



Toolkit for “Engaging Political Decision-Makers”



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This document was produced on the basis of consultations held by:





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Engaging Political Decision-Makers

1. What is the purpose of this toolkit?

Young people have an important role to play in the decision-making process of political leaders. They can bring a fresh perspective and energy to the table, and are often more in tune with the current issues and trends that are affecting their community. They can provide valuable insight into what needs to be done to best serve their communities, and provide valuable feedback on policy decisions. By engaging young people in the decision-making process, political leaders can ensure they are creating policies that are in line with the needs and desires of their constituents. Additionally, young people can act as advocates for their communities and can help leaders make informed decisions that will benefit everyone.

On the other side there's an increasing trend among youth of setting progressively detached from the political real. The gloomy perspectives for their future and the fact that they are the first generation that will probably live worse than their parents generates a sense of discouragement and a tendency of concentrating on short term goals, living the present rather than carving their future. ✨

2. Who are the activities aimed at?

This toolkit is for any young person who wants to be involved in his/her community life and take contact with a decision-maker. If you are a teacher or a facilitator, you can also use this toolkit with your group to inspire them to work out which children's rights issues they care about and how to go about creating the change they want to see.

How has the toolkit been developed?

This toolkit supports the crucial work you do as a political decision-makers, peer or local authority to promote the democracy values and to foster the participation of young people. It contains easy-to-use examples to help engage young people to participate in their community life.

The activities have been developed with input from both young people and representatives of local and national authorities.

3. How do I use the toolkit?

This Toolkit can be used as a means to make the connection between political decision-makers (local and or national) and young people, to increase the interest of young people to get involved in community life, but also as basic material from which to can develop towards various activities and exercises. The exercises below are concrete examples that can be used



in organizing information sessions and debates with young people, but also sessions to connect young people with representatives of the authorities, to answer questions and to support concrete debates on various topics of interest.

The involvement of both sides is the key to the success of these debates!

4. Activities Examples

Activity 1: Democracy – True or False?	
Background There are different types and forms of democracy around the world and in those systems people can have different rights and responsibilities. This activity helps to generate discussions about democracy in the 4 th countries.	
Aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give the audience an understanding of their democratic rights and some key facts about what they can do to get involved with democracy • Provide the audience with fun and interesting facts about democracy to pique their interest in the subject
Step 1	Give out the worksheet with the statements about democracy around the world. Ask the audience to write down whether they think the statements are true or false. This will generate discussion. If you do not have enough time to hand out the worksheets, you could read out the statements and ask the audience to vote by a show of hands whether they think the statements are true or false.
Step 2	When going through the answers, use the elaboration column to give the audience more information.



Statement	True/False	Elaboration
What Democracy means?	Open question	The word “democracy” comes from two Greek words: “demos” (people) and “kratia” (ruling by or government). Democracy literally means “people’s government.”
Monarchy, Oligarchy, Plutocracy, Tyranny or Democracy. Which is the best form of government?	Open question	Separation of powers (legislative, executive, judicial) Legitimacy: one person, one vote. Flexible form of government, facilitates pacts and agreements between partners and parties and smooth power transition.
In one country, citizens vote by dropping marbles into a bin	True	In Gambia citizens vote for their president with a marble system. Voters enter a booth and drop a clear glass marble into one of three drums representing the candidates, instead of a putting a ballot paper into a box. As the marble falls into the drum, it hits a bell so officials can tell if anyone votes more than once. It was introduced in 1965 because of a high illiteracy rate. Afterwards voters have their finger dipped in indelible ink.
You can take your pet to a polling station	True	There are no rules against having pets in polling stations and you are allowed to take dogs as long as they do not disrupt the voting process. The Electoral Commission advises that in some cases, unless they are service dogs, dogs may have to be left outside.
In UK, members of the House of Lords cannot vote in general elections	True	Members of the House of Lords cannot vote in general elections. This is because they are part of Parliament and so do not need to elect an MP to represent them in Parliament. However, they can vote in local authority elections.



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The suffragettes fought for the right to vote for 50 year, unsuccessfully	True	To vote, they had to be 30 years old, and be a land owner or have a university degree.
There is no way for young people to get involved with elections before the age of 18	False	The young people can write to their local parliament members about what matters to them. They can also start and sign petitions or volunteer in the organizational process of elections.
In some countries, voting is compulsory	True	In Australia, for example, it is compulsory to vote. Anyone who does not vote is subject to a fine of 20 AUS dollars
You can't join a political party until you turn 18	False	All major political parties in the UK have a youth arm and you can join these before you turn 18. It is the exact age you can join varies from party to party or from country to country.

Activity 2: Day-to-day Decisions

Background

Many young people struggle to understand how democracy and decision-making affect them and therefore fail to take an interest in democratic participation. This activity encourages the audience to think about how the decisions that government and Parliament make have a direct bearing on their everyday lives.

Aims

- Encourage the audience to think about how their lives are influenced by Parliament and the government
- Help the audience understand the work of an MP or peer and how they influence decision making
- Introduce the difference between local and national government structures and inform the audience whom they can contact within these structures

Step 1

Ask the audience to think about their day so far. You might want to do this with everyone together or after splitting into smaller groups. What aspects of their daily lives have been influenced by the government? What decisions have been made by Parliament that have impacted them?



Step 2

Give everyone a worksheet and ask them to map out a normal day in their life, showing what decisions have been made for them in this process. The below diagram demonstrates what this might look like and has ideas you could use to prompt people if they get stuck.



Step 3

Once the audience has completed the activity, you can use it as a stimulus for discussion. This exercise is also a good way to introduce the devolved governments and the decisions they make.

- You could also use this exercise to compare the day of a young person in this country to other places in the world e.g. a child in the USA can eat cereal with more additives. Why can't we here? Who decides this?
- In Sweden, they would get on a bus powered by renewable fuels, in other countries they would not be able to get public transport at all. Who decides what happens with public transport in their country?
- In China, the curriculum is influenced by political ideology. Who decides the curriculum in their country?
- Are we educated on internet? How do you feel knowing that your mobile phone is used to gather personal data? Do you really read carefully and understand what are the consequences before you sign in for Google, Tik-Tok or a Face-aging app?



Activity 3: The Constitution

Background

It is important to teach young people about the different aspects of democracy and the constitution so that they can understand the different institutions which make up the constitution and how powers are distributed. Young people may not know how decisions are made on a local and national level.

Aims

- Teach young people about the different institutions that make up the constitution in their country
- Help the audience to understand the difference between local and national decision-making

Step 1

Explain to the audience that a constitution is a set of important rules that describe how a country is run. Give out the worksheets with information on the different parts of the constitution of their country and ask the audience to match up each element with the correct definition.

Step 2

Go through the answer sheet with the audience. When going through the answers use the factsheet overleaf to elaborate on each of the different points. Some comparisons with other countries have been included to help the audience think about how our democracy functions compared with others and the reasons for this.

Step 3

Ask the audience some thought-provoking questions relating to the different areas of the constitution. Some potential prompt questions have been included on the factsheet. You may only have time to discuss one or two areas in detail. It may be a good idea to split the audience into smaller groups so they can discuss these questions amongst themselves before feeding back. Research has shown that this age group finds it difficult to think up answers on the spot and initially may feel more comfortable discussing answers with their peers.



Activity 4: Discussion Prompts

Background

Young people have lots of opinions about what’s going on in the world around them but often find it difficult to think about and discuss these issues unprompted. This activity encourages you to think of some thought-provoking questions on topics of interest to help prompt constructive discussion.

Aims

- Encourage the audience to think about the different areas of their lives that are affected by government decisions
- Encourage the audience to think about the way they would do things differently, and think of themselves as people who can influence change
- Help the audience to understand that every government decision has to be paid for and implemented

Step 1

Think of some national or local issues that are relevant to young people in your area. Research has shown that this age group is often particularly interested in local issues and issues on education, the environment, animal welfare, and mental health. Prepare some open-ended questions to encourage the audience to think about what they would do to help resolve these issues if they were in power.

Step 2

Split the audience into small groups and give each group one or two questions to consider. The questions should be designed to get the audience thinking – emphasize that these should be used as a springboard to generate discussions and that they don’t have to stick to the questions allocated to them if there are other issues that they would like to discuss

Step 3

Ask the groups for feedback on what they think is the most important issue they have been talking about. You can then use these examples to explain making these changes in Parliament, the process of passing laws, and the different roles of MPs and peers. This is also a good way for you to understand what the biggest priorities are for your young constituents. Give examples of how to lobby at local level, at your local council, create an association, ask for a meeting place, create a campaign.



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5. Engaging Political Decision-Makers

The involvement of decision-making factors and representatives of public authorities in these events together with young people is essential because the latter will be more stimulated to get involved, they will develop their curiosity and interest in learning more about how public institutions are organized, how they are taken decisions at the level of the Parliament or the Government, etc. Direct contact with an important representative will help young people to understand the constitutional organization of the institutions, but especially to gather the information that cannot be found on the website or in books.

The personal experience of each guest, with positive examples but also with negative examples, with concrete solutions to the problems encountered, makes young people more interested and learn more, want to discover, get involved, and make their opinion heard.

In this way, it is very important to develop a comprehensive understanding of the needs and concerns of policymakers. In order to effectively engage political decision-makers on youth strategies, it is important to understand their motivations and perspectives. This means researching their backgrounds, understanding the issues they care about, and the stances they may have already taken on youth-related topics. On the other way, young people are advised to connect directly with policymakers and build relationships. This could include attending meetings and events, writing letters, or setting up one-on-one meetings. Building these relationships aims to create an open dialogue and establish trust.

Local and regional governments should take affirmative action to encourage young men and women's access to positions of responsibility within the professional world, associations, politics, and local and regional authorities as part of their policies to create the best circumstances for equal participation by women and men in local and regional affairs.

To promote a policy of equality between women and men, local and regional authorities should:

- Identify and evaluate potential inequalities between men and women and social groups (minorities)
- Draw up a medium-term plan to eliminate inequalities between young men and young women
- Implement and evaluate measures that promote equal opportunities for girls and minorities.



Benefits of Engaging Political Decision-Makers:

- More fully understand the needs and issues of the communities they serve
- Make better, more informed planning and development decisions
- Educate community members on the inherent complexities and trade-offs involved in policy and development decision-making
- Implement at the local level the directives and spirit of the UN Convention
- Involve young people in efforts to implement sustainable development, thereby helping to achieve the goals of Youth Goals: Space and Participation for All; Sustainable and Green Europe
- Create urban environments that are more friendly and humane.

6. Barriers to/Challenges of Engaging Political Decision-Makers

Analyzing the European context and the difficulties that can exist in engaging political decision-makers in contact with young people from each country, but especially from the 4 participating countries (Romania, Italy, Sweden, and Spain), we have identified some challenges and barriers that can be based on the lack of interest and information, on both sides:

1. Lack of Awareness: Political decision-makers often lack awareness of the issues they are voting on and the impact they can have on the community. This makes it difficult to engage them in meaningful dialogue and build a consensus around a particular issue.
2. Short Attention Span: Political decision-makers often have short attention spans and lack the time to properly consider the implications of the decisions they are making. This can lead to hasty decisions that are not in the best interests of the public.
3. Limited Resources: Political decision-makers often have limited financial and personnel resources to engage stakeholders in meaningful dialogue. This can make it difficult to engage the public adequately and build a consensus around an issue.
4. Lack of Knowledge: Political decision-makers often lack the knowledge and expertise necessary to make informed decisions. This can lead to decisions that are not based on sound evidence and may not reflect the best interests of the public.
5. Poor Communication: Political decision-makers often have poor communication skills, making it difficult to effectively engage stakeholders in meaningful dialogue and reach a consensus around an issue.
6. Lack of Time: Political decision-makers are often very busy, and may not have the time to engage with constituents or stakeholders on various issues. This can be a barrier to engagement as decision-makers may be unable to make the time to meet or discuss the issue at hand.



7. Political Motivations: Political decision-makers may be motivated to act in a certain way because of their own political agenda. This can be a barrier to engagement because decision-makers may be unwilling to consider other perspectives or viewpoints.

8. Lack of Resources: Political decision-makers may lack the resources necessary to engage in meaningful conversations or debates about certain issues. This can be a barrier to engagement as decision-makers may be unable to access the necessary resources to engage effectively.

7. Tools

Engaging Political Decision-Makers in relations with young people could be organized in a different way:

1. Hold town hall meetings: Reach out to political decision-makers and invite them to participate in a town hall meeting about issues that are important to young people. This is an opportunity for young people to share their perspectives, ask questions, and get to know the decision-maker better.
2. Organize a grassroots campaign: Work with other young people to organize a grassroots campaign that highlights the issues that are important to them, and then reach out to political decision-makers to get their support.
3. Participate in youth advisory boards: Many political decision-makers are interested in hearing what young people have to say. Participating in youth advisory boards is a great way to make sure that your voice is heard.
4. Use social media: social media is a powerful tool for connecting with political decision-makers. Use it to share your thoughts and opinions, and to engage in meaningful dialogue with decision-makers.
5. Attend public hearings: Public hearings are an important way to engage with political decision-makers. Attend hearings to ensure your voice is heard and that the decisions being made are in the best interests of young people.

8. Hints and Tips

Focus on local issues

Research with young people suggests they are more interested in local issues that directly affect them rather than in broader national issues. You could focus on work you have done for the community and any plans you have for the future and use these as a springboard to discuss broader democratic and political issues. It is also a good idea to focus on what you can do for individuals, especially those in your audience. You could focus on a local suffrage hero – male or female – telling their story and what they did for their communities.



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Show the impact

Young people like to know that their participation makes a difference, for example, some of the Parliamentarians who helped to shape this toolkit had raised youth issues through local and national authorities' participation and were able to demonstrate this to the young people in their constituency.

Focus on single issues

Young people want recognition of the issues they consider important. Tackle one issue at a time with a clear theme that the audience considers relevant. Talking about subjects the audience feels are significant or interesting will encourage connection. You can then use this example to explain decision-making structures in a way that is both pertinent and easy to understand.

Have a stable, physical space to hold meetings, discussions and coordination.

Get economical support from local authorities in exchange of social services (education, cleaning of a wood or a river, planting of trees)

Explain and disseminate the outcomes and benefits of the initiatives to the local community and to the local politicians.

Follow up

Once you have completed a session, follow this up with a message on social media or a written letter. People appreciate a written recognition that you have taken their views on board.

Make it fun

Humor is a great way to break down barriers and create a more open space for discussion with young people. Don't be afraid to inject humor and informality into sessions in this toolkit.

Make it fast-paced and interactive

You could start sessions with quick-fire questions to get people engaged early. You should emphasize to the audience that they can ask you anything and questions do not have to be of a political nature.

A brainstorming session is a good way to break the ice. A relaxed atmosphere where you can safely say half-baked thoughts may lead to valuable ideas and proposals and put participants in the right mood to dare to express themselves.

A basic knowledge of conflict management is a must before you decide to organize any gathering. A facilitator smoothed and avoid unnecessary clashes and tensions, and helps to focus, and convey the conversation within a structured frame, burning item after item and extracting conclusions in each step of the way. This ensures the feeling that the group is advancing in a orderly manner and avoids the dispersion of energy.

