo alla Scuola initiative in Palermo, Italy, showcases the potential of non-formal approaches. During participatory workshops, young people collaborated with architects and local authorities to redesign an abandoned public space. This process not only transformed the area into a vibrant community hub but also empowered young people to make their voices heard and shape their environment.

This initiative demonstrates the value of engaging youth in meaningful projects that combine creativity with tangible outcomes, fostering a sense of ownership and achievement among participants.

¹⁶ [GOOD PRACTICES ANALYSIS.pdf](#)





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Creating Inclusive Pathways to Youth Participation

Engaging young people with fewer opportunities is about building inclusive, vibrant communities. These young people very often face compounded challenges—economic, geographical, cultural, or physical—and discrimination on multiple grounds that negatively affect their ability to participate fully in civic life. This section offers some practical recommendations that ensure their active participation, with a focus on accessibility, inclusivity, and bespoke approaches.

1. Addressing Accessibility and Inclusivity

Participation mechanisms must be designed to accommodate all young people, particularly those with fewer opportunities. Creating equal participation is a long-term and multidisciplinary effort and requires critical examination of youth participation activities and structures. The central question is whether we can notice which factors in the activities enable some young people to participate and others to remain outside of these activities. Local authorities should take action to identify discriminatory mechanisms and attitudes, prioritize both physical and digital accessibility while addressing financial barriers and communication gaps:

- **Attitudes and assumptions:** Evaluate both the barriers and the accessibility of the activity from the perspective of different minorities. Pay attention to who can feel safe and welcome in the activity. Can you identify barriers to participation that are related to attitudes, prejudices or assumptions often associated with marginalized groups or minority youth?
- **Physical Accessibility:** Ensure venues for participatory events are accessible to youth with disabilities. Provide transportation options for those living in remote or rural areas to enable participation.
- **Digital Accessibility:** Platforms and tools need to be supportive of screen readers, video captioning, and mobile compatibility to accommodate youth with visual, hearing, or mobility impairments.
- **Financial Support:** Provide stipends, pay for travel, or offer scholarships to eliminate the economic barriers that prevent participation.
- **Plain and Clear Communication:** Avoid using complicated or bureaucratic-sounding language when addressing young people. In all communications, use plain and understandable language in order to be inclusive of youth of different educational or linguistic backgrounds.

Example: The YouthMetre project, developed in Italy, utilized digital tools in order to present accessible and understandable data about youth policy in a participatory and inclusive manner, thus facilitating advocacy.

2. Targeted Outreach Strategies





Local authorities should make sure that outreach is proactive and targeted to involve young people with fewer opportunities. These activities shall aim at trust-building and reaching youth where they are most active:

- Cooperate with institutions already trusted by the young. Schools, youth houses, and social services can act as key allies to disseminate information, promote participation, and create safer spaces for engagement.
- Outreach strategies should address gender-specific barriers, encouraging equal opportunities for all genders, especially young women and people belonging to different gender minorities, to actively participate in civic processes.
- Clear, relatable language in outreach materials is key to informing diverse youth. The ways to remove the barriers include simple words, culturally sensitive content, and translation services.
- Reach out through direct contact with community leaders, cultural associations, and grassroots networks to liaise with youngsters from underserved backgrounds. Long-term partnerships will make it possible to build this trust and secure longer-lasting engagement.

Example: Inclusive outreach strategies co-ordinated or facilitated by Peace Education Institute across Finnish municipalities meant that immigrant youth were also engaged through i.a. translation of materials and culturally sensitive programs with the over all goal of developing anti-racist youth work and enabling more equal participation.

3. Flexible and Supportive Mentorship

Mentorship plays a crucial role in guiding young people, especially those with fewer opportunities, through the participation process. Local authorities should combine structured programs with personalized support:

- **Connect Youth to Caring Adults:** Beyond formal mentorship programs, ensure that youth have facilitators, community leaders, or youth workers who guide them throughout their journey of participation. These adults offer encouragement, practical help, and confidence-building.
- **Provide Leadership Development:** Provide opportunities for young people to build leadership skills through workshops, peer mentorship, and hands-on projects. Encourage underrepresented youth to step into leadership roles and contribute to decision-making.
- **Flexible Options for Participation:** The participation of young people with fewer opportunities may be constrained by work, family, or other commitments. For this reason, participation must be flexible through the offering of short-term or low-commitment opportunities and/or the option of virtual engagement.

Example: The Ankaran Scholarship Program from Slovenia combined financial support with volunteering opportunities, which enabled young people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds to make a positive contribution to their communities.





4. Ensure Gender Equality in Participation

Inclusive participation mechanisms are not possible without promoting gender equality. Local authorities should address gender-specific barriers and ensure a balanced representation by taking active steps in the following:

- Promote the equal involvement of different genders in all initiatives and decision-making bodies.
- Align with EU frameworks, such as the *EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025* and the *Treaty of Lisbon (Article 8)*, which emphasize gender equality in policy and participation.
- Track participation data to ensure gender balance, and if there are any disparities, implement targeted outreach and supportive measures to address them.
- Allocate quotas within Youth Councils to ensure **equal representation** of young people of different genders.
- Provide leadership training specifically for young women and other underrepresented youth groups to strengthen their confidence and readiness for decision-making roles.

Final Thoughts

Engaging young people in local governance is not just a goal—it's a necessity for building inclusive, forward-thinking communities. By addressing barriers such as alienation, economic hurdles, and gender-specific challenges, municipalities can empower young people to actively shape their environments.

This manual highlights both **structured mechanisms**—like Youth Councils and advisory bodies—and **participatory methods**—such as IDEATHONs—that enable meaningful youth engagement. Local authorities must take intentional steps to:

- Dedicated budgets and technical support ensure youth initiatives thrive.
- Equal participation aims to take into account various grounds for discrimination - such as gender, origin, nationality, language, religion, disability, sexual orientation and other personal characteristics - that may act as obstacles for young people to participate. Equal participation amplifies diverse perspectives and strengthens decision-making processes as fundamental rights to participate belong to everyone.
- Training, mentorship, and access to evidence-based tools equip young people to contribute effectively.

Young people bring energy, creativity, and innovative solutions to local challenges. Their participation fosters trust, strengthens relationships, and drives tangible progress. By adopting these strategies, municipalities can create a culture of collaboration where youth are not only heard but seen as active partners in governance.





Something Meaningful



Investing in youth participation today builds a legacy of civic engagement and shared responsibility—creating resilient, dynamic communities for generations to come.



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