

# What is Meaningful Youth Participation?

Definitions of **Youth** vary across context and organisation. The CFYE approach is informed by the African Union Youth Charter and Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) working definition of those between the ages of 15-35, accommodating for a broad transitional period in global young people's lives.

In the context of CFYE Meaningful Youth Participation (MYP) is understood as:

*“Intentionally supporting and enabling diverse young people to have voice, visibility, and influence in explicit stages of decision-making and action (design, implementation and/or evaluation) on issues and initiatives that affect them.”<sup>1</sup>*

Critically, active participation will contribute to CFYE outcomes and be of tangible benefit to young people and the communities they are part of. Simply, MYP implies that young people have a valued voice, that decision makers listen and act and that outcomes for young people are purposeful, positive and avoid risk of harm and tokenism.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.youthatheart.nl/meaningful-youth-participation-toolkit>

MYP theory and practice has developed over recent decades; aligned with **Participation and Rights Based Models**, driven by young leaders and a collective of civil society and industry actors who explicitly recognise and advocate for the essential role young people must play in addressing global issues. As actors working to address global youth underemployment and unemployment, we would encourage all CFYE colleagues, and other stakeholders to explore the \_\_to develop a deeper understanding of youth participation.



# MYP Practice Standards Overview

## GOAL



### 1. Building Positive Environments

Young People experience a safe and positive environment where they feel enabled and supported to participate freely.

### 2. Accountability & Transparency

We hold ourselves accountable for our actions. Engagement is intentional with defined objectives and boundaries. Clear roles, expectations, transparent communication, and two-way feedback support the positive participation of all.

### 3. Safe Participation

We recognise our Duty of Care for all those with which we work and strive to minimise risk and ensure the safety, security, and well-being of all those participating in our programmes.

### 4. Inclusivity & Respect

We value and respect young people as individuals. We will challenge barriers to participation, providing opportunities for diverse young people to engage free from prejudice and/or discrimination.

### 5. Mindful Resourcing

Meaningful Youth Participation is appropriately resourced, and staff effectively supported, to ensure a quality experience and outcomes for all stakeholders.

### 6. Quality & Supported Participation

Young people make a free and informed choice to engage with the programme. Participation is appropriately supported to maximise their development and positively contribute to programme outcomes.



# Standard 1: *Building Positive Environments*

Positively and proactively address unequal power dynamics between youth and non-youth as they emerge.

Work to build the self-confidence of young people to take an active role in future opportunities. Focus on it being an affirming process through recognition and feedback.

Consider developing 'group compacts' to collectively agree positive ways of working.

If working in a virtual environment consider ease of IT access and if support with skills for technology, or specific platform 'how to guides' can be provided in advance.

Allow for informal space, supporting organic discussion and relationship forming.

Ensure that methods of engagement are continuously developed and agreed upon with young people to best fit their preferred ways of working. Use participatory and inclusive methodologies - engagement should be varied, positive and fun.

Language is powerful and can be exclusive. Ensure that you avoid jargon in your communications and any 'technical language' that must be used is explained ahead of engagement. Where multiple language speakers are engaged provide translation and accompaniment or documentation in advance.

Consider which voices are leading the engagement and are most heard- how can this be distributed more equitably?

Ensure there is a mutual understanding of the purpose of the engagement and the role and value of all parties.

Work to create spaces where young people are comfortable. Use existing, accessible, youth-friendly spaces or create online environments with inclusive visuals, language, sounds and diverse leading voices. Avoid replicating existing societal barriers.

Identify barriers to participation (travel, timing, language, gender norms, cost, caring commitments, digital access, power dynamics etc), working with young people to minimise these. Consider capturing this in a 'Personal Support and Development Plan'.

Promote participation amongst all stakeholders, taking time to support non-youth actors' expectation setting.

## GOAL

Young People experience a safe and positive environment where they feel enabled and supported to participate freely.



# Standard 2: Accountability & Transparency



## GOAL

We hold ourselves accountable for our actions. Engagement is intentional with defined objectives and boundaries. Clear roles, expectations, communication and two-way feedback supports the positive participation of all.

Define the purpose and outcomes of youth engagement for your activity and the contribution to CFYE objectives. Why are you doing it? What will change as a result?

Provide engaged young people with accessible information about their roles, their responsibilities and the support provided. Ensure expectations are clear and that young people choose to participate based on a clear, realistic brief.

Collectively agree what success looks like for the engagement and those involved.

Incorporate multiple touch and review points into your plan-enabling you to realistically adapt activity in response to youth contributions and feedback.

Provide accessible, timely feedback on the outcomes of participation. Share with those engaged how their inputs have been interpreted and applied and how they have influenced outcomes. Communicate the impact of their actions in achieving CFYE goals.

Honestly share the engagements scope, boundaries, and limitations. Ensure young people are aware of the scale of their influence and where decision making lies.

Evaluate your activity and the process of engagement. Dependent on scale, consider the best mechanism for this and ensure young people are central to the process.

Ensure that the roles and expectations of all involved are outlined and understood. Clearly state that we are accountable for our commitments to young people.

Develop an engagement timeline that outlines the ask, milestones, touchpoints and a clear endpoint to the planned participation.

Share your activity, success, and learning- ensuring visibility amongst young people and CFYE colleagues. Honestly reflect on the process of engagement and how we can continue to do better.



Ensure that feedback is two-way, creating a safe space for young people to reflect on their experiences and future recommendations.

Do not proceed with an engagement process if young people's contributions will be manipulated or unheard. Be transparent about this.

# Standard 3: *Safe Participation*



Ensure you are familiar with National Safeguarding Legislation. Establish if security checks are needed to work with vulnerable groups in your location.

Identify the ages of those you are working with. If engaging those under the age of 18 follow National and Organisational safeguarding procedures.

Complete a 'Risk and Vulnerability Assessment' for your activity. Depending on the context, discuss the challenges that young people may face in their lives, if there is a risk of harm from participation, and how this can be avoided/mitigated for.

Manage young people's data and imagery sensitively and confidentiality, in line with the company GDPR & Digital Policies.

Ensure you are familiar and compliant with all relevant organisational policies outlined in your company. For example, Code of Conduct, Child Protection Policy, Safeguarding Policy, PSEAH Guidelines, Modern Slavery Guidelines.

Any external parties involved in activity are assessed and prepared to effectively and safely work with young people.

Unless otherwise agreed, avoid young people's contributions being attributable to any one individual.

Clearly communicate the Company's Complaints and Whistle Blowing Procedure, and contact person, to allow for the confidential raising of issues experienced by those engaging with the programme.

Ensure young people have a clear point of contact to discuss their participation with.

Always prioritise the physical, emotional and societal security of those engaged.

In line with a rights-based approach ensure young people are aware of their right to be safe from harm and abuse and that they know how to access support if required.

Assess if the Process Lead has the skills, confidence, and line management to support safe participation.

Map what support for young people is available in your context. What organisations can you refer young people to? What support can be built into the activity?

Complete company Safeguarding training and ensure familiarity with the Safeguarding, Disclosure and Reporting process. Know to whom you and those engaging with young people will escalate a disclosure or concern

## GOAL

We recognise our Duty of Care for all those with which we work and strive to minimise risk and ensure the safety, security, and well-being of all those participating in our programmes.

# Standard 4: *Inclusivity & Respect*



Do not assume all young people are confident and free to express themselves where their contributions could be culturally sensitive. Consider the use of blind or anonymous input tools and direct feedback.

Where there are limits on how many young people can participate, try to engage young people in identifying appropriate contributors to represent them.

Encourage and support young people engaged to act as conduits for wider youth participation through accessing youth networks and informal spaces.

Value the non-homogeneity of young people, not assuming that the views of a certain group apply to all.

Do not suppose you know what is best for a group and or individual, speaking for them or leading dialogue.

Proactively address power imbalances between young people and other actors engaged, identifying ways to ensure they are confident and safe to participate (consider Group Compact use).

Map the youth ecosystem of possible actors. Avoid only engaging young people from well-represented groups and only those who are 'well known' to the programme. Reach out to young people through multiple avenues and in their own environments.

Recognise and respect young people's other commitments, allowing time to participate alongside wider life. For example, scheduling sessions at appropriate times, offering multiple drop-ins, giving advance notice via a project timeline.

Work to ensure participation equally available to all, identifying and addressing barriers in recruitment and engagement mechanisms.

Consider proactive approaches to engage groups who are frequently excluded (urban/rural, gender, age, PWD, careers, socio-cultural, ethnicity, status). Put in place ways to reduce things that limit participation (language, geography, abilities, age, income, connectivity, cultural bias, discrimination etc.) and capture this in a 'recruitment plan'.



Be mindful of and avoid assumptions about young people's capacity or anticipate that young people's inputs are lesser valuable than those of other stakeholders.

## GOAL

We value and respect young people as individuals. We will challenge barriers to participation, providing opportunities for diverse young people to engage free from prejudice and/or discrimination.

# Standard 5: Mindful Resourcing



The participation of young people is appropriately valued and rewarded; to include fair remuneration, expenses, networking, investment in their development and support.

Explore whether you can maximise efficiency by collaborating with wider colleagues on a collective engagement plan.

Sufficient time/resources are available for quality participation and young people are supported to prepare for and maximise their participation.

Be intentional in purpose and process, producing an engagement plan to ascertain the resource required and communicate scope and expectations.

Be mindful of your capacity limits and the intended scope- do these align or do you need to make amendments?

Company colleagues are proactive role models and advocates for positive ways of engaging with young people- living the MYP values.

The Activity Lead is equipped and confident to lead the engagement. Support available includes using the Practice Standards, have basic understanding of MYP (in CFYE, we also have familiarisation with the MOFA MYP Toolkit) engaging with the appointed Youth Participation Advisor.

Share any concerns about engaging young people in your work with supportive colleagues. Access MYP in-house support services to explore the engagement, troubleshoot, and increase quality.

Through openly sharing our MYP processes, successes and learning we build a culture where colleagues value MYP and feel empowered and inspired to engage in activity.

Colleagues are supported and supervised to effectively lead MYP activities via the engagement of line management, peers and Youth Experts.



Ensure the best use of effort by identifying issues of most relevance to the young people engaged with real avenues for positive action.

## GOAL

Meaningful Youth Participation is appropriately resourced, and staff effectively supported, to ensure a quality experience and outcomes for all stakeholders.

# Standard 6: Quality & Supported Participation



Recognise that we are accountable to young people for the commitments we make and transparently address where we fail to do so in a timely way.

Be honest and open about any boundaries to participation and the realistic impact on decision making and outcomes.

If we are to genuinely be shaped by young people's participation, we must create space- allow time in planning processes for review and adaptation.

Provide easy and timely access to relevant information and resources. Where possible provide materials in a user-friendly format.

Ensure there is a named and accessible contact point with clarity on response times.

There is a common understanding and agreement on how young people's contributions will be shared, with whom and for what outcome.

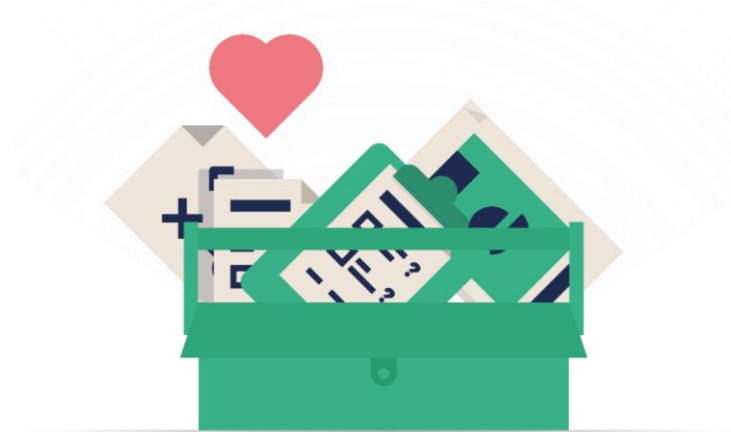
Work to provide regular communication and project updates.

Complete individual needs assessments (email/survey/1:1) to determine young people's specific needs and development objectives. Consider capturing this in a 'Personal Development and Support Plan'.

Offer varied and stepped participation options over the activity lifespan to allow for incremental development and contributions and engagement of a wider group.

## GOAL

Young people make a free and informed choice to engage with the company. Participation is appropriately supported to maximise their development and positively contribute to programme outcomes.



MYP offers a two-way value exchange. Communicate the engagement offer to young people, identifying the outcomes, support available and capabilities they will develop.

Young people's participation is based on the principle of informed free choice. All participants must understand their role (role description) and responsibilities and have the freedom to withdraw without negative consequence.

Allow young people to choose the most appropriate form of engagement for them and to shape alternative mechanisms.

# Applying the Practice Standards: *Reflection Questions*

## Standard 1: Building Positive Environments

- ▼ What would a 'perfect' environment and process look like? In the context of your work and scope which elements are the priority?
- ▼ Alone or in a group, consider what you could include in a 'Group Compact' which would help to build a youth friendly and inclusive environment?

## Standard 2: Accountability and Transparency

- ▼ How have (will) I transparently inform young people on the purpose, limitations and scope of their engagement? Draft a sample role brief to support this.
- ▼ Consider a time you have observed poor or unethical engagement. Why did this happen (context and drivers) and what were the outcomes? How can this be avoided in future?

## Standard 3: Safe Participation

- ▼ Map the key risks associated with Youth Engagement and consider the support mechanisms available to you, young people and colleagues in your context. What roles can they play in enabling safe participation?
- ▼ Reflect on your confidence to support safe participation? Identify three actions you can take to enhance this.

To contextualise the Practice Standards and support reflection on your practice, a range of **reflection questions** and **action scenarios** have been developed. Each question and scenario can be considered alone or with peers and colleagues. To maximise their value, review them alongside the Standard 'Actions in Practice' considering relevance, feasibility and priority in your work.

## Standard 4: Inclusivity and Respect

- ▼ Reflect on why diversity of contribution is important. Identify three ways this could help better meet your/organization objectives?
- ▼ Map the youth ecosystem of possible actors in your context. Consider their possible barriers and how you could mitigate for each one?

## Standard 5: Mindful Resourcing

- ▼ Outline the value-add of your activity. How can this be communicated to decision-makers?
- ▼ Reflect on how experienced you are at engaging young people in your work? Capture two SMART actions, linked to the Meaningful Youth Participation, to enhance your practice.

## Standard 6: Quality and Supported Participation

- ▼ Imagine you are a young person engaging with a certain project/programme. Write a wish list of the support and opportunities which would best motivate and enable you to participate and develop? Capture these in a simple Personal Development and Support Plan.
- ▼ Reflect on and capture what could be included in a quality communications plan for young people engaged?