



How to share stories and celebrate your youth voice activities

Proudly supporting youth social action



Department for Culture, Media & Sport



THE CENTRE FOR YOUTH VOICE

Part of YMCA George Williams College

Introduction

This guidance gives practical steps to promote youth voice activities, advocate for the difference it makes, and celebrate successes with different audiences.

The guide offers practical guidance should you be:

- Seeking to share stories of your youth voice activities;
- Collaborating with communications departments or leads; and
- Responsible for ensuring that young people are kept safe and supported when sharing their stories.

Following this guidance and adapting it to your context should help you to:

- Identify and reach your key audiences effectively;
- Craft stories which are impactful and build support for youth voice; and
- Ensure that your work with young people is trauma-informed and ethical.

How you develop and share stories will depend on your organisation's wider approach to communications. Where you have a communications team or lead, ensure you work with them and share this guide with them.

Why this is important for effective youth voice activities

Youth voice activities contribute to changing the wider understanding of the abilities and status of young people. When the wider community and public are aware of how young people are influencing decisions which affect them and contributing to wider positive changes in the community, they may have a more positive and balanced understanding of the life experience of young people.

Evidence from the #iwill Fund 'Evaluating Youth Voice' research project found that practitioners engaging in effective youth voice activities recognised the need to celebrate their successes and highlight the learning internally. By having greater visibility of young people within their organisations, they demonstrate the value of youth voice activities and increase the buy-in from others. In turn, this helps to grow further activities and remove barriers in some functions or amongst key staff.

Benefits of sharing stories of effective youth voice activities

Build a culture of celebration and recognition: sharing positive stories of success highlights individual and team achievements and can help boost morale and motivation.

Encourage collaboration: increased awareness can help break down silos, encourage cross-team working, and facilitate connections between youth voice practitioners, young people, and others who can benefit from their expertise. It can foster dialogue to enhance learning and further improvement.

Provide inspiration and motivation: stories of positive change can demonstrate tangible results and inspire others to strive for effective engagement.



Build a positive reputation: you can showcase the organisation's accomplishments and expertise and demonstrate a track record of delivering successful outcomes to young people and potential partners or funders.

Attract new young people: success stories are powerful marketing tools by showcasing real-life examples of how the organisation engages young people. Showing the results achieved may encourage other young people to get involved or seek opportunities to influence decisions.

Differentiate your work from others: you can set the organisation apart by highlighting your approach and outcomes. You can distinguish your work from those who fail to listen to young people.



Identify and consider your audiences

Before beginning to share your stories, it is important to recognise who your audience is. This will enable you to identify the most relevant information for each group and how best to reach them. If you aren't sure about who your audience is, ask yourself and the young people you work with - who can help us achieve our goals? You can also consider who you want to share learning with, and who may benefit from your approach and learning.

Consider that stories about youth voice may have multiple audiences:

- Your organisation's key audiences;
- Who the young people you work with are seeking to communicate with or influence;
- Other practitioners with an interest in youth voice;
- Young people either currently involved in youth voice activities or who currently are underrepresented;
- Funders of youth voice activities; and
- The wider sector relevant to your organisation.

Understanding your key audiences can shape your messaging and communication channels to reach and resonate with them effectively:

Define your audience: identify those directly or indirectly affected by your youth voice activities or whom you want to reach. These may include internal teams, senior leaders, partner organisations, those in the sector, or specific user groups.

Understand their needs: different audiences have shared characteristics, interests, or needs. Work with your organisation's communications leads to gain insights into the organisation's interactions and relationships with different groups. What kind of insights, evidence, or information would appeal to this group?

Plan how to reach them: consider the most appropriate channels to reach each audience effectively. Does the organisation already try to communicate with them? If so, how do those interactions contribute to the organisation's goals?

Work across platforms: ideally aim to reach your audience across a range of mediums. You might produce the same story in several formats or ensure different mediums have been adopted throughout your activity.

Change as you go: regularly review and update your approach and stay receptive to feedback and insights from sharing youth voice stories.

Keep it up: to share and celebrate the impact of your activities, a singular communications push or single blog will have limited impact. Make communications a regular fixture within your projects and work with young people to continue to share future stories and achievements.



Work with your team

If your organisation has a dedicated communications team or lead they can support, limit, or prevent sharing stories within your organisation and more widely. They can be very influential regarding what stories are featured and what information is included. Establish a productive partnership with the communications lead to increase their likelihood of proactively featuring your youth voice activities. Remember, they work across multiple platforms, can see the latest trending issues, and know when to promote the work reactively to gain further reach.

Understand their priorities: understand the organisation's communications goals, priorities, and audiences. Are they trying to reach young people or practitioners? Are they looking to grow new audiences or update those previously engaged? Tailor your approach to align with their objectives, making it more likely for them to feature your activities.

Understand the organisation's brand and voice: some organisations will have brand guidelines describing how they want to present themselves. Ensure you know and follow any branding and style guidelines.

Understand their workflow: take the time to understand their workflow and processes. Find out the best time to reach out, preferred methods of communication, and any specific guidelines they follow or expect others to follow. There can often be lead-in times for newsletters or blogs or a 'grid' of when communications will be released. For impactful communications, plan ahead and do not bounce expectations onto them.

Determine which channels and platforms should be used: check what social media platforms your organisation uses, whether they have different audiences, and what materials they need (do they need videos or pictures? How many words can be used?). Consider how to promote your work through the correct internal channels. Ask for tips on what has received the most engagement in the past and what is an effective story for different channels.

Accessibility: work with the communications lead to understand any social media platforms' access requirements. Often you will need to provide 'alt text' for photos (text embedded in a photo to describe images to visually impaired readers), subtitles for videos, and post text when it is also included in a graphic.



Be responsive and cooperative: be responsive to their requests for additional information or clarifications. Collaboration is key, so be open to their suggestions and be willing to work together to present your project in the best possible light.

Articulate the value of your activities: clearly explain how your project aligns with the organisation's goals and why it deserves to be featured. Be prepared to show the benefits, impact, and unique aspects that make your activities newsworthy or interesting.

Offer compelling stories: consider your project's unique aspects, human impact, or broader implications that can be crafted into an engaging narrative. Presenting a compelling story angle will capture their attention and make your project more appealing for coverage.

Respect their expertise: be open to their suggestions and feedback on promoting your activities best. Respect their expertise and consider their recommendations for optimising the messaging and channels used to feature your project.

Show appreciation: when the communications team supports and features your project, show appreciation. Recognise their efforts publicly or privately, depending on the situation. A simple thank-you note can go a long way in fostering a positive working relationship.

Ruby is a new Youth Engagement Lead at a charity launching a new youth board. In her induction, she meets with the Communications Manager. They discuss the project plans and how they can align with the organisation's comms schedule. Ruby prepares some key messages about the project and a content collection and dissemination timeline linked to key events and activities. The Communications Manager attends a residential with young people and trains them on taking good photos and using social media. Following the residential, the young people 'take over' the organisation's key social media accounts and promote their work.



Communicate with young people, not just about them

Sharing stories of youth voice activities should be done in partnership with the young people you work with. Communication is a part of your core youth voice work, not a separate activity.

Trust young people: encourage young people to take an active role in shaping their stories. Provide them with guidance and support but also the freedom to express themselves in their own words. Empowering them will ensure authenticity and ownership of their stories.

Offer skill development: understand whether young people you work with may need support or training to produce communications materials. What knowledge and skills are in the group which can be shared? What additional training or support may be needed?

Use different media formats: explore various media formats such as written testimonials, photographs, videos, or interviews to capture their stories. Consider how transcripts from videos can be used in blogs or how short videos can be used on social media. Aim to maximise the impact of the materials they produce.

Collaborate, don't control: involve young people in deciding key messages and developing materials. Seek their input, feedback, and ideas to ensure their stories are accurately represented and effectively communicated. Be honest about final editorial control but be open to working through different versions of materials.

Support young people's self-advocacy with humility: many young people involved in youth voice activities will want to promote the projects and activities they are involved with. Some can develop a 'personal brand' showcasing their expertise, skills, and passion for the cause. Consider ways to support this while also enabling humility and promoting safety. Consider when they are featured in materials or 'tagged' directly. Aim to support young people to showcase their work in a way that highlights the collective efforts of the groups and the organisation, centring this on the shared positive impact on the community.



Daniel is a young person on a national youth charity's Youth Advisory Board. He creates a new Twitter account to document his experience. He agrees with the organisation that they will 'tag' the account, have the username/password, and monitor the direct messages. They train him on effective tweets, what images to include, and how to decide what to retweet.



Develop effective stories of change

Stories that impact often combine anecdotal and quantitative evidence, helping readers understand the changes, directly and indirectly, resulting from a project or activities.



Start with a clear objective: clearly define the purpose and objective of the story you want to share. What do you want to achieve from communicating with others?

Structure your stories: organise information logically and coherently. Almost always, headings and subheadings make it easier for readers to follow. Start with an introduction, provide relevant background information, present key facts or information, and finish with actionable insights.

Highlight diversity: celebrate young people's diverse experiences, backgrounds, and achievements within your stories of change. Provide opportunities for multiple voices to be featured. Emphasise the unique perspectives and talents they bring to the organisation or the area they seek to change.

Provide useful context: use storytelling to highlight important issues affecting young people. Provide insights, statistics, and context to help the audience understand the challenges young people face and the potential solutions they are proposing.

Consider cultural norms: consider the cultural norms and values of young people and their families when developing and sharing stories. Avoid misrepresentation or reinforcing stereotypes. Seek guidance and input from young people to ensure accurate portrayal.

Select images carefully: always consider how visual imagery shows people taking positive action. Are young people at the centre of the change or action in imagery? Is it a positive, accurate, and responsible representation of the work? Is it a dignified and respectful framing?

Be honest and authentic: share genuine stories about the young person's experiences. Avoid sensationalism or embellishment, which can undermine the trust of the young people involved in your activities and the audience. Ensure stories are accurate with a true and fair representation of who did what in the youth voice activities and the level of change achieved.

Include lessons learnt and recommendations: avoid stories which simply explain a situation. Instead, always consider what the call to action might be. Share the insights and lessons derived from your work, and the activities' practical implications and potential applications. What are the specific actions that your audience can implement? Make recommendations clear, specific, and supported by evidence.

Spark dialogue and conversation: encourage your audiences to engage in conversations, share their perspectives, or take action based on the young people's views.

The Youth Action Network is a group of young people recruited by a national funder to influence their funding decisions. They agree to write a monthly blog on their activities. A different member of the team drafts each blog. One of the group members has a call with a staff member and they agree on key messages and what they want to say. The staff member does a first draft, and the nominated member edits. The others get three days to read and comment on it.



Stay ethical and safe

You have a broad duty of care to the young people you work with. When promoting your work together, you need to protect their rights to protection and safety.

Informed consent: obtain informed consent from young people and their parents or carers before sharing their stories, including within your organisation. Consent for a young person to participate in your youth voice activities should explain how the organisation will use the information, who will have access to it, and any potential risks involved.

Provide control and autonomy: give young people control over their story and how it is shared. Allow them to choose what aspects they are comfortable discussing and how much detail they want to share. Respect their boundaries and never pressure them to disclose more than they're comfortable with.

Centre young people: take care when collecting stories from young people, ensure they have oversight over finished material and can consider whether their voices are still present within texts or media. Stories featuring young people that are used only to promote an organisation risk being exploitative. Ask yourself, does this communication benefit the young people you work with or just your organisation?

Be alert to sensitive stories: many young people share difficult, traumatic, or sensitive information when involved in youth voice activities. Exercise sensitivity when dealing with stories that may share personal information about young people's experiences. Consider if even naming a young person as involved in your youth voice activities may share personal and sensitive details about their life or their family. When you and a young person decide to share potentially sensitive content, consider whether a sensitive content warning should be included at the start, warning others to make informed decisions about what they engage with.

Naming or using pseudonyms: recognise where young people may want to be identified and consider the safeguarding implications. Ensure no identifiable information is shared, including full names, locations, schools attended, or other identifying details. Likewise, if young people prefer to be anonymous or use pseudonyms, respect their choice. Where possible, allow them to choose an alias and ensure it is culturally appropriate.



Consider proportionate information sharing by platform:

consider what information may be appropriate for internal and external audiences and the potential reach and impact of sharing stories on social media platforms. Ensure appropriate privacy settings are in place for any young people featured and have absolute certainty on consent for featuring them, including from parents or carers. Ensure young people are aware and comfortable that anything posted online will often be there forever, even if deleted by the organisation.

Respect what young people do and don't want to share: some young people involved in youth voice activities may present their identity or share information they do not want others, such as family or other friends, to know. For example, a young person may be 'out' as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or share a different gender identity or expression in your group than in other areas of their life or with their family. Always be alert to how sharing information about a young person may impact their other relationships. Respect young people's wishes for how they want to be presented, their boundaries, and consider your wider duty of care to them.

Monitor how stories are used and consider follow-up: once the story has been shared, always share it with young people featured and any group with details of how they can access it. Offer a debriefing session to discuss the experience, address any emotional reactions, and ensure the individual feels supported. Stay attentive to the individual's well-being during and after sharing their story. If signs of distress or re-traumatisation emerge, be prepared to intervene, and provide additional support.

Actively provide advice about online safety: young people may seek to share their youth voice activities online, including by sharing stories your organisation has published or asking to be 'tagged' within them. Always ensure you provide details of staying safe online if they feature in your stories. Consider how they enable privacy settings on their social media platforms. Remind them of the risks in sharing personal information online (such as full names, locations or school details). Encourage them to limit their social media connections to trusted friends, family members, or those they know.

Practice self-care: it can be emotionally demanding when collecting or engaging others in storytelling, whether that is due to young people sharing distressing details of their lives, or the absolute joy and pride they experience from their relationship with you. Seek support from colleagues or supervisors and process any emotional reactions you may experience while working with sensitive stories. Always be transparent with colleagues about young people's praise for your work.

Learn more

- If you're new to communications, especially online, read this introduction to **Understanding Digital Communications, Campaigns and Content** on the NCVO website. Look for resources on the **Media Trust** and **Charity Comms**.
- Ensure you consider how to present information about young people safely. The NSPCC has information about **photography and sharing images for children** and the Ann Craft Trust has guidance on **Photography with Adults**.
- If you want to share a case study of your practice, consider developing an intentionally learning-focused case study. Follow this guide from **Emma McDowell on CultureHive**.
- Learn more about using **Content and Trigger warnings** from The Mix.
- For information on ensuring that content creation is considerate and safe, consider reviewing the **Whole Picture Toolkit by the Film and TV Charity**. While aimed at professionals, it has lots of practical information on staying safe and healthy when producing communications materials.
- To communicate ethically, consider adapting insight published by international development charity BOND in their guide: **Putting the People in the Pictures First: Ethical guidelines for the collection and use of content (images and stories)**.



About this guide

This guidance has been produced as part of a project that captured youth voice's impact within the #iwill Fund. During 2021-2023, a Young Evaluators Panel of young people from across England steered the collection and analysis of data on how young people are heard within the #iwill Fund and other youth voice activities. A participatory process allowed other young people, practitioners, funders, policy makers and academics to review their findings. A final report of their findings is available on the Centre for Youth Voice website.

The Centre for Youth Voice team has drafted these guides based on the learning generated through the project, the views of young people engaged in the project and wider good practices. All scenarios are hypothetical composites informed by examples provided by young people, practitioners and the team's experiences. Links are provided to learn more but they do not constitute an endorsement or approval by YMCA George Williams College and we bear no responsibility for its accuracy, legality or content.

About the Centre for Youth Voice

At YMCA George Williams College, our vision is for a just and equitable society that invests in support for all young people to learn, grow, and explore their relationships with the world around them. Established in 1970, the College works to provide transformational support to practitioners, funders, and policy makers across the sector, to improve the quality and impact of provision and outcomes for children and young people across the UK. This support is characterised by safe spaces, high quality socio-emotional skill development opportunities, and relationships with trusted adults.

As part of its work, the College hosts three Centres of Expertise. The Centre for Youth Voice at YMCA George Williams College advocates for and supports a stronger role for the voices of young people in evaluation and continuous quality improvement. Underpinned by the belief in participation of young people in the decisions that affect them, the Centre for Youth Voice develops and shares relational, structural, and practical approaches to embedding the voices of young people, and directly supporting them to develop their research and evaluation skills.

About the #iwill Fund

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