



How To Meaningfully Engage Youth Activists and Youth-led Organizations

This guidance sets out basic principles that Our Generation for Inclusive Peace (OGIP) expects organizations engaging with youth advocates, activists, organizers and youth-led groups to meet to ensure young people's meaningful and effective participation in discussions and decision-making processes. This guidance covers both longer-term process-based engagement with young people and youth-led groups, as well as one-off youth participation for specific events. OGIP will use this guidance in our interactions with partners and organizations to set clear parameters around our expectations, and to hold partners and organizations to account for their commitments to youth inclusion. We also hope this simple guidance can be used proactively by organizers looking for ways to ensure effective youth engagement, leadership and participation.

Why we wrote this guidance

Youth activists, advocates, and youth-led organizations face additional barriers to their participation in decision-making and policy spaces, and in their implementation of the Women Peace and Security (WPS) and Youth Peace and Security (YPS) agendas. The vast majority have limited access to funding or resources and often undertake work in a voluntary capacity, alongside other commitments.

This is in addition to experiencing wider forms of discrimination that often lead to young people being labelled as inexperienced, idealistic or naïve, and perceptions that their participation is an 'opportunity' they should be grateful for, rather than a valuable contribution to wider peace and security processes. When young people are invited to participate, often they are asked to speak only to 'youth issues' and are not seen as peace and security experts in their own right. These challenges and forms of discrimination are exacerbated by and intersect with other constraints faced by certain organizations and individuals, particularly those based in the Global South, young women-led organizations, those championing a gender equality or explicitly feminist agenda, LGBTQ+ persons and those championing LGBTQ+ rights, and those with or those supporting the rights of persons with disabilities. Not considering these additional barriers means that youth participation is often tokenistic, rather than substantive.



To ensure equitable, meaningful and effective youth participation, it is, therefore, necessary for organizations engaging with youth activists, advocates and youth-led organizations to account for these needs and put in place the necessary steps to redistribute power and facilitate intergenerational partnership.

Guidance

Planning

- 1. Define a clear role for youth participants and provide space to check-in on expectations**

Vague remits with no decision-making power relegate youth participation to tokenism and limit the impact their contributions can have. Organizers should make sure that youth participants have a clear role and understand the purpose of their contributions, and that this is also understood by other participants, whether as part of a one-off event or an ongoing process. Realistic expectations should be set by both organizers and participants about the extent of their engagement so organizations and young people can make informed decisions about their level of commitment.

- 2. Involve youth from the beginning, not as an add-on at the end of a process**

Young people and youth-led organizations should help shape processes, as well as contributing to the final outcome. Timelines, deadlines, agendas and outputs should be co-designed with youth participants, or if this is not possible developed in consultation with young people. This will help ensure the needs of diverse participants are met, that timelines are realistic, and that youth participation is meaningfully undertaken.

- 3. Give participants enough notice before opportunities**

Young people and youth-led organizations are often balancing multiple commitments and need to make arrangements to have time to prepare for and participate in opportunities. Whether a one-off event or part of a more thorough engagement process, organizers should give youth participants a minimum of two weeks' notice, ideally more, when inviting them to participate at any meeting, event or opportunity, with clear timings and parameters for discussion. This should be substantially longer if travel is required for participation. If part of a longer-term process, a clear timeline with expected participation and deliverables should be co-created with participants from the beginning.



Funding

1. Recognize and compensate young people and youth-led organisations for their time

In both stand-alone events and engagement through multiple fora, if other participants are receiving financial remuneration for their contribution, so should youth delegates. Failing to provide equal compensation reinforces the perception that youth participation is an opportunity for them, rather than a space to share their expertise and shape decisions. If all participation is uncompensated, organizers should recognise that youth activists usually participate on their own time, rather than on behalf of funded organizations, and, therefore, should make stipends available to enable their attendance and full participation.

2. Provide direct core funding to youth-led organizations

Where possible, organizations should follow up their commitments to youth participation by providing core-funding to youth-led organizations as a priority. This will enable ongoing and dedicated support to youth activists and enable their longer-term advocacy and engagements in events and policy making processes. By providing direct, core funding, youth-led movements will be able to determine their own priorities and direction.

Engaging

1. Allow space for youth delegates to contribute to the whole discussion, do not relegate them to 'youth issues'

Meaningfully engaging youth means recognizing that young people have wide-ranging expertise and experiences. They do not talk on behalf of all youth or only on 'youth-issues' but should be engaged on the diversity of subjects at hand, and have their contribution valued as an equal member of the discussion and decision-making process.

2. Ensure formats for meetings, events, discussions, whether one-off or part of a wider process, are conducive to meaningful and diverse participation of all delegates

Traditional formats for discussion with large numbers of people are often not conducive to encouraging youth or diverse voices to speak up and



contribute. More needs to be done to ensure these spaces are youth friendly and accessible to all. Ensuring dedicated time for youth speakers is one way of ensuring sufficient time is dedicated to different speakers and that those who are less familiar with such formats feel supported to participate. Chairs and organizers should be aware of the power dynamics in meetings and discussions that often privilege certain voices above others and should actively shape the conversations to challenge such dynamics.

3. Establish mechanisms to be held accountable to recommendations and ensure follow-up with delegates

Organizers should establish and share upfront how recommendations from youth consultations will be actioned and the expected timelines for this. The outcomes and actions from any consultations, how they are implemented or why they are not should be shared with all those that have contributed. Accountability and transparency are essential for any effective and diverse process.

Acknowledging

1. Acknowledge and credit the contribution of youth participants and organizations

Youth-led organizations, and youth advocates and activists often don't have comparable reputations, profiles or networks compared to larger, more established entities. Publicly and actively crediting them for their ideas, participation, and influence in a discussion can have a positive impact on that individual's or organization's profile.

2. Value the time and contribution of youth participants

Valuing time and expertise does not just come in the form of funding, but also the attention and prioritisation of engaging with youth participants. Ignoring or relegating engagement with youth participants reinforces power dynamics and denies the opportunity for diverse perspectives to be listened to. Senior decision-makers should equally value the contribution of youth participants as much as more established entities, giving them equal time, space and consideration.



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Further resources

These are baseline principles intended to be a starting point for consideration on how to meaningfully engage youth advocates and activists and youth-led organizations, whether through their participation in one-off events or as part of a broader, longer-term process. We strongly recommend all organizers of events, forums, discussions, policy-making and other processes conduct wider research into *how* to ensure meaningful and diverse participation in these processes. Here are a few recommended readings that OGIP has found informative on the subject:

- Moving More Money to the Drivers of Change, Mama Cash
https://www.mamacash.org/media/publications/movingmoremoney_ma_ma_cash_awid_cmi.pdf
- The Harts Ladder of Quality of Participation
<https://www.myd.govt.nz/documents/engagement/harts-ladder.pdf>
- The Flower of Participation - Meaningful Youth Participation, CHOICE for Youth & Sexuality
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zniPwsDQskk>
- Young Feminist Manifesto; A Bold and Transformative Vision for Change, Generation Equality Forum Youth Coalition
https://e303bb68-0f86-4625-b0df-382bc663b63a.filesusr.com/ugd/13b9c9_9205e426df3a4a849fcbe0166e74548f.pdf

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