

# Time to Listen.

Encouraging Professionals to actively listen and respond to young people.



# What is My Tomorrow?



**My Tomorrow**  
Create it. Shape it. Embrace it.

My Tomorrow sheds light on the realities of being young today, aiming to challenge stereotypes and showcase the true diversity, strengths, and contributions of young people in the West Midlands.

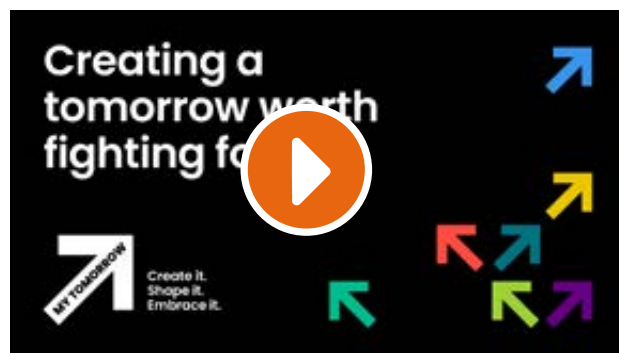
The campaign highlights the opportunities and challenges, often unseen, in young people's lives, sparking conversations between young people and communities to build understanding that leads to collaborative, positive action.

**My Tomorrow's core objectives are to:**

1. Empower young people to influence policies affecting their lives, ensuring their voices are heard and respected.
2. Support professionals in creating and managing opportunities for youth engagement.
3. Encourage communities to rethink perceptions and support opportunities for positive change.
4. Spark conversations that lead to collective action, shaping a future where every young person thrives.

**My Tomorrow aims to be:**

- Authentic
- Empowering
- Engaging
- Inclusive & diverse
- Thought-provoking



# Who are Positive Youth Foundation?



The Positive Youth Foundation (PYF) is a registered charity that has two distinct strands of activity:

- Supporting young people aged 8-25.
- Through advocacy and consultancy services, supporting the national youth work sector to thrive.

We aim to raise the aspirations and life chances of young people who are facing challenging circumstances through our identified areas of work.

## Why did we create this guide?

Through learning from recent commissions, we have the opportunity to support and encourage professionals to facilitate effective consultations with young people. These conversations will in turn, assist professionals and organisations in shaping their services to meet the needs of young people in an informed and reactive way.

PYF have a history of collecting Youth Voice in a range of different ways, this has been created as a “how to guide” based on our experiences.

## Who is this for?

**PROFESSIONALS** – anyone who works in services that have any impact or engagement on young people.

### This could include:

- Teachers, Tutors, Lecturers and Youth Services
- Doctors, Nurses and Health Professionals
- Council Services like transport and housing
- Support Services like social care and domestic violence support.

For more information, please visit:

[positiveyouthfoundation.org](http://positiveyouthfoundation.org)

@pyfcoventry

@positiveyouthUK



# "How to" Animation



positive youth foundation  
Beyond Engagement

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# What is Consultation?



Consultation is defined as:

"...a process which requires the commitment to take on board young people's views and present detailed information back to them."

**Treseder's (1997)**

*Empowering Children and Young People*

In essence a consultation is a conversation related to a certain theme or topic, with an outcome of collecting data and evidence to further support the people impacted.

## ...It's a chat!

Consultations can be delivered and youth voice collected in a range of different ways. This guide will support you to explore what might work best for your organisation and prompt thoughts around various considerations before taking on a youth consultation.



# Why Consult?



Every Child has the right to say what they think in all matters affecting them, and have their views taken seriously.

(Article 12 UN Conventions of the Rights of a Child 1989)

## Benefits to your organisation:

- Genuine insight into young peoples opinions, behaviours and mindset.
- Building effective relationships in your local community of interest.
- Broadening your reach in your service or local area.
- Honest intel for Impact & Evaluation of Services.
- Support in creating high quality, well informed provision.
- Boosting retention rates of service users.
- Feedback to support future funding bids.
- Upskilling young people who may become volunteers or staff members in the future.
- Upskilling professionals in communicating with diverse groups
- Remember: You may leave with unexpected outcomes!



# Why Consult?



## Benefits To Young People:

- Getting their voice heard and opinions shared.
- Being part of something bigger than them - for example having a say within social justice movements.
- An opportunity to shape services better suited to them.
- A boost in confidence
- Meeting new people (friends + potential future opportunities with professionals).
- Experience for CV's & Personal Statements.
- Being exposed to opposing view points.
- Young people being recognised and valued as experts.



# Barriers to Consider



**In our experience, the most common barriers to young people's engagement and having their voices heard with organisations include:**

- The Young people missing positive role models who are boosting their awareness of their right to be heard.
- Young people are not always taken seriously and have reported feeling like part of a "tick box" exercise.
- Organisations that are resistant to change.
- The risk of a power imbalance, where the real decisions continue to be made by the organisation and young people have no real impact.
- A risk of tokenism when recruiting young people or targeting those who will give an expected outcome.
- Young people not having the opportunity to be upskilled or trained in being effective youth consultants.
- A lack of acknowledgement for young people's commitment levels and differing day to day routines.
- Not taking into account transport arrangements, accessibility, equality of opportunity and any further support that might be needed.
- Only collecting one similar experience or opinion, giving you bias feedback.
- Professionals finding it difficult to facilitate conversations with young people, including a change in language or expectations for diverse groups and age ranges.
- Young people having had negative past experiences when getting involved.
- A lack of opportunities available for young people to engage in sharing their voices.



# Recruitment



When recruiting young people into youth consultation there are a number of factors to consider to ensure a diverse and representative voice is heard.

## Age

This may depend on the topic/service being consulted i.e if the services dedicated to 15-18 year olds.

## Gender

Whilst it is always good practice to take views from all genders, this may be gender specific due to the nature of the consultation.

## Ethnicity

To offer genuine representation there needs to be a diverse group engaged in the consultation. A diverse group also includes those from differing religions & cultures - who may offer opinions tailored to different approaches.

## Geographical Location

If the service is city wide, the consultation needs to reflect the views of people living in a range of areas - i.e those from more affluent areas may show a different level of need to others.

## Relevance of Representation

A targeted audience depending on the agenda of the consultation - this may mean young people that have specific characteristics or life experiences relating to the discussion topic.

## TIP

if a consultation is held that isn't representative of all of the above, another should be held to engage those who may be underrepresented.

i.e: a consultation taking place in a male dominated sports club, would need to be repeated with those of other genders at another time.



# Engaging Young People



## Tips for keeping young people engaged:

- **Authenticity** - Young people need to be introduced to the nature of the consultation before getting involved. This gives them the opportunity to make an informed choice whether to participate, addressing any factors of manipulating young people to engage. If young people feel forced to share their voice, it is not going to be genuine and meaningful.
- **Activities** - use physical activity to collect viewpoints and keep things interactive. A simple example of this is to have participants move to different spaces in the room to answer Agree, Disagree and Unsure questions.
- **Ice Breakers** - use short ice breaker activities to bring informality to the session and build rapport between staff and other group members. This could be a simple game of throwing a ball to one another and introducing yourself by name, with a fact related to yourself. Professionals should also include themselves in this process and never ask a young person to do anything they wouldn't feel comfortable doing themselves.
- **Refreshments** - whether this is just drinks and biscuits or an offering of food, this can help mark a break in discussion and boost concentration levels with young people throughout the session.
- **Comfort Breaks** - ensure discussions are kept to short timescales. Regular breaks can give people time to refocus, in our experience 45 minutes is the maximum time on one activity before concentration waivers.
- **Approachability** - introducing young people to a service or furthering engagement relies upon professionals being approachable and promoting a comfortable, supportive environment. Take considerations as to how you dress, speak and present yourself.
- **Group Dynamics** - you can often identify who the most open and confident participants will be before the session even starts, however make efforts to encourage those quieter young people to have an equal opportunity to input.
- **Stimulus to provoke discussion** - use photos, videos or controversial statements to provoke a discussion around topics relating to your theme.

# Planning a Consultation



## Questions to ask yourself before you start...

- ❑ Where & When will it take place?
- ❑ Who will it engage and why have this group of young people been chosen?
- ❑ How will you recruit?
- ❑ What are you trying to influence?
- ❑ What are your motivations?
- ❑ Which method of consultation is best suited to your topic and time scales?
- ❑ What resources or tools will you need? (including staff)
- ❑ What practical or visual impact can you explain to the young people engaged?
- ❑ Where will you utilise the voices that you capture?

Consider any potential issues that may arise as well as support systems in place if so? For example, discussing an emotive topic which may need safeguarding support for young people





✓	Action	Considerations
	Create an expected Timeline	When do you need your consultation completed by? How long will it take you to recruit? When will this then be utilised and reported on?
	Choose Topic / Theme	Consider: possible expected and unexpected responses, the language used, how the theme will make young people feel and what further support may you need to offer?
	Choose Demographic	Age, Gender, Ethnicity, Geography, and any other characteristics (e.g: young parents, newly arrived, history of offending).
	Plan Method	Which consultation method will you use? (see further in the guide for more information!)
	Recruit	Consider: time, place & environment, accessibility, giving young people enough notice, and whether or not the group is pre-existing or new to each other.
	Gain Consent	Get full consent and emergency contact details for all participants (see further in the guide for more information!).
	Pre Briefing of Young People	Give the young people an informed choice on whether they are interested in engaging.
	Incentives	What incentives will be offered to the young people engaging?
	Facilitate Consultation	See the Animation further in the guide!
	Reflective Practice	Debrief as an organisation: what worked, what didn't work so well and what can you do with the intel gathered in a practical way.
	Use the data and insight collected	Make use of the insights that have been collected and document how and why this has been done.
	Ensure Support Structures are in place	Offer relevant support and safeguarding provision for all young people engaged during and after the consultation.

# Choosing a Consultation Method



## Method 1: Focus Group

A face to face or online group session to hold a discussion.

### Considerations:

- Location Accessibility
- Time/Day and Duration
- Group Size
- Safeguarding Policies and Procedures
- Group Dynamics

### Pro's

- A great way to build relationships between services and young people.- Opinions and ideas can be positively challenged.
- Can read body language queues and prompt if necessary.

### Con's

- Young people not sticking to timings.
- Facilitator or other participants could influence young peoples. opinions.
- Young people feel less willing to contribute due to social pressures in the group.
- Opinions and comments may not get heard over big characters in the room.



# Choosing a Consultation Method



## Method 2: 1:1 Interviews

A face to face or online interview with an individual.

### Considerations:

- Accessibility for online platforms.
- Lone Working and Safeguarding Policies & procedures.

### Pro's

- Giving a young person your full attention to get the best out of them.
- Being able to rephrase and reword questions for understanding purposes and prompt further.
- Facilitator can pick up on body language queues.

### Con's

- A lack of relationship building with broader groups or with the facilitator.
- Participant may not give full thoughts as not encouraged by others.



# Choosing a Consultation Method



## Method 3: Survey

An online or paper based short survey.

### Considerations:

- Accessible to a large audience.
- Keep things short and snappy.
- Data protection.
- Safeguarding Policies and Procedures.

### Pro's

- A mixture of quantitate and qualitative data.
- Can reach young people who don't always feel comfortable to share in group settings.
- A broad range of views.
- Easily monitored and analysed.

### Con's

- Loses personal touch.
- If the survey is too long or not relatable young people may not complete it fully.
- Limited approach and participants might not be able to explore themes further.
- May lose context within answers.





# Capturing Data



Capturing the views and opinions of young people from your consultations is crucial to how valuable your data will be.

## Considerations include:

- Giving young people enough information on the topic to form an opinion.
- Using language that is young person friendly.
- Allowing more informed young people to lead on sections of the consultation can help make the conversation relatable.
- Providing options for young people to express their thoughts in different ways, such as creative drawings or mind maps.
- Design a game to collect feedback, be creative!
- Use audio or video recording to capture the conversation. You can listen back afterwards to capture key points and opinions.
- Have a designated note taker so that you, as the facilitator can stay fully engaged in the discussion.
- Technology can be a good way to be interactive with your data capturing and engaging for young people. There are several free tools online that can help with this such as Google Jam Board, Miro & Mentimeter.



# Consent, Understanding & Incentives



**Consent** is fundamental and doesn't just include the permission of participation of the young people.

Consider always gaining consent for every element of recording young peoples voices. This includes photography, video footage, audio recording and also the collection of quotes and viewpoints.

**Remember** - young people are not only giving their opinions but sharing their intellectual property and services need to be explicit in how this will be utilised moving forward. For example if you take quotes to use in reports or publications or design programmes or policy specifically to what young people have told you - their voices need to be recognised.

If a young person removes consent to using their participation either visually or using their verbal input you must respect this and take steps to follow GDPR guidelines.

## Understanding

Young people should be made aware throughout the consultation that if they do not feel comfortable answering certain question or engaging around a specific theme, they can say no or not respond. Facilitators and Professionals also need to be made aware of this in regards to their practice around prompting participants and reading body language queues.

## Incentives

It is imperative that you acknowledge young people are giving up their time freely to engage in your consultation. There are various ways in which you can recognise their contribution through different types of incentives.

- Vouchers or Monetary payment.
- Food and Refreshments within the session.
- Travel Expenses covered.
- Branded Clothing for them to wear as a "uniform".
- Offers of positive references and personal statement requests.
- Feedback on how you used their voice. **This is critical**



# Analysing Data + Reflective Practice



## 1. The What?

**What change are you looking to achieve through consulting with young people?**

Specific objectives need to be established before involving young people in consultations. To avoid tokenism and give clarity as to why young people are being asked for their views.

If you are looking to use youth voice to influence your own service of work, adapt a strategy or impact on policy, it is important that the views and opinions of young people are given due weight and communicated to adults who have the power to act on these issues and influence change on behalf of young people.

## 2. So What?

Consulting with young people is the first step but understanding and reflecting on what they are saying and what it means to the system in question, is key. In order to review and evaluate issues that include young people, a system needs to be implemented throughout a project or organisation, that allows for consistent reviewing by young people. This is especially important for long-term services strategy or policies as many young people have different views of issues and how services should be run.

## 3. Now What?

**What will or can you do with the views of young people?**

Strategies and policies of the service need to include the involvement of young people at every level. The views and opinions from young people can strongly influence future planning, supporting organisations and services to stay relevant and adaptive to evolving youth issues and cultures. The success criteria against what will be measured should be clear from the start and all influential senior staff should be help to account. Regardless of the outcomes or impact, young people should be treated with respect and given appropriate feedback.



# Collecting Feedback from Young People



To continue your reflective practice, it is always useful to collect feedback on how the young people felt whilst being engaged in your consultation.

This can be done as a simple short survey (5 questions maximum!) that can be sent to them as a link to complete online or printed to complete before they leave the session.

You can also collect feedback in a more physical and interactive way by setting up a “feedback station” asking 3 simple questions and asking young people to drop a coloured counter symbolising yes or no into a cup or cone.



# Accountability & Next Steps



One of the most important steps in facilitating youth consultation is what comes next.

Holding your organisation and/or service to account is imperative to making the activity meaningful.

Having accountability means revisiting the consultation with those involved to explain the any progress or impact that has come from their commitment.

This can be done in a number of ways, it may be that you see the young people regularly and can arrange a "Consultation Update" gathering at a later date that suits the topic discussed - i.e; a month later or even further ahead.

If you do not have regular contact, sign young people up to a mailing list (with consent) and send an email detailing any progress that has been made. This ensures that young people feel fully connected to the process and avoids a tokenistic approach to facilitating consultations.



# Setting up a Regular Youth Advisory Group



## You could consider creating a Youth Advisory Group specific to your organisation.

A group of young people who are committed to meeting is a great sounding board for future decisions.

Be aware and considerate that young people may experience a lack of engagement at certain times throughout the year.

For example during intense exam timetables and during the summer holidays with pre scheduled time out of usual routines.

Be sure to incentivise this membership to the Youth Advisory Group, encourage young people to take ownership over the name of the group, the time and place for meeting and the type of incentive they would appreciate.



# Top Tips



- Consent Forms should also include consent to capture photography, videos and audio recordings as well as ability to utilise quotations and opinions.
- Ensure the collection of Emergency Contacts for everyone in attendance.
- Be aware of de-escalation techniques for topics that may be sensitive or controversial – professional support for young people.
- Play Devils Advocate, this can encourage deeper considerations.
- Try to keep things engaging and have fun.
- Create an informal and comfortable environment and atmosphere.
- Offer refreshments and incentives!
- **Remember:** Young people are giving up their time to engage.
- Create a Consultation Resource Box! Pens, Paper, Post It's, Blue Tac...
- Provide relevant support signposting and safeguarding provision during and after the consultation.



# Signposting & Safeguarding



Encouraging young people to use their voices, whilst being an effective way to explore topical conversation, can also bring forward the potential of triggering disclosures from young people.

If you are worried about a child or young person in a safeguarding capacity contact your Local Children's Safeguarding Partnership

By creating a safe and comfortable environment, you are in turn creating trusted relationships with individuals who may (or may not be!) affected personally by the topics you are discussing. Ensure that a confidentiality statement is introduced to the group with the understanding that if individuals say anything that could show that they themselves or any others are at any risk, this will need to be taken further.

In order to support this process, creating a **"Group Agreement"** before beginning a Youth Consultation is key. You can encourage young people to list things such as "Don't interrupt each other" to "Be open minded" and then add your confidentiality clause in during the discussion. It is important when closing the session to remind young people of any support services that may available to them relating to the topic discussed or simply to support their emotional well being.

