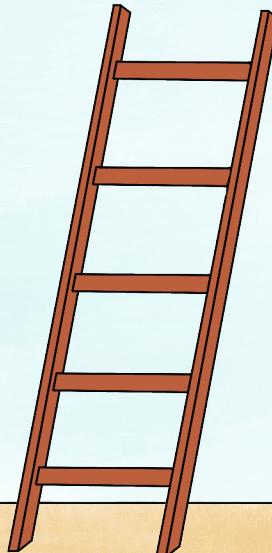




TOOLBOX

With 17 Valuable Tips to a Youth Council



INTRODUCTION

THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE

THE PATH TO A YOUTH COUNCIL

17 TIPS FOR BUILDING, SUPPORTING AND DEVELOPING A YOUTH COUNCIL

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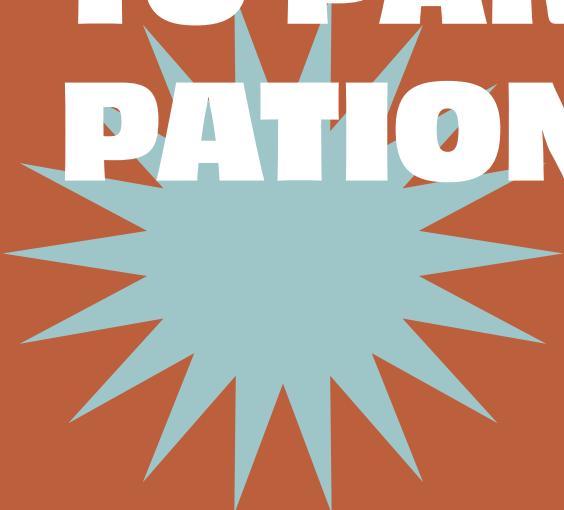
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INTRO- DUCTION

A youth council is a tool that allows young people to be regularly involved in decision-making. It creates a structured space for exchange between young people and an organization. This **fosters openness, transparency, and better decisions**, because different perspectives are taken into account.

A youth council helps ensure that **programs and measures are better aligned with the actual needs of young people**. As a result, decisions become more effective, understandable, and credible. At the same time, young people learn to take responsibility, work in teams, and engage actively.

THE RIGHT TO PARTICI- PATION



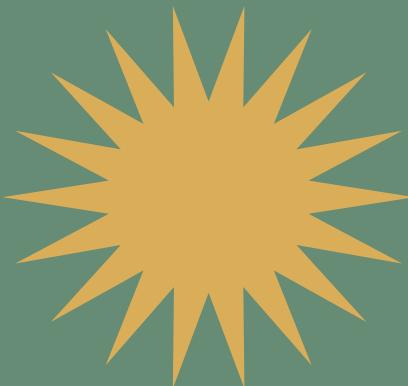
The participation of children and young people is not merely a pedagogical approach – it is a **right**. Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) enshrines every child's right to be heard in all matters affecting them. States and public institutions are obliged to take **young people's opinions** duly **into account**.

In Austria, this right is guaranteed by **Article 4 of the Federal Constitutional Act on the Rights of Children** (BVG-Kinderrechte). According to this law, every child has the **right to participate and to have their views taken into account** – in accordance with their age and maturity. Public institutions are therefore called upon to create structures where young people can be heard and take part in shaping decisions.

A **youth council** is a concrete way to put this right into practice. It offers young people a safe and reliable framework to share their concerns, discuss topics, and participate in decision-making. In this way, the **right to participation** becomes a living reality – not as a one-time initiative, but as a **lasting form of democratic involvement**.



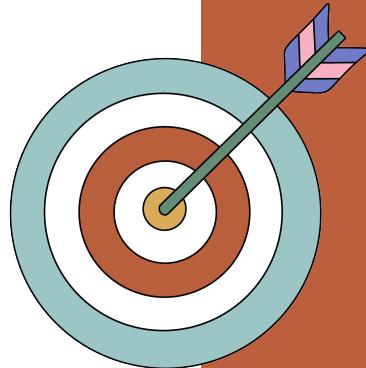
THE PATH TO A YOUTH COUNCIL



A youth council develops step by step. For it to function well, **good preparation, clear structures**, and a spirit of **collaboration on equal terms** between the young people and the organization are essential.

I. Clarify Goals and Framework

- * Clarify fundamental questions: In which **areas of young people's lives** does the organization's work or mission have an impact?
- * **Define available resources:** What time, budget and personnel are available for establishing and supporting the youth council?
- * Note: Setting up a youth council does **not necessarily require major expenses**. However, funding for incentives, team building, refreshments, and – depending on needs – projects or social media formats should be planned.



2. Establish Internal Agreements

- ★ Clarify the **key questions** together in a team workshop.
- ★ Decide on which topics young people can contribute to and participate in decision-making.
- ★ **Define target groups:** age range, gender, specific groups of interest. Consider legal aspects for certain ages (e.g. photo rights, social media use, parental consent).
- ★ Determine and document “**no-gos**” and decision-making boundaries.
- ★ Prepare the team for **collaboration on equal footing**: reflect on attitudes, language, and expectations. Recognize the council as a special form of substantive collaboration.
- ★ **Clarify roles and responsibilities:** Who organizes, who facilitates, who documents?
- ★ Child protection: Develop a **child protection policy** and appoint independent child protection officers (these should not be the main persons responsible for the council).
- ★ Define main responsibility: Identify which team members act as **main contact persons** – ideally two individuals. They should serve not only as coordinators but also as **trusted confidants** for the young council members.

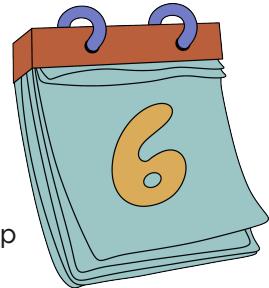
3. Engaging Young People in the Project

- ★ **Reach out to target groups directly:** build and use partnerships with associations, student unions, youth parliaments, and youth centers.
- ★ **Complement with public calls:** reach young people through social media, posters, and personal networks.
- ★ **Communicate briefly, clearly, and appealingly:** convey the benefits of participation and what impact young people can have.
- ★ Create attractive open activities: for initial, informal information and exchange
- ★ Ensure **diversity and equal opportunity:** actively approach young people who are less frequently heard.
- ★ Clarify **motivation and expectations:** What do young people expect, and what does the organization offer? Highlight benefits (learning opportunities, networking, recognition).



4. Shaping the Start-Up Phase

- * Foster **mutual understanding** and trust.
- * Statutes, team rules, and a **code of conduct**: develop and approve them together with the young people.
- * Define structures and processes: working methods, roles, and **regular meeting schedules**.
- * Determine **content and goals**: What exactly should be developed or changed?
- * Keep the start phase compact: young people want to get **into action quickly** and not spend too long on organizational details.
- * Encourage community: **personal meetings** are important early on. Online meetings cannot replace in-person encounters.

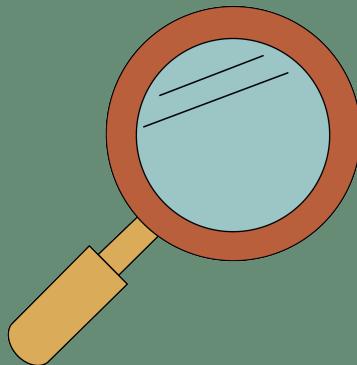


5. Establishing the Working Phase

- ★ **Regularity**, practical engagement, and meaningful participation.
- ★ **In-person meetings** as the foundation; online formats can complement once the council is well established.
- ★ **Plan and implement projects**: young people want to create and see results. They need close guidance and support.
- ★ Possible activities: contributing to **events**, accompanying staff to appointments, **collaborating on projects**, or participating in text or **media production**.

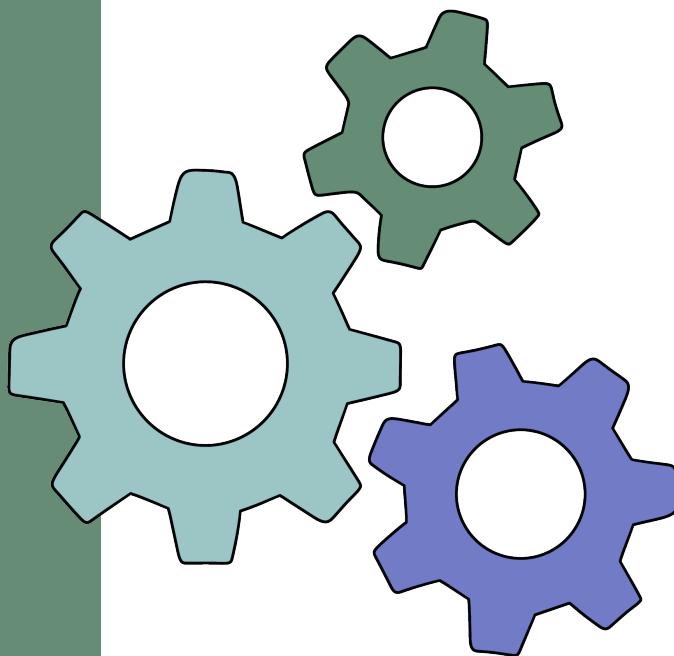
6. Reflection

- ★ **Make achievements visible** and adapt working methods as needed.
- ★ **Document results** and provide immediate feedback: young people should feel the impact of their contributions.
- ★ Evaluation: regularly **assess impact** and satisfaction (both among young participants and staff).
- ★ Further development: take feedback seriously and **adjust methods** accordingly.
- ★ Ensure continuity: **recruit new members in time** and organize smooth transitions (periodically or as needed).

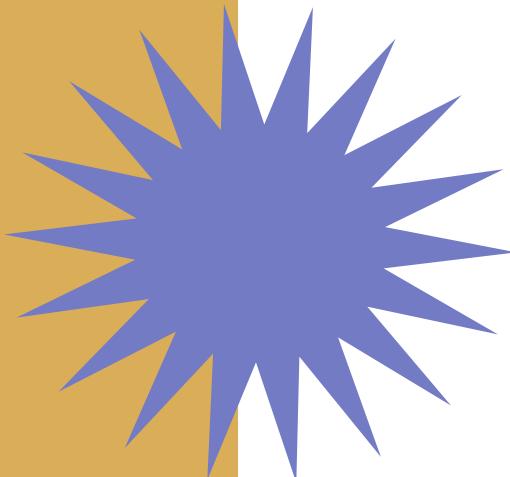


7. Staying Engaged and Developing Further

- ★ Building and **maintaining relationships** is an ongoing task — setbacks are normal.
- ★ **Stay committed:** don't get discouraged if **attendance fluctuates** — that's to be expected.
- ★ **Maintain relationships:** keep in touch with young people via messages or calls, showing genuine interest without being intrusive. Accept if someone chooses to leave.
- ★ **Continuously attract new members:** use all available communication channels and consistently highlight the benefits (community experience, friendships, networks, certificates for their CV, etc.).
- ★ **Continue evolving:** regularly review offers, methods, and incentives, and adapt them to the realities of young people's lives.



17 TIPS FOR BUILDING, SUPPORTING AND DEVELOPING A YOUTH COUNCIL



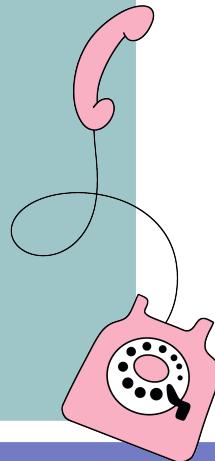
I. Relationship Building – The Foundation of Everything

Relationship work is the foundation of every successful youth council. Without **genuine interest** in young people, their worlds, attitudes, and concerns, no **trust-based collaboration** can grow. Young people instantly sense whether the interest is authentic or merely “pedagogically correct.” Building relationships means being **present**, listening, engaging in small talk, and offering **honest feedback**. Anyone who wants to involve young people must truly engage with them — **on equal terms**, with curiosity and respect.



2. Communication – On Equal Terms and on the Right Channel

Communication is more than the transfer of information — it is relationship maintenance. For most young people, communication happens primarily via **WhatsApp**. Anyone who wants to stay genuinely connected with them cannot ignore this. Other channels such as email or newsletters often feel slow and impersonal. At the same time, the **communication strategy** must comply with the **organization's IT policies**.

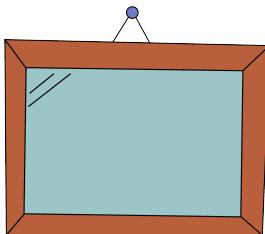


TIP

Clarify internally **what is permitted**, and then respond reliably — quick, clear, and **appreciative communication** is key.

3. Structure – Freedom Needs a Framework

Young people appreciate structure more than many adults assume. **Regular**, well-prepared meetings with **clear agendas** and goals provide security and **reliability**. Within this framework, **creativity** can — and should — have space. It is a balance between “being guided” and “shaping independently”. Total freedom (“Just do whatever you want!”) can be overwhelming. Clear structures create **trust** and room for creativity.



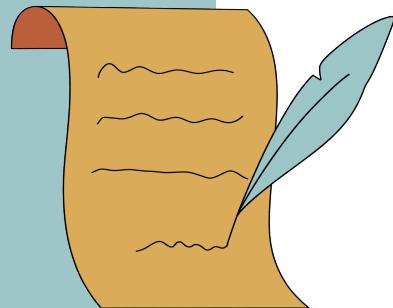
4. Time – Engagement Requires Resources

A youth council cannot be built as a side project. To stay vibrant, it requires **clear responsibilities, planning time**, and consistent **support**. Those responsible within the organization must have **time resources**, not only for organizing, but especially for relationship work and mentorship. A youth council that is not given internal priority risks becoming a façade.



5. Team Agreement – Clear Frameworks Within the Organization

Before young people come on board, clarify internally: **What topics** can the youth council codecide on? Where are the **limits**? What spaces are available? How will the organization respond if things move in an undesired direction (e.g. political influence, anti-pluralistic attitudes)? A **written internal agreement** provides clarity, security and protects both the young people and the organization.



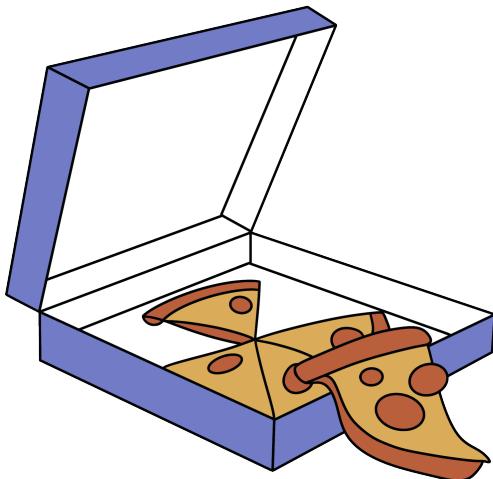
6. Rules – Small Agreements, Big Impact

Team rules provide **orientation**. Courtesy, punctuality, respectful behavior, confidentiality, reliability – these are not minor details but the foundations of effective cooperation. These rules should be **developed jointly with the young people**, written down, and signed by everyone. This creates **commitment** and pride in being part of a real group.



7. Food & Atmosphere – Hospitality Matters

Food connects people. An invitation to a meeting is always also an invitation to **community**. Snacks, drinks, maybe a pizza — these show **appreciation**. It's a sign of respect to offer young people what adults would naturally expect, too. Of course, **dietary needs and preferences** (e.g. vegetarian options) must be taken into account.



8. Ideas & Creativity – Space for the Unexpected

Creativity doesn't arise automatically – not even among young people. They often operate within familiar patterns.

Creativity needs time, trust, and spaces that allow experimentation. Methods like **brainstorming**, creative workshops, excursions, or inspiring guest speakers can help. **Encouraging people to think in new ways** – that's the art. That's when ideas start to flow.



9. New Media – The Joy of Visibility

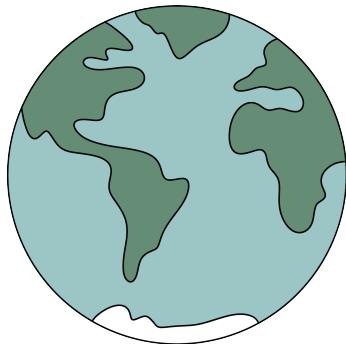
Videos, podcasts, social media – these are natural areas for young people.

These media can be used to increase the **visibility** of the youth council, to produce content or reach politics and administration with **youth-friendly messages**. Openness to **new formats** pays off, it boosts motivation, pride, and identity.



10. Diversity & Accessibility – Who's at the Table?

A youth council is only as strong as its **diversity**. Actively seek out young people who are rarely heard – for example, from economically disadvantaged families, with migrant backgrounds, or without prior participation experience. This requires creativity, **networks**, and **cooperation** with youth centers, schools and associations. A council that reflects the diversity of the city is truly representative.



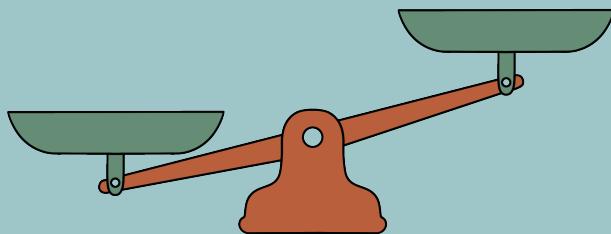
II. Recognizing Patterns – Reflection Instead of Routine

Anyone working with young people brings their own patterns and sympathies. That's **human**, but it becomes problematic if left unexamined. Who gets invited? Who is heard more often? Who receives more recognition? **Regular self-reflection** helps avoid unconscious biases. Stay open — especially toward those who are different.



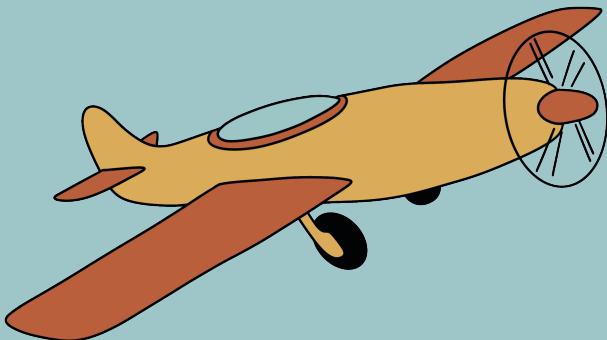
12. Power & Equality – Creating True Partnership

Every participation process involves **power dynamics** – between adults and young people, between experienced and new members. Handling this consciously means **sharing power**, delegating responsibility, but also **communicating boundaries clearly**. Working “at eye level” doesn’t mean equality in every decision, but **respect, transparency** and **dialogue**.



13. Fluctuation – Change Is Normal

Young people's lives change — school, training, jobs, relationships, new interests. Some leave, others join. That's not failure; **it's normal**. What matters is to continuously recruit new members, ensure **smooth transitions**, and **pass on knowledge**. A council thrives on movement.



14. Staying Engaged – Attention Is Ongoing Work

After the initial enthusiasm, there must be **no stagnation**.

Ongoing impulses are needed: short messages, calls, check-ins, little reminders. Showing up, listening, reaching out — this isn't extra work, it's a **sign of care**. Staying engaged means maintaining relationships. That's how the youth council stays alive.



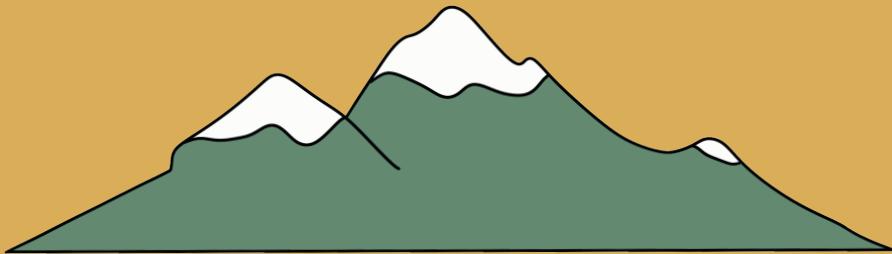
15. Incentives – Recognition That Resonates

Commitment deserves **recognition**. Small gestures, such as vouchers, invitations, experiences, or certificates, can motivate. Even more important are **symbolic gestures**: an official thank-you, a meeting with decision-makers, or the chance to make a visible change. Recognition should always be linked to **genuine engagement**. That's how value — not arbitrariness — is created.

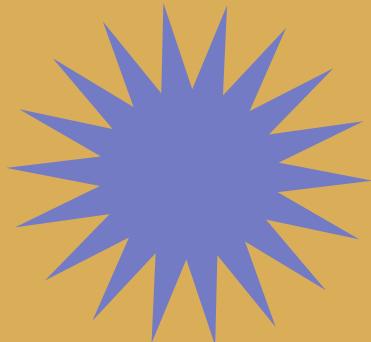


16. Young People's Realities – Stay Compassionate

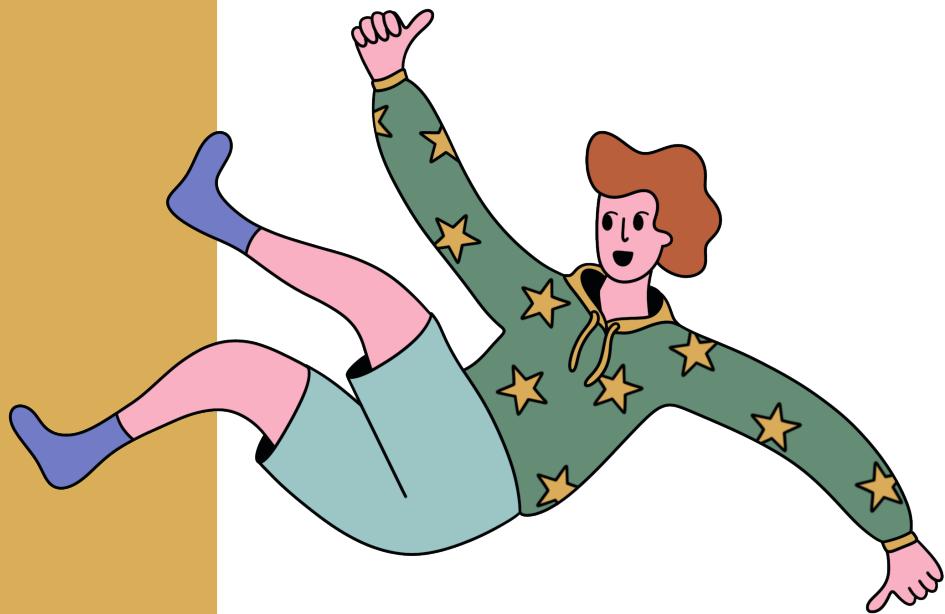
Young people bring all the facets of life with them: friendships, crushes, rivalries, conflicts. That's part of the package. Those who guide a council should be **prepared for such dynamics** – with clear rules, **openness to conversation**, and an attitude that allows growth. Young people need structure, but also **leniency**.



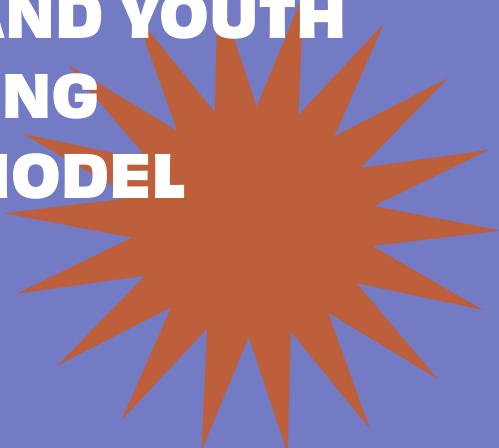
17. Criticism – A Chance to Learn, Not an Attack



Criticism is not a disturbance — it drives **development**. Young people should be encouraged to express criticism openly and honestly — clearly, directly, and **respectfully**. Equally important is that adults don't take criticism personally but see it as **valuable feedback**. A youth council thrives on a culture where criticism is normal, not hurtful, but **constructive**. The ability to give and receive criticism is not a weakness, but a sign of maturity, on both sides.



ANALYSIS OF A CHILD AND YOUTH COUNCIL USING THE LUNDY MODEL



The **Lundy Model**¹ provides a clear framework for **systematically reflecting** on the participation of children and young people. It distinguishes **four key dimensions** – Space, Voice, Audience, and Influence – which highlight what **genuine participation** requires. The following questions and suggestions can help assess and **further develop** an existing or planned child and youth council in line with this model.

I. Space – Participation Needs a Safe Place

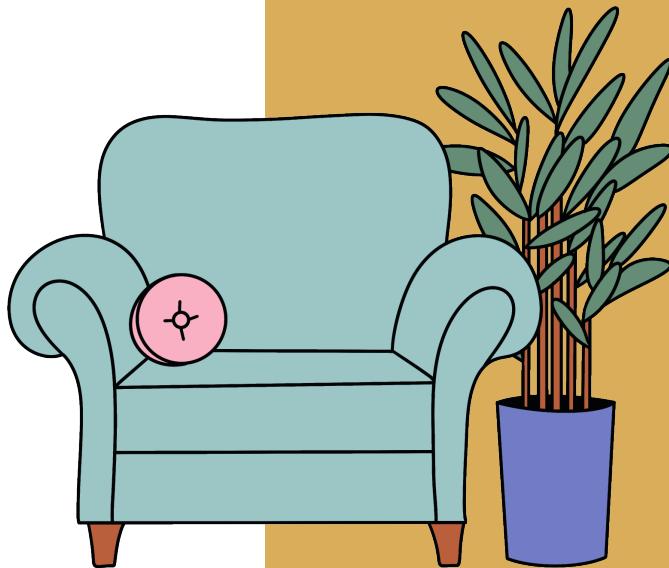
Children and young people must have the opportunity to **express their views freely** — in an environment that conveys trust, safety, and openness.

KEY ASPECTS:

- ★ Approach young people **actively and purposefully** — ensuring that diverse groups are reached.
- ★ Formulate questions and topics in ways that are **understandable, engaging, and relevant** to their lives.
- ★ Make invitations and opportunities appealing — with clear information, **personal outreach**, or social media formats.
- ★ **Create spaces** (physical or digital) that are accessible, pleasant, and safe.
- ★ Allow time for building relationships and trust — don't start by "extracting opinions," but first **establish connection**.
- ★ **Develop rules** and boundaries **together** and keep them transparent.

TIP

Remove barriers, provide support, and respect the group's pace. Participation only succeeds when everyone feels welcome and understood.



2. Voice – Enabling Children and Young People to Express Themselves

Participation requires both **knowledge and confidence**. Young people can only contribute meaningfully if they have access to the necessary **information** and can express their **views** in different ways.

KEY ASPECTS:

- * Present information in an **age-appropriate** way — clear, visual, and in simple language.
- * Ensure that everyone has the **same level of understanding**.
- * Create opportunities for **questions** and learning.
- * Emphasize **voluntariness**: participation is not mandatory; breaks are allowed.
- * Offer **multiple ways of expression** (e.g. writing, drawing, video, discussion, or role play).
- * Encourage and support a **variety of methods**, possibly with the help of “translators” or mentors.



TIP

Children and young people should feel that their **voice matters** — regardless of how loud or quiet it is.

3. Audience – Who Listens and How Is Listening Ensured?

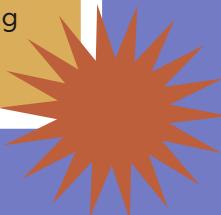
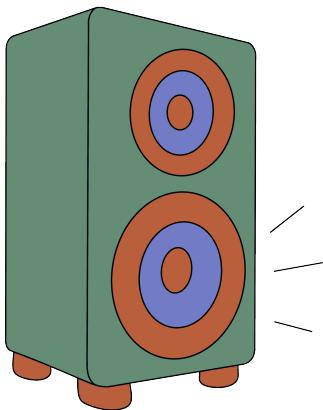
Real participation doesn't end when an opinion is voiced. What matters is that these **opinions are heard, passed on, and understood**.

KEY ASPECTS:

- * Clarify early on who will receive the **results** and what will happen with them.
- * Make **communication pathways transparent**: Who listens? Who decides?
- * Explain to children and young people where their input goes and how **decision-making structures** work.
- * Facilitate **personal encounters** with decision-makers (e.g. politicians, managers).
- * Create situations in which decision-makers actively listen.

TIP

Participation becomes credible when children and young people can see that their **opinions reach the right people** — rather than disappearing into a void.



4. Influence – Making Impact Visible

The goal of the Lundy Model is not only to ensure that children and young people are heard, but that their **contributions genuinely have an impact**. Influence means that results are considered and feedback is provided.

KEY ASPECTS:

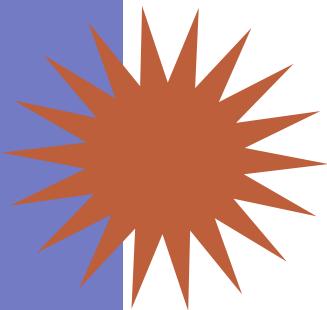
- ★ Establish procedures that ensure young people's input **feeds into decisions**.
- ★ Plan **feedback loops**: What has been implemented, what hasn't – and why?
- ★ Appoint responsible persons to ensure follow-up and feedback.
- ★ **Document processes** to make impact visible and strengthen trust.
- ★ Use **follow-up meetings** to reflect together on which ideas have led to real change.

TIP

Influence requires **transparency**. Even if not everything can be implemented, an honest explanation is worth far more than silence.

Conclusion

No child or youth council will fulfill every aspect of the Lundy Model at all times. But the model provides **valuable guidance**: it highlights what genuine participation entails – from space to speak, to voice for expression, to audience for listening, and finally to influence that leads to real change. Those who regularly reflect on these questions **strengthen** not only participation **structures** but also the trust, motivation, and **sense of agency** of young people.



IMPRINT

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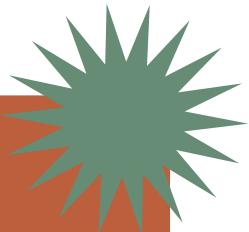
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Reference



¹ *The Lundy model of child participation*, commission.europa.eu,
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