

Involving Children and Young People

Introduction

Participation is an active process that enables children and young people's views and experiences to influence and contribute to appropriate and relevant decision making. Participation is not the tokenistic involvement of young people that has no meaning or significance for the organisation.

Young people are the lifeblood and future of most sports. Organisations have a moral duty to involve them in decision-making. Their right to participate and be involved is underpinned by Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and is emphasised in both [Working Together to Safeguard Children \(2015\)](#) Chapter 2 and the [Standards for Safeguarding and Protecting Children in Sport \(2001\)](#) Standard 9.

In legal terms a child is someone younger than 18 years. However in this context many organisations extend this definition to include young adults (up to 25 years old) whose views and relatively recent experiences as young people are still relevant. Most young people are involved as participants in sport, but many have taken on other roles, as coaches, officials, event organisers, young leaders, or in other voluntary roles.

Some benefits of involving and consulting with young people:

- It provides unique user/stakeholder views and ideas
- Organisations become more responsive to this core group, and more child-focused, with anticipated benefits in terms of retention within the sport
- It provides opportunities for young people to provide feedback and raise their own issues
- It ensures that plans, projects and materials are appropriate and relevant to young people
- Failing to consult young people and the absence of young persons' perspectives can result in wasted resources, time and effort
- These young people can contribute to the sports, and develop skills, experience and confidence through this process
- The organisation can grow a valuable resource for consultation and involvement – in both the short and long term
- Young people are more effective in connecting with other young people in undertaking subsequent consultation or disseminating information
- The organisation models respect for young people's views.



Core principles underlying the involvement of young people

Young people's involvement must:

Be based on their right to be involved: particularly in decisions that will involve or impact on them.

Be based on honesty, openness and respect.

The organisation should be prepared to hear, consider and where appropriate act on information, views and feedback that may challenge existing plans, perceptions and practice. Those involved need to be open about the boundaries and parameters of the young people's influence (e.g. to what degree the organisation can or will be open to feedback or suggestions on a particular subject); and clarify any 'givens' there may be that impact on the scope for change. Participation and consultation do not require the organisation to accept or act on all feedback from young people, but respect does involve ensuring that feedback is heard, seriously considered and, where deemed appropriate, incorporated into planning and reviews.

Have management support and backing.

It is essential that plans and arrangements to involve and consult with young people have a management mandate.

Be meaningful, not tokenistic.

There should be a clear purpose to the process which fits with the organisation's overall strategy, plans or aims. Involving young people for the sake of it achieves nothing; it risks alienating young people and damaging the reputation and image of the sport.

Be focused.

Make clear what the young people's role will be (e.g. establish Terms of Reference/role descriptions for on-going groups); what the outputs will be (e.g. a report presented to management and written by the young people or compiled from their comments); focus on the unique perspective that children and young people can contribute in a range of different roles within the organisation.

Be adequately resourced.

Involving young people requires resources – in terms of officer/staff/volunteer/s time; a budget (e.g. for venues, travel, materials, and refreshments); administration (e.g. for records, reports, practical arrangements such as booking venues, travel and so on); and rewards for/acknowledgment of young people's contributions (e.g. sports tickets, kit or other).

Address diversity and power issues.

Steps should be taken to ensure that potential obstacles to participation by particular individuals or groups are identified and addressed. Power differentials between adults involved and young people, and between different groups of young people, should be recognised and addressed. Clarify ownership and leadership of the group; and how differences of opinion will be addressed.

Build in feedback.

Arrangements should be in place to ensure that young people are kept updated about the way in which their feedback has been used, received, and about changes or decisions made by the organisation as a result their efforts.



Practical considerations

Despite the obvious differences between planning to engage young people in a single consultation exercise and establishing an on-going consultation group, many of the factors outlined below remain relevant in both instances.

Organisational 'fit':

How will the involvement/consultation/participation process contribute to promoting the organisation's aims, developing plans or assisting reviews?

Is there clear management commitment and support?

Purpose, tasks and role:

Is this a 'one off' or single issue consultation process (e.g. seeking feedback on a website or a safeguarding leaflet) or the establishment of an on-going standing group (e.g. a sport's youth forum)? What is/are the role/s of the group (e.g. to produce or design of materials, comment on policy or practice issues, represent young people across the organisation, identify and advocacy on issues affecting young people within the organisation, develop ambassadors, communicate – to whom and how)?

Are there identified outputs (e.g. a report or reports to management, suggested amendments to materials, or identification of issues the organisation should address)?

Focus:

Will the group consider a range of issues affecting young people within the sport, or be safeguarding specific (which necessarily limits the agenda and scope)?

Support and facilitation:

Are there members of staff given specific responsibility for supporting and/or facilitating this activity?

Do they have a clear job description (what they will be required to do) and person specification (the experience and attributes they require for the role – e.g. commitment to principles of young people's participation, communicating with young people, adequate vetting)?

Is this role accounted for in terms of their time and support?

Membership:

Has a recruitment process been identified and how will this be undertaken (e.g. advertising, expression of interest opportunities, interviews or other formats)?

Is information about the proposal been developed?

Will the group seek representatives of children and young people of all ages, abilities and in all roles across the organisation (e.g. participants, young officials, young organisers, existing young people's groups), or will there be a focus on a particular group or groups?

Have the additional support needs of younger or some disabled children (e.g. in terms of access, carers or additional staffing) been considered and addressed?

Meetings:

What format is planned (e.g. face to face meetings, video conferencing, online links, or a combination)?

What type of venues will be used (consider potential access issues for disabled young people)?

Where will meetings take place (consider where members may be travelling from)?

When will meetings take place (e.g. consider school, college or university timetables, examination periods, train schedules)?



Resources:

Is there an agreed budget for this work?

Are arrangements to refund travel or other costs in place?

Is this system clear and accountable?

Has consideration been given to the potential costs of venues, refreshments, materials and accommodation?

Have the additional support needs of younger or some disabled young people (eg attendance of a parent/carer) been considered?

Are there development opportunities that group members can access to build on, eg communication or presentation skills?

Facilitation, input and style:

Who will chair or facilitate the group (adult staff member of young person)?

How will agenda items be raised, agreed or identified (within the group and from elsewhere in the organisation)?

Will style, length of meetings, nature of activities, tools used, and breaks reflect the needs of the group on the basis of age, role and/or ability?

How will codes of conduct for group members and facilitators be developed and agreed?

How will a sense of fun be engendered and maintained?

Communication:

Who will be responsible for recording meetings and activities, and for preparing feedback (in writing or through presentations) or reports?

To what degree will the young people retain control over what is recorded and reported?

How will disputes (between adult facilitators/supporters and young members or between young members) be managed, resolved and recorded?

How will the wider organisation (and in particular other young people) be updated and informed about the group's work (e.g. reports on website, through social media, e-bulletins)?

Young people's autonomy:

Although organisation staff at the outset need to have established the basis on which a proposed group may operate (as above), in many cases groups will later assume responsibility for many aspects of its role and operation (e.g. by developing terms of reference, job descriptions, codes of conduct, taking responsibility for chairing/facilitating, agenda setting, recording and writing/presenting feedback).

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