

# How to support young people finishing or leaving youth voice activity

Proudly supporting youth social action



Department for Culture, Media & Sport



COMMUNITY FUND



THE CENTRE FOR YOUTH VOICE

Part of YMCA George Williams College

## Introduction

This guidance gives practical steps you can take to support young people as they transition away from your youth voice activities. This guide is best used by staff or volunteers who design and deliver youth voice activities.

The guide offers practical guidance should you be:

- Supporting young people leaving your project;
- Working with young people on time-limited projects; or
- Ending your youth voice activity with all young people.

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

- Support young people to leave youth activities positively;
- Avoid common challenges when young people finish their involvement; and
- Provide positive progression and aftercare for young people who were involved.

Note, this guidance is **not** specifically intended - and would require significant adaptation - for the hopefully rare circumstance that you have excluded a young person from youth voice activities; for example, because they pose a risk of harm to you or others or persistently acted inappropriately. Similarly, it may not be suitable for situations where you learn a young person, despite your best efforts, is leaving under negative circumstances - such as where they feel excluded or bullied by other group members.

## Why this is important for effective youth voice activities

The young people involved in youth voice activities will always end their involvement as a participant at some point. This could include circumstances such as:

- **Planned conclusion:** the activity may be part of an intentionally time-bound project.
- **Positive choices:** they leave the group for their own reasons. They may have other opportunities, seek new challenges, or prioritise other interests.
- **Ageing out:** the opportunity may have been designed for a specific age range where they have reached the upper age.
- **Change of circumstances:** there may be wider life changes, some of which may be out of their direct control (eg. relocation, experiencing poor health, or entering the secure estate).

Evidence from the #iwill Fund 'Evaluating Youth Voice' research project showed that some young people feel that the transition when they become too old to be involved in a youth voice activity or choose to leave is not always well planned or executed. Often young people want to stay engaged with some activity, especially when they have been very invested in the project. They felt it was important for organisations to think about how this could be facilitated, such as creating new opportunities for older young people.



## Benefits of supporting young people in completing your activities



**Foster wellbeing:** if young people leave with a negative experience, this may taint their overall perception of the organisation or their involvement. With a positive exit, they may reflect on their time with the organisation more fondly and increase their sense of satisfaction and wellbeing.

**Avoid harm:** some young people can develop very strong bonds with the youth voice groups they are involved with. They may 'grieve' at losing this status, relationships, and support. Losing this role, especially if handled badly, may lead to anger, sadness, and misunderstanding.

**Encourage future engagement:** a positive ending can encourage young people to continue supporting the organisation in different roles such as volunteering again or recommending the organisation to others. By maintaining a good relationship, even after their current role ends, young people are more likely to feel valued and contribute again in the future.

**Gain constructive feedback:** a positive departure process provides opportunities to collect valuable feedback and suggestions for improvement.

**Build sustainable support networks:** as your relationship shifts, you want to enable young people to have the right networks for their personal, social, and professional development. Ending the relationship positively helps preserve relationships with safe and appropriate boundaries, allowing for continued collaboration and for them to access alternative support in the future more confidently.

## Adapting endings to the needs of your group

Ending anything, professional or personal, can be difficult for many people. However, for some, it can be especially challenging. When ending a relationship with young people, the unique circumstances of your group and its individuals should impact your planning, preparation, and support.

Circumstances when you may especially need to manage risks of ending the activity:

**Working with young people managing poor attachment:** some circumstances can make it more challenging for a young person and their parent or caregivers to form solid relationships with secure attachment. This can echo through young people's lives and impact how they form and respond to relationships with others. When they enter a positive relationship, such as with a youth worker, they may remain alert to any rejecting behaviours and their well-being may be negatively impacted by the loss and end of a relationship.

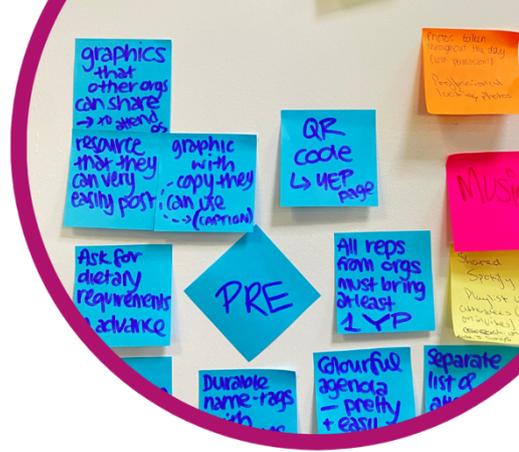
**Working with young people who have experienced trauma or loss:** trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as harmful or life threatening. While unique to the individual, generally, the

experience of trauma can cause lasting adverse effects. These can surface if young people feel re-traumatised by the end of other relationships in their lives.

**Working with under-supported young people:** many practitioners offering youth voice activities can become a stable and positive adult relationship in a young person's life. If your relationship is ending, young people may recognise the relative lack of other supportive networks or positive influences in their lives. Some may have a wider sense of loneliness that this change will exacerbate.

**When activities are closing unexpectedly or with conflict:** the organisation may have decided to close a youth voice activity. Budget cuts or funding loss, restructures or changes in strategy may lead to abrupt endings of relationships with young people. While this process should ideally be undertaken carefully and transparently with young people; some may feel anger and frustration with the organisation or, by proxy, with the practitioners they are working with. It can be tough for some practitioners to move on, especially when they believe the individual still needs support, the activities were productive and valuable or they believe the young people will be at risk or underserved as a result of the activities ending.

**When endings link to staff leaving or redundancy:** young people may become preoccupied by the future of the practitioners working with them. While important to be open with young people about the circumstances, you should maintain clear professional boundaries and remain focused on enabling them to be heard and engage.



*Javier is working with a Youth Advisory Board for a youth information, advice and counselling organisation. Many of the participants have had significant adverse life experiences and a number are living with ongoing mental health problems. Throughout the recruitment and the project, he reminds the young people of the boundaries and time limited nature of the group. He speaks early with young people about their plans beyond the group. Knowing the time bound nature of his relationship, he is circumspect on what wider pastoral support he offers, focusing on signposting to other services and building peer support relationships.*



## Plan the end at the beginning

When you begin with the end in mind, you can plan the activities accordingly for the best results.

Things to consider in your planning:

**Age range:** many projects (and funders) will only support youth voice activities with certain age groups. When designing projects set clear boundaries of which age group you work with. Always have the flexibility to ensure young people do not leave automatically after a birthday – rather allowing them to complete at a natural change in the project or with the cohort of young people they were recruited with. Consider whether an individual's needs for care and support means that it is best to offer flexibility in the age range of provision, and consider any additional safeguarding arrangements to manage this.

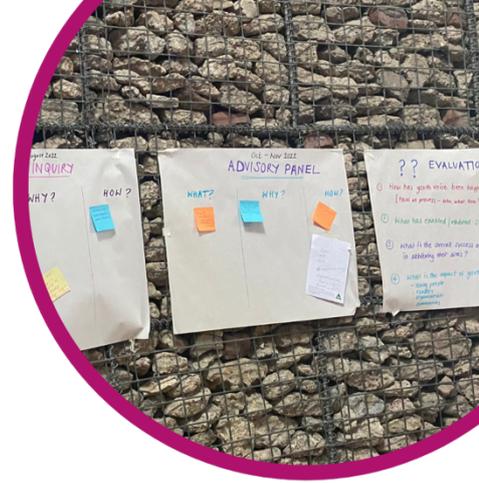
**Consider linking endings to other transition points:** the transitions of opportunities young people experience can be linked to other natural points of change in their life. For example, can activities conclude before the school summer holidays or at the end of the calendar year (e.g. linked to a Christmas break).

**Start before the end:** when mapping out your project timeline, ensure you have built-in sufficient wrap-up and reflection time. Consider the evaluation information you may need to collect as the project close. Consider what is needed, how this would be collected and how much time this may take.

**Budget for expected costs:** as part of other direct costs of working with young people, allocate a modest budget for celebratory trips, honorariums, or thank you gifts for participants. If your project will likely include a final report or output, include costs for printing and posting copies to participants.

**Communicate:** set a clear intended end date for the project and communicate that to young people and their parents or carers (when gaining consent).

**Be honest about the status of your role:** sometimes those directly leading youth voice activities are external consultants and are inherently on time-limited contracts or have been commissioned to deliver specific activities. Always be clear on your status with participants and the specific boundaries and availability of this. Wherever possible, have a proportionate presence of the commissioning organisation's core staff team; especially those who can be a continued source of contact after the conclusion of your role.



**Top tip:** if you are working with older teenagers you may need to consider the specific safeguarding risks in working with a mixed age range, especially as individuals start to turn 16 and 18. You should consider the specific needs of your group and the status of older young people; do they remain participants on an equal basis to others with the same rules or have they taken on additional responsibilities and have a duty of care to others too? Speak to your organisation's Designated Safeguarding Lead or seek suitable advice, document your decisions in relevant risk assessments, and be transparent with parents or carers.



## Prepare young people throughout

Seek to build in touch points during the programme timeline where 'endings' and transitions are acknowledged and discussed. Depending on the needs of the group of young people, we suggest that this is undertaken twice as a minimum. These should allow young people to discuss how they feel about the activities ending and how best to navigate this transition. These touch points help to mentally prepare young people and build feelings of being valued by you and your organisation.

	Touch Point One	Touch Point Two
<b>When</b>	Close to just over the halfway mark of your youth voice programme.	At the end of your youth voice programme.
<b>What</b>	A workshop on navigating endings and transitions.	Reflection and review session and to communicate the next steps with young people.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Let young people know that though it may feel early to talk about this at the half-way mark, the programme will come to an end. They should start thinking about this now.</li> <li>Highlight the importance of taking care of themselves mentally during the transition.</li> <li>Open up a space for young people to bring any concerns they may have. Ensure you tell young people that any concerns can also be brought up on a one-to-one basis.</li> <li>Reflect on what people may want to achieve collectively or individually before the end. What skills or knowledge should be developed?</li> <li>Looking to the future and talking about celebratory events planned.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remind them of previous communication about the end of the project.</li> <li>Explain the planned conclusion of the programme and any known boundaries of support or contact after that point in time.</li> <li>Speak together about key issues: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What part of the programme did you enjoy the most?</li> <li>Which part of the programme did you learn the most from?</li> <li>How has your perspective or understanding been changed, challenged, or reinforced as a result?</li> <li>What didn't you like? And why?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

All young people may benefit from an individual discussion about their next steps. Offer specific space for them to reflect on the activities ending. Be proactive in suggesting this to young people who may be less confident, more anxious or have wider support needs. These spaces for one-to-one reflection on their engagement may provide you with useful feedback but also give them space to share their hopes or worries. Useful questions to include in your discussion include:



- What was your goal when you started this programme? In what ways do you feel you have achieved this?
- Are there any areas that you were hoping to cover that didn't get addressed?
- What aspects of the programme appealed to you the most and why?
- Going forward are there any skills you want to develop? What opportunities may help develop this?
- What do you need from us to leave the project well?

**Top tip:** try to model a positive tone and ethos about the natural ending of the relationship. Talk openly about endings from the start of the initiative. Validate feelings of sadness but also highlight the opportunities ahead. Similarly, do not assume that young people will be sad to finish; many will appreciate the natural end and change.

## Every ending is a new beginning

Plan what your future relationship with young people will be. Discuss with them what type of contact they might like and what capacity or capability you can realistically offer.

**Promise less and deliver more around future contact:** communicate any boundaries around contact and communicating with young people beyond the planned activities. What role, if any, will your organisation be willing to have with them in the future? If you're happy to be a referee for future jobs or education, what details should they use? Do not make promises or false reassurances about future contact – this can blur professional boundaries and lead to unrealistic expectations of what you can reasonably deliver.

**Enable appropriate connections:** consider how young people finishing an activity can support those who may be starting a new activity. For example, those due to end speaking at recruitment events or being involved in shortlisting new cohorts. Always consider the potential safeguarding risks of introducing different cohorts of young people and explain the boundaries of any involvement.

**Build on their expertise:** can the young people you have been working with play a role in developing or co-delivering future youth voice opportunities? What would the transition process be? What will be different in that new distinct role?

**Support them to find new opportunities:** work with young people to consider other opportunities that might be of interest. Consider actively signposting and sharing marketing materials for opportunities that might offer progression. Lead sessions that build the knowledge and skills to find and select appropriate volunteering opportunities.

**Suggest a future check-in:** you could offer an informal check-in three months after the planned activities end. This creates space for young people to express any unmet needs or issues in a less daunting way if needed.

**Consider an alumni network:** some organisations will create an alumni network of previous participants. This is a mechanism for connecting and engaging with those involved. Often it provides facilitated networking opportunities, knowledge sharing, and professional development. Members may receive information about the organisation, access to job or volunteer opportunities, mentorship programmes and ad-hoc reunion events. The network also gives the organisation a group with experience and expertise in its work, helping to draw on their knowledge and cultivate a sense of pride and loyalty among those they have worked with.

## Have a clear transition point

You, the young people you work with, and their parents or carers should all be clear about the end of a relationship. The end of the role and your direct support role should always be clearly communicated. No young person should ever feel 'ghosted' or that the relationship just faded out. Always bring a marked conclusion and a clear transition point to the end.

**Acknowledge and validate feelings:** experiencing change or loss can bring up a lot of emotions and we can feel embarrassment or shame in reacting in that manner. Encourage young people to be open about how they feel. Validate all emotional reactions – whether sadness, happiness, pride or anger. Consider how to show empathy for the diversity of experience emphasising that there is no “normal” way to experience change.

**Celebrate:** acknowledge all the work and effort of young people being involved in your youth voice activity. With young people, plan a group activity to celebrate your experiences as a team such as visiting an escape room, going bowling or visiting an adventure park. Try to ensure this is a true social celebration rather than just a workshop with more youth voice related activities.

**Cards, certificates, or gifts:** give young people certificates and/or personal thank you cards for their hard work and participation. You can give small gifts as long in line with policy guidelines where the cost is reasonable in proportion to the organisation's total income and to the volunteer's contribution to the organisation's work. Ideas include a framed photo of the group or an engraved glass or mug.

**Collect relevant evaluation data:** depending on your plans for monitoring and evaluating your project, you may need to collect specific feedback or evaluation data from young people who have been involved. Align this with wider reflection activities where possible and be aware of the time commitment you will be expecting of young people to complete surveys etc.



**If you are a consultant:** decide and share the continuing contact point for all young people. Transfer any individual records or contacts to the commissioning organisation.

**Keep it safe:** you need to ensure that you plan the change of young people's status in your organisation. Consider safeguarding risks of young people having been associated with your organisation, potentially in a leadership role, but who are no longer in a clear role or are under supervision.

**Close communication channels:** always ensure that official WhatsApp groups, Slack channels or other online platforms used with the group are fully closed and archived. Avoid allowing young people to maintain access. If they want to keep in touch, they should self-organise this independently of your organisation and encourage appropriate parent or carer oversight if necessary.

**Fulfil your data protection responsibilities:** as projects end, you should consider what data you retain and how this is done securely. You must have a legal basis for retaining any identifiable data about young people. Refer to your organisation's Data Protection Policy and liaise with your Data Protection Officer.

**Consider whether new consent is needed:** depending on the context of your work, consider whether you need different consent from young people or their parents or carers for continued contact. For example, do you need consent to add them to a different mailing list?

**Ensure relevant information is stored:** it is useful to have a clear summary document which details what individual young people achieved and contributed to as a basis for future references.

**Top tip:** *young people's passion for youth voice will extend beyond the particular programme they were involved in. Think about ways they can stay involved that align with their motivations. You can work with each young person to explore what interests them the most about youth voice work. Use this information to let them know about any additional opportunities. When sending opportunities to young people, make sure you mention what made you think of them as someone to forward it to.*

*Tatiana is planning the end of a Young Evaluators Panel. She asks young people to opt into a new email mailing list. With each young person, she records some bullet points of their involvement in the project and skills/knowledge gained which she can use in future references. She works with her line manager to consider what information to destroy and archive. Once completed, she removes all young people from her work phone WhatsApp group.*



## Learn more

- Learn more about trauma **[informed practices on gov.uk](#)** and on supporting children and young people with attachment issues on the **[NSPCC website](#)**.
- Read the Low Income Tax Reform Group guide on the **[benefits and tax implications of gifts to volunteers](#)**.
- Manage the end of the relationship and the potential safeguarding risks by following guidance from NCVO on **[ending volunteer relationships](#)**.
- Follow the Information Commissioners Officer guidance on **[limits on storing data](#)**.
- The Welsh Government and Future First offer **[advice on building an alumni network](#)**. While geared towards schools and colleges, it provides an overview of what to consider in the plan, design and delivery of a network.



## 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

The #iwill Fund is made possible thanks to £66 million joint investment from The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to support young people to access high quality social action opportunities.

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