

EU4Youth:  
Coordination and Policy Support

#EU4Youth

# YOUTH POLICY LABS TOOLKIT

Plan, Design, Implement and  
Follow-Up Youth Policy Labs



Funded by  
the European Union

The EU4Youth Coordination and Policy Support project (2023-2026) supports the European Union's actions on youth in the Eastern Partnership region. Its areas of work range from enhancing strategic partnerships and extending EU support on youth policy matters to monitoring the overall progress of the EU4Youth programme and communicating the success of EU-funded youth initiatives throughout the region.

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# List of abbreviations

**BA** Bachelor of Arts

**EaP** Eastern Partnership

**ME** Micro-Experimentation

**NEET** Not in Education, Employment or Training

**NGO** Non-Governmental Organization

**PL** Policy Lab

**SWOT** Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

**YPL** Youth Policy Lab

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# General Introduction

This toolkit has been produced in the framework of the Youth Policy Labs Hub under the EU4Youth Programme in the Eastern Partnership (EaP).



*EU4Youth promotes the employability and active participation of young people in society and the economy in the Eastern partner countries (EaP) – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine – with a special focus on disadvantaged groups.*

The Youth Policy Labs Hub was set up following the positive experience of Youth Policy Labs during the previous phases of the EU4Youth programme, in order to promote more deliberately innovative ways to involve young people in policy dialogue processes, to co-create and monitor the implementation of youth relevant policies, and in this respect to contribute to sustaining and strengthening youth participation mechanisms in the countries of the EaP region.

The purpose of this modular instrument is to clarify the concept, the key principles and rules, the expected benefits, and the practical phases of development of **Youth Policy Labs (YPL)** as they were introduced in the Programme in 2021 and then implemented in five EaP countries in 2021 and 2022. On the basis of a comprehensive reflection and evaluation of the experience of these years, the Policy Lab approach has been proposed for the current phase of Programme implementation, considering the lessons learned from the previous phase and other experiences of successful policy labs conducted in the European Union and other countries.

## WHAT IS A YOUTH POLICY LAB?

A **Policy Lab** is a multi-stakeholder co-creation exercise in several sessions that applies design thinking and experimental approaches to find innovative ways to address a Policy Challenge. It brings together, based on a direct interest in the Policy Challenge addressed, citizens who are expected to benefit from an improved policy, decision-makers, and other stakeholders.

A **Policy Challenge** is a complex problem that requires the intervention of a policy authority and typically involves several sectors and levels of the Public Administrations and several categories of stakeholders; for example, issues such as ‘Improving Employment Opportunities for Youths’ or ‘Guaranteeing Inclusiveness in the Digital Transformation of the Local Public Administration’ are Policy Challenges requiring a multisectoral approach.

A **Youth Policy Lab (YPL)** is a Policy Lab in which the ‘citizens’ involved as main beneficiaries of the desired policy innovations are Young People; in a YPL, Youths contribute in **all phases of a policy-making cycle**, from the representation of a problem, to the identification of possible solutions, and from the experimentation of new measures to the formulation of policy recommendations and the monitoring of the follow-up.

The intended use of this toolkit is to support three target groups in understanding the specific complementary value of Youth Policy Labs, compared to other more consolidated forms of Youth Participation.

## WHY THESE THREE TARGET GROUPS?

**Youth Organisations and Policy Makers** are the natural 'initiators' of YPLs, since they may see, better than others, the benefits of close collaboration between the Public Administration and Youths in addressing Policy Challenges that directly affect the young population; not only youth participation as a specific policy objective, but also as a method to improve other sectoral and transversal policy challenges.

**YPL Facilitators** are the most specific target group for this toolkit because they have the task of making the Labs work according to their aims and operational principles and leading them to innovative and relevant recommendations.

In particular, this toolkit has the following objectives:

- To prepare Youth Organisation leaders to use a different approach, extracting the learning, participation, and influence value that YPLs can provide if the approach is well implemented.
- To illustrate to (local) Policymakers and Administrators the value of a structured form of youth participation in decision-making, involving public and private stakeholders in a constructive and realistic manner to analyse a policy challenge from multiple perspectives, to conceive and design innovative solutions, and to accompany their implementation.
- To provide basic methodological guidance to new cohorts of Youth Policy Lab Facilitators, who may be brought to adapt the original Youth Policy Lab approach to local contexts and constraints; this can be done as far as timing and experimentations are concerned, but without neglecting the basic features, principles, rules and potential of Policy Labs.

In the following sections, the concept of the YPL is introduced to Youth Organisations' readers and Policy Makers who are considering becoming a host/organiser of a YPL, showing which kind of benefits they may respectively expect.

Then YPL Facilitators are addressed, explaining what the facilitators' tasks consist of, and which competences are required for the facilitators' team.

A checklist is introduced at this point to make clear what characterises a YPL with respect to other forms of participatory democracy and youth participation in policy-making phases.

Finally, the YPL Cycle is introduced and explained step-by-step, to allow Facilitators and anybody interested to go deeper in the understanding of the method proposed.

# What's in it for Youth Organisations?

**Youth Policy Labs** have some common and some different features with respect to other more consolidated forms of Youth Participation. They should be considered as an additional, not an alternative approach to the existing opportunities to advocate and negotiate new measures and corrections in existing youth policy.

The Labs are not limited to the specific field of 'Youth Policy', but may extend to any other policy field in which young people are considered to be among the beneficiaries or target groups: they may open new policy dialogues in fields like transport, social innovation, inclusion, environment, urban planning, health, employment, or education.

YPLs are applicable at different institutional levels, with a higher success at the local level, allowing to create and consolidate long-term relationships and confidence between youth organisations and local authorities in different policy areas.

They follow a 'multi-stakeholder' approach, opening up the dialogue between several public and private stakeholders involved in the policy challenge selected by the YPL organisers: by including more differentiated interests and opinions, they avoid the risk of self-referential bilateral dialogue between the usual interlocutors.

YPLs open the opportunity of policy-making not only to official youth representatives, but also to other young people who have never entered into contact with policymakers, but are particularly interested in and affected by the selected policy challenge, thus extending the inclusivity and specificity of youth dialogue.

They develop negotiation and democratic leadership skills by facing a multilateral structured debate with a clear orientation to develop consensus on practical solutions.



# What's in it for Youth Policy Lab Hosts in Local Government?

Youth Policy Labs are an interesting opportunity for local policymakers and administrators, being substantially different from periodic, non-specialised consultations with youth representatives at local level.

YPLs offer an opportunity to address community-relevant policy challenges in a democratic and participatory process, with a particular role attributed to youth representatives; they allow to develop shared ownership of future policies and to engage youth and stakeholders in decision-making.

They help to bring youth and citizens closer to democratic debate, giving substance to the concept of civic engagement and participation.

YPLs allow Local Authorities to experiment with new participatory approaches to local policy-making, that increase the credibility of the local political class and allow a shorter 'time for delivery' for new policies and initiatives that have already been agreed and considered relevant between several participants in a Policy Lab.



# What's in it for Youth Policy Lab Facilitators

Youth Policy Labs Facilitators are the primary target group for this toolkit, which are intended, first of all, to make them fully familiar with the concept and the specific features of YPLs. In fact, the experience of designing and successfully implementing a Youth Policy Lab is highly formative and may constitute an important step in the professional and civic development of a (young) person, but YPLs should not be confused with any other form of facilitation in a youth organisation. Some techniques may be the same, but the 'full process orientation' and the direct expected impact on policy-making in a multi-stakeholder context make the YPL a quite specific participatory democracy approach.

In fact, the core section of the toolkit is mostly directed to Facilitators, who are expected to be supported in the following tasks:

- To concur (with the Local Authority and the Youth Organisation Leaders) on the definition of a relevant Policy Challenge, without which the success of a YPL is unlikely.
- To participate in the identification and engagement of relevant public and private stakeholders involved in the policy challenge.
- To identify and prepare the YPL participants before the start of the sessions.
- To design and facilitate the sequence of participatory sessions (alternating divergent and convergent phases) while always keeping in mind the YPL approach and rules, the facilitation techniques, and the policy objectives to be achieved.
- To guarantee confidentiality within the group and, as far as possible, the continuity of participants' presence in the whole cycle of sessions.

# Competences for Youth Policy Labs

Designing, organising, facilitating, documenting, and evaluating a Youth Policy Lab should never be a one-person activity. While the core group of competences can be gathered in the area of FACILITATION (a broad enough category in itself, and which justifies the use of YPL Facilitators as key figures in the process), other relevant competences are **COMMUNICATION, EVALUATION, UNDERSTANDING OF POLICY CHALLENGE AND POLICY MAKING PROCESSES**.

Each of these competence areas is necessary and may be more important in some of the 12 Steps described in the toolkit than in others. Even if all these competences were available in one person, it would be extremely difficult to operate all of them in the different roles that are required. That is why it is recommended to form a team of two to four people who act in different roles, according to their relative mastery of the competence areas:

- The main facilitator, having a strong capacity to support expression, to moderate different opinions, and to orient the discussion toward the intended path and results.
- The organiser and promoter, who focuses on identifying relevant stakeholders and participants, and can motivate stakeholders and participants to invest time and energy in the YPL.
- A documentation, reporting, and evaluation person, who is in charge of making the YPL process and results readable by those who were not attending, and a good writer in view of drafting recommendations.
- Someone who knows the field in which the Policy Challenge has been identified and can have access to specialist input and professional/scientific support when needed.

It is important when setting up a Youth Policy Lab to check if the persons in charge have the necessary competencies or can easily access other persons who complete the spectrum of competences considered ideal for the task.

In terms of time, different competences are activated in different phases of the development of a Youth Policy Lab:

- *Before the PL sessions: understanding the context, taking part in the choice of the Policy Challenge, planning the composition of YPL participants, activating stakeholders, involving policy makers, planning the workshops, designing the sessions, identifying needs for scientific/technical/administrative expertise.*
- *During the PL sessions: welcoming participants, facilitating expression and dialogue, guaranteeing the working principles and the rules of the PL, supporting the dynamics of solution design and co-creation, managing session times and unforeseen developments, reporting.*
- *After the PL sessions: keeping contact with the participants, monitoring activities between sessions, communicating PL developments to local stakeholders, following up the recommendations produced.*

## Are you really planning a Youth Policy Lab?

### CHECKLIST TO GUARANTEE APPROACH COHERENCE

The following questions are proposed to help you check if you are planning a Youth Policy Lab (YPL) or another kind of Youth Engagement or Youth Dialogue activity:

- ✔ 1. Have you identified a clear Policy Challenge to address?
- ✔ 2. Have you agreed on the Policy Challenge and the aim of the YPL with at least one public authority (co-hosting or participating in the YPL)?
- ✔ 3. Have you identified and engaged all relevant stakeholders, beyond the policy authorities?
- ✔ 4. Have you engaged a trained Facilitators Team with the necessary competences, dialogue orientation, independence, and clarity of roles?
- ✔ 5. Have you planned at least four well-identified sessions corresponding to the 'Double Diamond' of design thinking?
- ✔ 6. Have you planned sufficient time and adequate methods to hear all representations of the policy challenge, to deal with disagreement, to elaborate first ideas, to check their feasibility and impact and to select those on which to base (micro-experiments and) recommendations?
- ✔ 7. Have you planned the participants' composition according to a balanced representation of youths, decision-makers, and other relevant stakeholders (about 1/3 of each group) and including inexperienced participants in each category?
- ✔ 8. Are you ready to apply a confidentiality principle (Chatham Rule) and to have it applied by all participants?
- ✔ 9. Are you requiring continuity of presence as a condition for participation?
- ✔ 10. Are you prepared to conclude the YPL with a set of well-documented Recommendations and a follow-up plan?

# YOUTH POLICY LAB

The **Youth Policy Lab (YPL)** cycle is a structured, 12-stage process designed to tackle policy challenges in a collaborative, iterative, and adaptive manner. It provides a clear pathway for engaging stakeholders, exploring policy issues, and co-creating solutions. Each phase plays a specific role in the overall process, ensuring that participants move methodically from initial planning and research to the final recommendations and their potential implementation. The **12 stages** guide participants through the entire YPL, from the groundwork to real-world testing (micro experimentation) and follow-up activities.

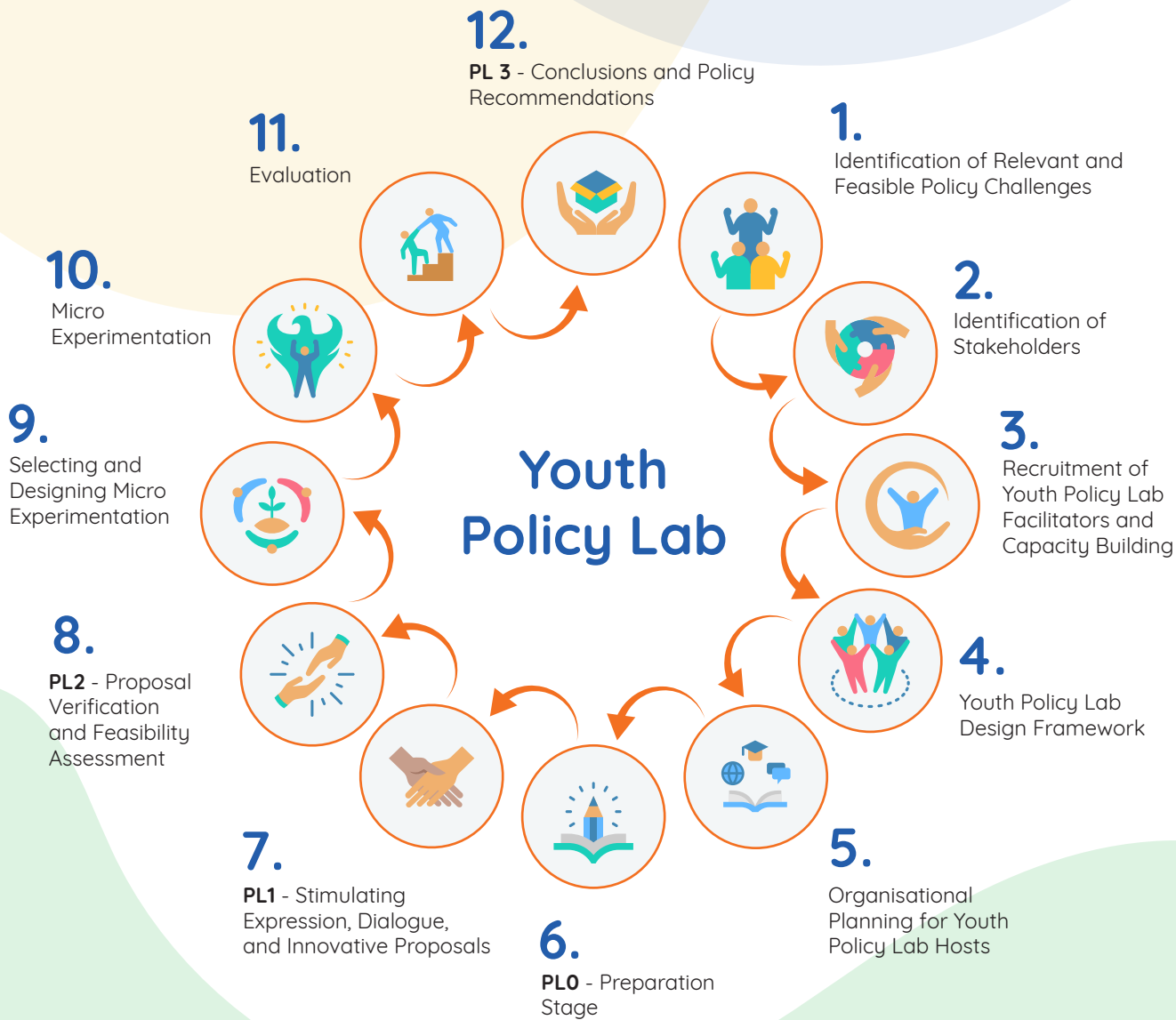
The cycle begins with defining the policy challenge and identifying the key stakeholders who will contribute to the entire process. From there, participants engage in a thorough exploration phase, gathering insights, assessing needs, and understanding the broader context of the issue at hand.

As the process unfolds, stakeholders collaborate in the co-creation phase, where ideas are exchanged, tested, and refined to develop potential solutions. These solutions are then further developed in the design stage, where they are prototyped, tested, and refined based on feedback from real-life scenarios and stakeholders. The final stages of the cycle involve consolidating and finalising policy recommendations that are both actionable and practical.

This **12-stage Youth Policy Lab Cycle** is designed to be flexible and dynamic, with each stage building on the previous one. It ensures that policy recommendations are not only relevant and informed by the lived experiences of those affected by the issue, but also practical and feasible in terms of implementation. Throughout the cycle, there is an emphasis on stakeholder engagement and collaboration, which ensures that the process is grounded in real-world needs and outcomes.



# 12-STAGE YOUTH POLICY LAB CYCLE





## STAGE 1.

### Identification of Relevant and Feasible Policy Challenges

The first step in preparing a Youth Policy Lab (YPL) cycle is to identify relevant and feasible policy challenges that resonate with the youth community.

Ideally, a YPL cycle should be an ongoing, collaborative, and reflective development process that becomes integrated within local governance systems, specifically focusing on youth-related issues.

It is important to clearly define the scope of each YPL cycle to ensure that it is manageable and realistic. Addressing issues beyond the local governance authority or outside the capacity of youth engagement can be unproductive, so careful consideration must be given to the challenges selected.

The specific policy challenge chosen for the YPL should guide the entire process, focusing all activities, discussions, and actions toward a shared goal. These challenges may range from general youth issues, such as education or employment, to more specific problems, such as youth mental health or access to social services.



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*For the process to be effective, at least two parties must agree on the initial choice of the policy challenge: a policy agency and representatives from the target group (youth). This ensures that both the policymaking body and the youth community are aligned and invested in the challenge, leading to more relevant and impactful outcomes.*

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In the initial preparation phase, the YPL organising team needs to draft a proposed policy challenge, which will be reviewed and refined through consultation with a wide range of youth stakeholders, including youth organisations, local community leaders, and a reference group. This feedback process ensures that the challenge is relevant, achievable, and aligned with the needs of the youth community. The finalised policy challenge will then serve as the foundation for outreach efforts to engage prospective participants who are interested in working on the selected issue/s.

During the next stages of the YPL cycle, the selected policy challenge/s may be continuously refined, if needed. This process will involve working closely with youth participants to ensure that the policy recommendations are not only relevant but also actionable, reflecting the real-life experiences and challenges faced by youth. Additionally, the team will explore any existing local participatory strategies or youth-focused initiatives that the policy challenge can align with, ensuring that the proposed actions contribute to broader community efforts and foster sustainable change.

By involving youth directly in the identification and refinement of policy challenge/s, the YPL ensures that the solutions generated are rooted in their experiences and aspirations, creating policies that truly address their needs.

To effectively implement the first stage of the Youth Policy Lab (YPL) cycle, the following structured approach may be in place.

As a kick-off, a working group can be established, which may consist of youth leaders, policymakers, and relevant stakeholders, such as local NGOs, educators, and community leaders. The working group will play a key role in gathering initial input on potential policy challenge/s and selecting the most pressing issues to address. Their collaboration ensures that the process is inclusive and that all relevant perspectives are considered in the challenge selection.

Once the working group is formed, the next step is to conduct stakeholder consultations. This may involve organising focus group discussions, surveys, and community consultations with youth representatives, youth organisations, and local community leaders. The goal is to understand the challenges youth are facing, ensuring that the issues identified are directly relevant to the target group and are relevant and timely. A combination of qualitative and quantitative methods may be used to gather diverse perspectives and gain a comprehensive understanding of the most urgent issues for youth.

After gathering insights from stakeholders, it is important to analyse policy gaps. This step involves reviewing existing policies, programmes, and initiatives targeted at youth. By identifying gaps and areas where current efforts are insufficient, it can be pinpointed where the greatest impact can be made and where resources can be effectively leveraged. This analysis will help to focus the policy challenge on areas where it can make the most difference.

With the necessary information gathered, the policy challenge can be drafted. This policy challenge should clearly define the issue, its significance for youth, and why it requires attention. The draft challenge should be refined through ongoing discussions with the working group to ensure that it is relevant, actionable, and aligned with the resources available. The goal is to create a policy challenge that can generate multiple solutions and be implemented within the scope of local governance structures.

After drafting the challenge, it should be reviewed and finalised. This process involves reviewing the draft with the target youth group, local stakeholders, and policymakers to refine its language, scope, and objectives. Final approval from both youth representatives and policymakers is necessary to ensure that all parties are committed to addressing the challenge, ensuring that the policy challenge has broad support from those who will be involved in implementing the solutions.

In selecting a policy challenge, certain criteria should be met.

- The challenge should be broad enough to allow for the formulation of different solutions that address various aspects of the issue. For example, if the challenge is focused on youth unemployment, solutions could involve skill development, mentorship programmes, or collaborations with the private sector.
- At the same time, the challenge must be specific enough to generate concrete and actionable solutions. For instance, rather than a broad challenge such as 'improving youth employment', a more specific challenge like 'enhancing job-readiness skills for youth in rural areas' will lead to more focused, achievable solutions.
- The challenge must also be relevant and timely, connected to ongoing reforms, the availability of dedicated funds, or emerging issues that are attracting public attention, such as mental health support for youth as part of a national initiative.

As the YPL cycle progresses, the policy challenge may sometimes undergo some refinement. This may ensure that the challenge remains relevant to the youth community and adapts to their changing needs. Throughout the cycle, close collaboration with youth participants will help to shape the solutions to be practical and grounded in their real-life experiences. By involving youth directly in both the identification and the refinement of the policy challenge, the Youth Policy Lab ensures that the solutions generated are rooted in their needs and aspirations. This approach fosters a sense of ownership among youth participants and increases the likelihood that the solutions will be successfully implemented and sustained in the long term.



## STAGE 2

### Identification of Stakeholders

Within the framework of the Youth Policy Lab (YPL), establishing a strong and diverse network of stakeholders is essential for the success of the initiative. Engaging the right stakeholders from the very beginning ensures that the process remains inclusive, relevant, and effective. Creating this support network involves identifying key participants, defining a comprehensive engagement strategy, ensuring that diverse groups are involved, and building public support for the goals of the Youth Policy Lab.



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*The first step in creating this network is to identify all the categories of beneficiaries, stakeholders, and public policy agencies that might be interested in or impacted by the chosen policy challenge. Stakeholders include youth beneficiaries directly affected by the challenge, youth organisations that represent or work with young people, community leaders who can mobilise local support, educational institutions involved in addressing youth-related issues, and local government agencies responsible for implementing youth policies.*

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Additionally, national or regional policy-making bodies, private sector partners such as employers and businesses, NGOs, and international organisations with an interest in policy challenges should also be identified. This broad range of stakeholders ensures that the network is comprehensive and represents all the groups that can contribute to and benefit from the YPL process.

Once stakeholders have been identified, the next step is to define an engagement strategy that brings them on board. This strategy should outline how to effectively engage each stakeholder group, considering their level of interest, influence, and power in the policy-making process. The strategy must also address potential conflicts that may arise, especially when stakeholders hold differing views on how the policy challenges should be addressed. Conflicts should be acknowledged early, with mechanisms for open discussion and conflict resolution built into the process. An effective engagement strategy should focus on inclusivity, ensuring that not only official representatives but also those often excluded from policy-making processes, such as marginalised youth and grassroots organisations, are brought into the conversation. Clear communication channels must be established, whether through regular meetings, digital platforms, or other methods, to keep all stakeholders informed and actively involved throughout the process.

It is also crucial to involve stakeholders in understanding the concept of the Youth Policy Lab and to secure their support. Stakeholders should recognise that the YPL is not just about engaging formal representatives of organisations but also about bringing in those typically excluded from policy-making. The voices of youth who have been excluded from previous discussions are particularly important, as their experiences are essential to creating policies that reflect the needs of the broader youth community. Stakeholders should be asked to support the identification of potential participants for the YPL, ensuring a diverse and inclusive group of participants.

This group should not only include representatives from established youth organisations but also young people from underserved areas, marginalised communities, or those facing challenges such as unemployment, NEET, or mental health issues. The gender balance of the participants should be respected as well. The YPL must be a platform where diverse voices can be heard, and the solutions generated grounded in the real-life experiences of the youth involved.

Additionally, stakeholders should be encouraged to contribute to raising public awareness of the Youth Policy Lab and its innovative potential. The success of the YPL depends not only on the active participation of stakeholders, but also on creating visibility and getting support within the broader community. Stakeholders can play a key role in raising awareness by leveraging their networks, both online and offline, to spread information about the YPL. This can be done through social media campaigns, local events, or advocacy initiatives that emphasise the innovative nature of the YPL and its capacity to deliver youth-driven solutions to policy challenges. Publicising the YPL through stakeholders' networks will help to attract further support and participation from a wider audience.

In addition to raising awareness, stakeholders can help showcase the innovation of the YPL. Emphasising that the YPL allows youth to directly participate in solving their problems can create a powerful narrative that resonates with both the public and policymakers. The concept of young people actively contributing to policy design not only empowers youth but also encourages the broader public to appreciate the value of this approach. To further increase public engagement, stakeholders can collaborate with the YPL team to create media content such as articles, interviews, and short videos that can be shared across various online platforms. These materials can highlight the YPL's objectives, the process, and the potential impact of the solutions that emerge from the initiative.

It is of paramount importance to mention that a risk for any Youth Policy Lab is that it may be perceived as irrelevant or ignored by decision-makers. If the YPL fails to gain attention from key policymakers, it risks being marginalised and unable to influence actual policy decisions. To mitigate this risk, it is essential to build up a robust support network of influential stakeholders. Ensuring the YPL is visible to the community and recognised by public opinion can significantly increase its chances of success.

On the other hand, it is important to emphasise the 'Chatham House Rule' (Chatham House. (n.d.). The Chatham House Rule. Retrieved from <https://www.chathamhouse.org>), which allows participants to speak freely without attribution outside the Youth Policy Lab. This confidentiality rule prevents the unintended polarisation of positions and ensures that discussions remain constructive and focused on the policy challenge at hand without fear of external repercussions. Enforcing this rule is essential to creating a safe space for open dialogue and fostering trust among participants.

One of the core values of the Youth Policy Lab is its ability to reduce the distance between participants and policymakers. This approach democratises the policy process, enabling more targeted, problem-specific participation. When selecting participants for the Youth Policy Lab, it is therefore important to maintain a balance between the three key categories:

- **beneficiaries**
- **decision-makers**
- **other stakeholders**

A common starting point is an equal distribution, with one-third from each group, though this can be adjusted depending on the nature of the policy challenge. Additionally, the balance between experienced experts and grassroots participants is critical. While experts may provide valuable input, the majority of participants should ideally be those with less experience in formal policy-making processes. This ensures that the perspectives of those most affected by the issue are heard and considered.

The recruitment process for Youth Policy Lab participants is delicate. It is important to choose individuals who understand the purpose of the YPL and are motivated to contribute meaningfully to the process. A public call for interest (call for applications) can help to ensure that the Lab includes diverse and genuinely motivated participants. Furthermore, the process of recruitment should prioritise inclusivity, ensuring that voices from marginalised or underserved communities are not overlooked.

Youth Policy Labs should not serve as spaces to reproduce existing conflicts or represent official positions. Instead, they should function as safe spaces where participants can explore a range of potential solutions without fear of judgment. All participants should have equal opportunities to contribute, and the focus should remain on co-creating viable, effective solutions. This sense of equality and respect is fundamental to fostering collaboration and ensuring that all voices are valued in the decision-making process.

### Stakeholder Prioritisation Matrix

This exercise may assist in the process of prioritising which stakeholders need to be engaged, based on their interest and level of influence on the policy challenge.

Instructions related to the exercise:

- Draw a large grid with two axes:
  - Y-axis:** Level of influence (low to high)
  - X-axis:** Level of interest (low to high)
- Brainstorm a list of stakeholders and categorise them on the grid.
- Discuss the positioning of each stakeholder and identify:
  - High Influence, High Interest: these stakeholders should be engaged closely and regularly.
  - High Influence, Low Interest: work on increasing their interest and involvement.
  - Low Influence, High Interest: ensure their voices are heard, though they may not have the power to directly shape decisions.
  - Low Influence, Low Interest: these stakeholders can be monitored but may not need direct engagement unless relevant.

This exercise may assist in the process of identifying which stakeholders should be prioritised for engagement and which ones may need further attention to increase their involvement.

*Bryson, J. M. (2004). What to do when stakeholders matter: Stakeholder identification and analysis techniques. Public Management Review, 6(1), 21-53.*



## STAGE 3.

### Recruitment of Youth Policy Lab Facilitators and Capacity Building

In this stage of the Youth Policy Lab (YPL), the focus shifts to the recruitment of qualified facilitators and to building their capacity to facilitate the YPL process effectively. Facilitators play a critical role in ensuring that the Lab runs smoothly, that discussions are productive, and that the diverse voices of participants are heard and respected. Capacity building for facilitators ensures that they are equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge, and tools to guide the participants through the stages of the YPL, from ideation to the formulation of actionable policy recommendations.

The recruitment of the right facilitators is one of the most important tasks in the YPL process. Facilitators are responsible for managing the dynamics of the Lab, keeping discussions focused, and ensuring that all participants, including those who are not usually part of the policy-making process, feel comfortable and engaged.



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*The recruitment process should focus on selecting individuals who possess a range of qualities. Facilitators should have prior experience in leading discussions, workshops, or group activities, especially with diverse groups of participants. Experience in working with youth or in policy-related environments is highly valuable.*

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Furthermore, facilitators need to possess strong communication skills to clearly convey ideas, listen actively to participants, and manage group dynamics. They should be able to navigate conflicts and disagreements constructively. Cultural sensitivity and inclusivity are also essential qualities, as facilitators must foster an environment where everyone feels safe to contribute, regardless of their background or expertise.

Additionally, facilitators must be neutral during discussions, allowing all perspectives to be heard and ensuring that no participant's views are unduly favoured or ignored. It is equally important for facilitators to be committed to the goals of the Youth Policy Lab, which focuses on youth-driven policy design and fostering an open, collaborative environment.

Once facilitators are selected, it is essential to provide them with capacity-building opportunities to ensure that they are fully prepared to facilitate the YPL process. Capacity building involves providing training and support to enhance their skills and knowledge, particularly in the context of facilitating youth-driven policy design. Facilitators must first have a deep understanding of the YPL framework, including its stages, objectives, and methodology. This knowledge is crucial for guiding participants through the process and ensuring that the Lab operates according to the established goals.

In addition to understanding the YPL process, facilitators should be trained in various facilitation techniques to encourage participation, active listening, and constructive dialogue. They must learn how to manage group dynamics, use ice-breakers and energisers, and handle challenging situations or conflicts. Capacity building should also include training on inclusive practices, ensuring that facilitators can create an environment where every participant feels valued and has the opportunity to contribute. Facilitators should be equipped with tools to support marginalised voices, encourage diverse perspectives, and manage power imbalances in discussions.

Conflict-positive transformation and settlement is another crucial area of focus during capacity building. Facilitators should be trained to address disagreements or tensions that may arise during the Youth Policy Lab process. Since the YPL aims to bring together a variety of stakeholders - including youth, policymakers, and experts - facilitators must be prepared to mediate conflicts and ensure that discussions remain productive and focused on the policy challenge.

Training in evaluation and feedback is equally important for facilitators. They must be able to collect and incorporate feedback from participants, ensuring that the process remains flexible and responsive to the needs of the group. Facilitators should also be encouraged to gather feedback on their performance as well as the overall Lab process to identify areas for improvement.

Finally, facilitators should be trained to build relationships and trust with participants. This is essential for creating an environment where participants feel comfortable sharing their ideas and opinions. Trust and rapport are particularly important in a Youth Policy Lab, where participants may come from diverse backgrounds and have varying levels of experience in policy-making. Facilitators must understand how to foster this sense of trust and create a space where every voice can be heard. Well-trained, committed facilitators are crucial for creating a positive, productive environment where participants can collaborate effectively and co-create meaningful policy recommendations.





## STAGE 4.

# Youth Policy Lab Design Framework

The **Youth Policy Lab Design Framework** is a structured approach that guides the co-creation of innovative, youth-driven policy solutions through a collaborative and participatory process. Drawing on the principles of the 'Double Diamond Model' (Design Council, 2005) the framework divides the policy design process into four key stages:

### DISCOVER

The goal of this phase is to gather a wide array of insights that give a detailed understanding of the policy problem. The diverse input helps to shape the subsequent stages by ensuring that the policy challenge is well-rounded and inclusive.

### DEFINE

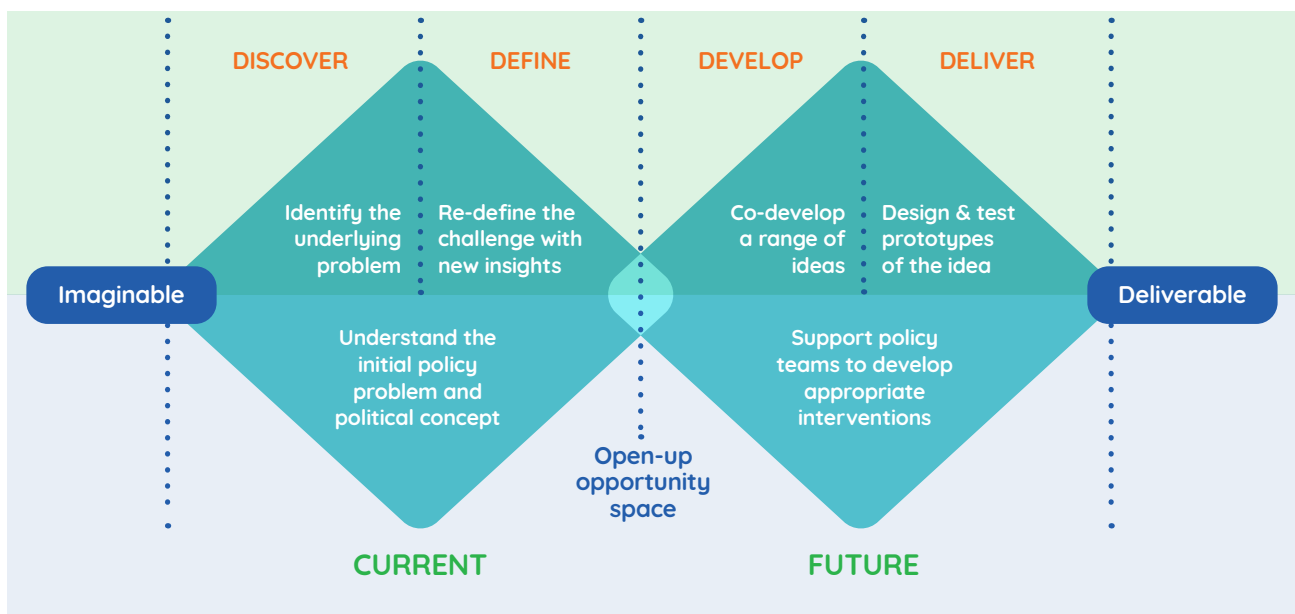
By the end of this phase, the policy challenge is clearly defined, with a specific problem statement that guides the next steps. The challenge should now be well understood by all participants, with a clear focus on what needs to be changed and why.

### DEVELOP

The focus of this phase is to produce a wide variety of solutions that address different aspects of the policy challenge. The ideas are not yet perfect but are raw concepts that can be tested and refined in the next stage.

### DELIVER

This phase results in final recommendations that are grounded in real-world testing. Micro experimentations (prototypes) allow for quick feedback and adjustment before moving forward. The solutions are now validated and ready to be scaled or fully implemented. This phase ensures that the ideas proposed throughout the Youth Policy Lab are not only visionary but also practical and adaptable to the local context.



Each stage plays a crucial role in transforming an initial policy challenge into actionable, tested solutions. In the **Discover** phase, the focus is on understanding the problem by gathering insights from diverse stakeholders. The **Define** phase refines the challenge, ensuring that all perspectives are considered in framing the policy issue. During the **Develop** phase, participants collaboratively generate and prototype potential solutions, which are then tested and refined in the **Deliver** phase. This framework emphasises inclusivity, ensuring that the voices of marginalised youth and other stakeholders are heard, while also fostering innovation through a structured, iterative approach. The Youth Policy Lab Design Framework ultimately provides a roadmap for creating policies that are not only relevant but also effective in addressing the needs and aspirations of youth.

## 1. DISCOVER

In the Discover phase, the objective is to understand the problem in depth. This stage involves gathering insights from diverse stakeholders, including youth, community leaders, policymakers, and experts. The goal is to identify the root causes of the policy issue, its broader context, and the specific needs and challenges faced by the youth. This stage emphasises inclusivity by ensuring that marginalised voices are included, setting the foundation for a comprehensive understanding of the issue at hand.

## 2. DEFINE

The Define phase builds on the insights gathered in the Discover phase. Here, the focus shifts to refining the challenge, ensuring that all perspectives are considered. This stage involves framing the problem in a way that clearly articulates the issue and the specific goals to be achieved. By synthesising the information gathered, participants are able to arrive at a precise and actionable policy challenge that sets the direction for solution development.

## 3. DEVELOP

In the Develop phase, participants collaboratively generate ideas and prototype potential solutions. This phase is characterised by creativity and innovation, where a wide range of ideas is explored without prematurely dismissing any possibilities. The co-creation process ensures that all voices, especially from youth, are involved in shaping the solutions. This stage may involve brainstorming sessions, group activities, and prototyping to bring abstract ideas into tangible forms.

## 4. DELIVER

The final phase, Deliver, focuses on testing and refining the solutions. The ideas developed in the Develop phase are tested in real-world settings through small-scale micro-experiments or pilot projects. This allows for the identification of challenges or barriers to implementation and provides an opportunity for adjustments based on feedback and outcomes. The goal of the Deliver phase is to ensure that the final policy recommendations are feasible, impactful, and sustainable.

*Design Council. (2005). The Double Diamond: A universally accepted depiction of the design process. Design Council. [www.designcouncil.org.uk](http://www.designcouncil.org.uk)*



## STAGE 5.

### Organisational Planning for Youth Policy Lab Hosts

The **Organisational Planning** phase plays an important role in the success of any Youth Policy Lab (YPL). It ensures that local government hosts are fully prepared for a successful and collaborative policy design process. This phase involves strategic planning, clear role definition, and setting the groundwork for a participatory, transparent, and inclusive approach that allows for the development of effective, youth-driven policy solutions.

Effective organisational planning requires a coordinated effort between the host organisation and all the participants, particularly when engaging youth, civil society, policymakers, and grassroots stakeholders. This preparatory phase is essential in aligning expectations, establishing clear objectives, and ensuring that the necessary resources and structures are in place for a productive Youth Policy Lab. By focusing on preparation, local government hosts stand to gain both immediate and long-term benefits from the Youth Policy Lab, making it a powerful tool for creating policies that are both innovative and inclusive.

#### Benefits for Local Government hosts

For local governments, hosting a YPL offers numerous advantages. It provides an opportunity to directly engage with youth and other community stakeholders in the policymaking process, offering insights into the real needs and challenges faced by the population. By including youth and marginalised groups in the development of policy solutions, local governments can design more relevant, inclusive, and effective policies that address pressing issues such as education, employment, social inclusion, mental health, etc. Through the co-creation process, local governments can ensure that the policies they implement are truly reflective of the community's aspirations and needs.

Additionally, hosting a YPL allows local governments to strengthen relationships with key stakeholders, such as youth organisations, NGOs, civil society groups, and academic institutions, fostering collaboration and trust between policymakers and the community. Engaging these stakeholders in meaningful dialogue creates a shared sense of ownership over the policy outcomes, increasing the likelihood of successful implementation and sustainability. It also builds a network of partners who can collaborate on future initiatives and support the long-term goals of the local government.

Moreover, by participating in the YPL process, local government staff gain valuable skills in collaborative problem-solving, co-creation, and active listening, which are essential in today's rapidly changing policy landscape. This capacity building enhances the overall effectiveness of the local government, making it more adaptable, responsive, and innovative in its policymaking.

## Preparation for the Host Organisation

Preparation for the host begins with an understanding of the Youth Policy Lab process, its goals, and the methodology behind it. For the process to be effective, the host must establish clear objectives and ensure that all stakeholders, from policymakers to youth participants, understand their roles and responsibilities in the process.

The host must also ensure that adequate resources are allocated for the event, including logistical support, and any necessary tools or materials. These resources are critical for ensuring that the YPL is well-organised and can function smoothly throughout its stages. Coordination between facilitators, experts, youth representatives, and other stakeholders is key to maintaining the flow and ensuring that everyone is engaged and contributing meaningfully.

In addition, the host organisation must align the internal team with the overarching goals of the YPL. This involves training facilitators, ensuring that they are equipped with the necessary skills to manage group dynamics, and creating a positive and inclusive environment for all participants. The host also has the responsibility of managing relationships with external partners, such as youth organisations, NGOs, and other experts, to ensure that they are aligned with the goals of the Lab and ready to contribute effectively.

In a YPL focused on improving youth employment in a local municipality, the host organisation - in this case it could be the local council - would begin by clearly defining its goals, such as creating new pathways for youth employment and enhancing skills training. The host would then organise preparatory workshops for both government representatives and youth groups to ensure they understand the collaborative nature of the Lab (PLO, see below), setting expectations for engagement and participation. This process helps to avoid any confusion about roles and ensures that all parties are aligned toward the common objective of co-creating solutions that benefit the community.





## STAGE 6

### PL0 - Preparation Stage

The **Preparation Stage (PL0)** is an essential and often underestimated phase in the Youth Policy Lab process. This stage sets the tone for the entire co-creation journey, ensuring that all participants, whether they are policymakers, youth beneficiaries, grassroots stakeholders, or experts, are adequately prepared to engage in productive, solution-oriented dialogue. The success of the Youth Policy Lab relies on creating an inclusive environment where diverse perspectives are valued, and participants understand their roles within the process. This preparatory stage involves not only preparing the less experienced participants but also setting expectations for more experienced stakeholders, ensuring that everyone approaches the YPL with a mindset of collaboration, listening, and co-creation.

#### Preparation of youth participants

The Preparation Stage (PL0) for youth participants is set to ensure that young people are effectively integrated into the Youth Policy Lab process. This preparatory phase sets the tone for how youth engage in the policy creation process and prepares them to be active contributors, rather than passive recipients. The focus of this stage is to equip young people with the knowledge, tools, and mindset necessary to engage in constructive and solution-oriented dialogue, fostering an atmosphere of co-creation and collaboration.

The PL0 stage for youth should include a combination of education, capacity-building, and expectation-setting activities that will ensure their effective participation. These activities will not only help young participants understand the YPL and its goals but will also give them the tools to navigate potential power dynamics, express their opinions effectively, and develop innovative, actionable solutions.

##### ➤ Introduction to the Youth Policy Lab and the co-creation process

The first step in preparing youth participants is providing an overview of the YPL process. This stage focuses on introducing the structure of the Lab, its collaborative nature, and its goal of creating policies that are both relevant and reflective of youth needs. Youth should be made aware that the Lab is a safe space for open discussion where their voices matter and where they can actively contribute to shaping policy solutions. The facilitators should also explain how the co-creation process works, emphasising that the objective is not just to discuss problems but to develop practical solutions together. This can be done through an interactive session, where youth are introduced to the entire Youth Policy Lab process.

##### ➤ Understanding policy challenges and their role

Youth participants need to understand the policy challenges they will be working on. This step involves providing background information on the specific issues being addressed (e.g. youth unemployment, education access, climate change) and engaging participants in contextualising these challenges. Youth should explore the root causes of the problem and understand the relevance of their role in shaping solutions. Facilitators should encourage young people to reflect on their own experiences and how these challenges have affected their lives. This reflection allows them to personalise the policy issue and see themselves as active agents of change, rather than passive recipients of policies made by others.

To ensure the success of the Youth Policy Lab, it is essential to establish clear expectations for youth participants. This includes explaining the goal of the Lab, what is expected of young participants during the process, and how they will be working alongside other stakeholders (policymakers, experts, etc.). Facilitators should explain the importance of collaboration and how every voice counts, while emphasising that the focus will be on problem-solving and actionable solutions. Youth participants should also be encouraged to think about their role in the broader policy ecosystem and how their involvement can lead to tangible outcomes.

### ➤ **Building confidence in communication and participation**

A key aspect of the preparation process is to build confidence in young participants so they can speak up and express their views openly. The objective of the YPL is to create an environment where youth feel empowered to share ideas, challenge assumptions, and propose solutions. This stage may include activities such as public speaking workshops, role-playing exercises, or group discussions, all designed to increase comfort levels in speaking and engaging in dialogue. Young people will also be encouraged to practice active listening, as it is equally important to hear and consider other participants' viewpoints during the co-creation process.

## **Preparation of less experienced participants**

The less experienced participants in a Youth Policy Lab often include final beneficiaries, front-line civil servants, and grassroots stakeholders who are intimately familiar with the policy challenge at hand but have rarely been involved in decision-making processes. These participants may be more likely to adopt an assertive attitude, seeking to voice complaints or demands without focusing on potential solutions. While these voices are essential to understanding the real challenges, the success of the Youth Policy Lab depends on engaging these participants in constructive dialogue rather than defensive discussions. To address this, the **PLO** should focus on helping these participants to understand that the purpose of the Youth Policy Lab is not just to express concerns, but actively to contribute to the development of innovative policy solutions. For example, in a YPL aimed at addressing youth unemployment, grassroots stakeholders may initially express frustration over the lack of job opportunities. The preparatory session would guide them to discuss specific policy recommendations or skills development strategies that could be implemented to tackle the issue. Through facilitated group exercises, they would be encouraged to focus on tangible, actionable ideas that could then be refined throughout the Lab.

## **Preparation of experienced stakeholders: policymakers, experts, and public administration**

While preparing less experienced participants is crucial, the **PLO** should also be directed at more experienced stakeholders, that is to say policymakers, public administration managers, experts, and other official participants. These individuals are often accustomed to asserting their positions and making decisions in formal settings. They may not have any previous experience in collaborating with various stakeholders, including young people. However, the success of a Youth Policy Lab depends on shifting the mindset of these stakeholders to one of active listening, co-creation, and open-mindedness. For this very reason, the preparation process focuses on ensuring that they adopt a more collaborative and inclusive approach, and they are fully aware of the main objective and the idea behind the YPL. These participants often come with established positions and professional expertise, but in the context of the YPL, their role shifts from presenting solutions to listening and working together with others, getting the best possible solutions for the experimentation.



## STAGE 7

### PL1- Stimulating Expression, Dialogue, and Innovative Proposals

The PL1 is the first meeting in the Youth Policy Lab, and is a foundational and pivotal stage in the co-creation process. This phase serves as the inclusive phase, focused on gathering a wide array of perspectives, concerns, and ideas from all participants. The aim is not to jump straight into solutions but to create a space where everyone feels encouraged to express their views, share their experiences, and contribute ideas without the pressure of finding quick solutions. This phase sets the tone for the entire Youth Policy Lab and ensures that the solutions ultimately developed are both inclusive and reflective of the diverse needs and concerns of the community.

At the core of this first workshop is the principle of co-creation, meaning that everyone, regardless of experience or position, has an equal role in shaping the process and outcomes. Facilitators should not rush the process to arrive at answers but should focus on encouraging participation, fostering dialogue, and gathering a wide range of ideas. The importance of PL1 is very high, as without proper time and attention to divergent thinking, the rest of the Youth Policy Lab process may lose its value, and the solutions may fail to be truly representative or innovative.

#### KEY OBJECTIVES OF THE PL1

##### Encouraging open expression

The first and foremost objective of this stage is to create a safe and open environment where participants, especially the young, feel comfortable sharing their ideas, concerns, and experiences. Given that many youth participants may not have had the opportunity to engage in policymaking processes previously, it is vital that the facilitators work to build trust and ensure that everyone's voice is heard. This can be done through ice-breakers and group exercises that allow participants to warm up to the process, reducing any anxiety or reluctance to speak.

Facilitators should encourage youth to reflect on their personal experiences and relate them to the policy challenge at hand. Allowing young people to connect the policy issue to their own lives, helps them to see the relevance of the work being done and reinforces the idea that their participation matters. In this regard, a couple of key activities can be placed here:

**Ice-breaking exercises to foster familiarity and trust among participants.**

**Brainstorming sessions where everyone is invited to contribute ideas without judgment.**

**Open discussions allowing youth and other stakeholders to express concerns freely, ensuring a non-hierarchical environment where no voice dominates.**

## Ice-breaking exercises for the PL1

### 1. Two Truths and a Lie

*Objective:* This activity is a fun and engaging way to help participants learn more about each other and create a relaxed atmosphere.

*Instructions:*

Ask each participant to come up with two truths and one lie about themselves.

They will take turns sharing the three statements with the group.

The group will then guess which one is the lie.

*Outcome:* This exercise helps participants relax, laugh, and build connections, while also getting to know one another better.

### 2. Human Bingo

*Objective:* This is a great exercise to help participants interact with as many people as possible and find commonalities.

*Instructions:*

Prepare bingo cards with various statements such as “Has a BA degree”, “Has visited more than 3 countries abroad”, “Speaks 3 foreign languages”, “Has a driving licence” or “Has volunteered with a youth organisation.”

Participants walk around and try to find others in the group who match the statements. When they find someone, they have that person sign the corresponding square.

The first person to complete a row of signatures wins.

*Outcome:* Encourages participants to mingle, get to know each other quickly, and identify shared interests and experiences.

### 3. The Name Game

*Objective:* This exercise helps participants remember each other’s names and relax before diving into discussions.

*Instructions:*

Have participants form a circle.

Each participant says their name and a word that starts with the same letter (e.g., “Emma the Enthusiast” or “Tina the Teacher”).

The next person repeats the previous names and adds their own. The game continues until everyone has shared their name and word.

This helps participants engage with each other and fosters a fun and cooperative environment.

*Outcome:* This builds rapport and helps everyone to feel more comfortable.

## Brainstorming session for PL1

### 1. Mind Mapping

*Objective:* Mind mapping allows participants to visually connect ideas and concepts, helping to create a dynamic and collaborative brainstorming environment.

*Instructions:*

Write the central theme or policy challenge on a large sheet of paper or whiteboard.

Ask participants to share any ideas, words, or thoughts they associate with the central theme.

As each idea is shared, it is written down and connected to the central theme, creating a web of related concepts.

*Outcome:* This visual representation of ideas helps participants to see how thoughts are interconnected, encourages further exploration, and can spark new, creative ideas.

### 2. Silent Brainstorming

*Objective:* This activity ensures that all participants have an equal opportunity to contribute ideas, especially important for those who might feel less confident speaking up in a group.

*Instructions:*

Provide each participant with a piece of paper or a digital tool for brainstorming (e.g. Mentimeter, Miro).

Ask them to spend 5-10 minutes writing down as many ideas as they can related to the policy challenge.

After the silent brainstorming session, participants share their ideas with the group.

*Outcome:* This method allows all voices to be heard, and encourages independent thinking while ensuring that everyone contributes equally.

### 3. Group Brainstorming with Post-It Notes

*Objective:* To encourage the generation of a broad set of ideas and to organise them in a collaborative, structured manner.

*Instructions:*

Provide each participant with several post-it notes and ask them to write down one idea per note related to the policy challenge.

After 10-15 minutes, participants should place their post-it notes on a wall or large surface.

The participants are divided into groups (in each group you have a policy maker, a young person and another stakeholder), and as a group, participants discuss and organise the notes into themes or categories, identifying patterns or common ideas.

*Outcome:* This activity not only generates a wide range of ideas but also encourages participants to think critically and collaboratively organise thoughts.

## Exploring diverse perspectives

Within the framework of the PL1, the facilitators must create an opportunity to explore a broad range of ideas. Youth, policymakers, civil society groups, and other stakeholders will bring diverse experiences and viewpoints to the table. This diversity of perspectives is invaluable in developing solutions that are not only inclusive but also creative and innovative. By facilitating small group discussions, participants can dive deeper into specific aspects of the policy challenge, share personal stories, and highlight key areas that they believe should be addressed. These discussions help identify the root causes of the policy issue and ensure that everyone's perspectives are heard, including those that might otherwise be marginalised. Facilitators must emphasise that this stage is not about consensus-building. Instead, it's about creating a space where ideas can emerge freely, and participants can challenge assumptions, propose new approaches, and think outside the box. A couple of key activities can be placed here, namely:

**Mapping exercises where participants visually explore different aspects of the policy issue.**

**Small group discussions focused on specific sub-topics related to the policy challenge.**

**Storytelling sessions where participants share personal experiences related to the issue at hand.**

### 1. Mapping Exercise: Exploring Perspectives

*Objective:* To visually explore the different aspects of the policy issue and understand the diverse experiences and viewpoints.

*Instructions:*

Create a large visual map on a whiteboard, flip chart, or using digital tools (e.g. Miro or Jam board).

Place the policy challenge at the centre of the map.

Ask participants to add their ideas, concerns, or experiences related to the challenge by drawing connections or adding new elements around the map.

Encourage them to identify different factors, actors, or systems that influence the policy challenge.

The facilitator guides the group to categorise the different perspectives and discuss how they are interconnected.

This can be expanded with sub-maps that explore specific issues in more detail, such as economic factors, social barriers, or youth engagement.

*Outcome:* Participants can visualise how diverse perspectives contribute to the policy challenge, identifying key factors that need to be addressed in developing solutions.

## **2. Small Group Discussions: Focused Dialogue on Specific Topics**

*Objective:* To allow deeper exploration of specific sub-topics within the policy challenge and provide space for different voices to be heard.

*Instructions:*

Break the participants into small groups of 4-5 people, ensuring diversity within each group (e.g., youth, policymakers, civil society).

Assign each group a specific sub-topic related to the main policy issue. For example, if the policy challenge is youth unemployment, sub-topics could include education, skills development, or job access.

Encourage each group to discuss their sub-topic, focusing on personal experiences, ideas, and solutions.

After 15-20 minutes, each group shares their insights with the whole room.

*Outcome:* This activity allows for more detailed, focused conversation, and helps bring to the surface specific aspects of the issue that may not have been considered in broader discussions.

## **3. Brainstorming Session: Generating Innovative Solutions**

*Objective:* To stimulate creativity and encourage participants to propose diverse, out-of-the-box solutions to the policy challenge.

*Instructions:*

Start with a brief warm-up exercise to get everyone thinking creatively.

Once everyone is in a creative mindset, invite participants to brainstorm potential solutions to the policy challenge.

Ensure that the atmosphere is non-judgmental. Encourage participants to think beyond the usual constraints and consider innovative approaches that may not have been explored before.

Use a structured method, where participants write down their ideas on paper or digital platforms and then share them with the group.

*Outcome:* This session generates a wide variety of ideas, helping participants to think beyond traditional solutions and approach the challenge from new perspectives.

## **Generating a long list of proposals**

One of the core outcomes of the first meeting is the generation of a diverse set of ideas and proposals. This is a critical step in the Youth Policy Lab process, as it sets the foundation for all subsequent stages. The goal is to create a long list of potential solutions, which will be refined and prioritised in later stages of the Lab. At this point, the emphasis should be on quantity rather than quality. Facilitators should encourage participants to share as many ideas as possible without immediately worrying about feasibility or practicality. The proposals generated in this stage can range from very concrete suggestions (e.g. creating mentorship programmes for youth employment), to more visionary ideas (e.g. rethinking the entire education system, proposing a career guidance system, etc.). It is important that every idea is considered valuable, regardless of how practical or idealistic it might seem. A broad list of proposals will provide the raw material for further development, discussion, and refinement. The key activities may be as follows:

**Idea generation sessions where the stakeholders and young people are encouraged to think broadly and propose as many ideas as possible.**

**Voting or prioritisation activities to help participants begin identifying which proposals resonate most, though the focus should remain on generating ideas.**

**Debriefing sessions where participants can reflect on the proposals and share additional thoughts or refine their contributions.**

## **Fostering co-creation**

The PL1 is a vital step in establishing the co-creation model for the rest of the Youth Policy Lab. Youth must understand that their role is not just to provide feedback but to actively contribute to shaping the solutions. This is about establishing youth as equal partners in the policymaking process, ensuring that they have a real impact on the outcomes. Facilitators should frame the workshop as a collaborative space where all ideas are valued and where participants from different backgrounds can bring their experiences together to develop more comprehensive and multifaceted solutions. This phase is about building relationships and creating a sense of shared ownership over the policy solutions that will be developed. Facilitators should encourage participants to work together, build on each other's ideas, and consider different viewpoints to co-create innovative solutions. The participation process should be dynamic, with youth not only contributing ideas but also challenging assumptions and offering critiques of proposed solutions. This can be done through:

**Facilitated group work where participants collaborate on developing and refining proposals.**

**Collaborative sketching or prototyping sessions to visualise ideas and solutions.**

**Group feedback sessions to evaluate ideas and explore alternative solutions.**



### **World Café: Collaborative Dialogue for Co-Creation**

*Objective:* The World Café is a highly effective method to facilitate collaborative conversations, allowing participants to discuss different aspects of the policy challenge and co-create solutions together in a dynamic and engaging way.

*Instructions:*

Set up several small tables with a specific topic related to the policy challenge at each table (e.g. youth employment, education, career guidance, etc.).

Participants rotate between tables, spending about 15-20 minutes discussing each topic, sharing their thoughts, ideas, and experiences.

At each table, a host (in one group the host can be a policy maker, in the second one a young person, in the third one a civil society representative, etc.) summarises the main points and insights from the previous group's discussion and encourages the new group to build on those ideas.

After several rounds of discussion, each table presents its key findings and proposed solutions to the larger group.

The facilitator can help to connect the ideas and insights from each table.

*Outcome:* This exercise enables active participation and helps to generate a wide variety of ideas, while fostering a sense of collective ownership over the solutions. The rotation of groups ensures diverse perspectives are considered and solutions are refined as participants learn from each other.

The success of the first meeting depends largely on the effectiveness of the facilitators. Facilitators play a crucial role in guiding the process, ensuring that all voices are heard, and managing the group dynamics. They must encourage active participation, foster a safe environment, and ensure that no one voice dominates the conversation. Their role is to mediate discussions, ensuring that the conversation remains constructive, focused, and inclusive.

### **Contextualising proposals**

The final stage of the first workshop is to revisit and contextualise the generated proposals. Participants, particularly youth and key stakeholders, will consider how these ideas fit within the realities of their community or region. Contextualisation involves understanding the local conditions (social, economic, political, and cultural) that might affect the implementation of these proposals. It is a process of ensuring that ideas are not just theoretical, but are aligned with the community's actual needs and with the available resources.

During this process, participants should ask:

**What challenges might arise when trying to implement this proposal in our community?**

**Which resources (financial, technical, human) will be required for implementation?**

**Who are the key stakeholders who need to be involved in making this idea feasible?**

This reflection ensures that the ideas are not only idealistic but also actionable, taking into account the practical realities of the environment in which they will be executed.

## Collecting first reactions and feedback

Once the proposals are contextualised, the next step is to gather feedback from a wide range of participants, including local stakeholders, experts, and the broader community. This feedback will provide valuable insights into the feasibility and potential impact of each proposal. This exercise is the homework of the YPL participants, the results of which are presented during the PL2 workshop. By reaching out to key local stakeholders, such as community leaders, local businesses, youth organisations, and experts in relevant fields, participants can get a better understanding of how the proposals might be received and whether they align with local priorities.

During the homework, the participants should seek feedback on:

**Practicality: Is this proposal realistic? Can it be implemented with the available resources and infrastructure?**

**Perceived benefits and risks: What are the potential positive impacts, and what are the risks or challenges in implementing the proposal?**

**Barriers to implementation: Are there any political, social, or economic barriers that could hinder the success of the proposal?**

Feedback from the community, experts, and stakeholders is collected, which will guide the selection and refinement process within the framework of PL2.



## STAGE 8

### PL2 - Proposal Verification and Feasibility Assessment

In the first meeting, a diverse range of ideas and proposals has been generated, but these ideas now need to be tested, refined, and evaluated for feasibility, impact, and practicality. This stage allows participants to reflect on the proposals from the first meeting and to discuss the evaluation of those proposals within the real-world context of their local environments regarding opportunities and challenges for implementation. During this phase, the focus shifts from generating ideas to assessing their potential for tangible impact, and considering their feasibility from various perspectives. Before proceeding with micro-experimentation or generating recommendations in PL3, the feedback and reflections gathered from youth participants, stakeholders, and experts will be crucial in assessing which proposals are ready for further development and which require additional refinement.

The key objective of PL2 is to refine proposals based on the feedback collected. This refinement process involves adjusting or modifying aspects of the proposals to make them more feasible, relevant, and practical. Proposals that are overly complex, unrealistic, or fail to address local needs may need to be reworked or redefined. Refinement is an iterative process, where ideas are continuously improved through ongoing feedback and evaluation.

#### Key questions for refining the proposals include:

##### What adjustments can be made to enhance feasibility or address identified challenges (financial, technical, political)?

Proposals often encounter financial, technical, or political hurdles that must be addressed in order for them to succeed. Financial challenges, for example, could involve securing additional funding or adjusting the scope of the proposal to match available resources. Similarly, technical issues might require adapting the proposal to fit within the existing infrastructure, or exploring new partnerships for support. By focusing on these challenges and making the necessary adjustments, the proposal can more effectively be brought to life in future stages.

##### Are there additional partnerships or resources needed to bring the proposal to life?

In many cases, ideas cannot be implemented by a single organisation or stakeholder. This stage is an opportunity to identify potential collaborators who can provide the expertise, resources, or connections required to proceed with the proposal. Whether it might involve working with local businesses, educational institutions, or non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the ability to forge strategic partnerships is essential for ensuring that the proposal is feasible and has the necessary support to succeed. Collaborative partnerships can also increase the proposal's chances of being sustained over time, as it often requires a shared commitment from multiple stakeholders.

##### Should the scope of the proposal be narrowed or expanded to increase its effectiveness?

Sometimes, a proposal may be too broad or ambitious for its intended context, and narrowing the scope can increase its effectiveness by focusing on a specific aspect of the issue. Alternatively, broadening the scope might make the proposal more impactful by addressing a wider range of challenges. This requires careful consideration of the target audience, resources, and timelines to ensure that the proposal remains both practical and effective.



## STAGE 9

### Selecting and Designing Micro-Experimentation

The final stage of the PL2 is often the heart of the Youth Policy Lab, where decisions are made based on transparent and collaborative processes. During this stage, the emphasis is on co-creating actionable solutions, specifically by selecting and designing micro-experiments, which are small-scale tests that provide an opportunity to verify potential benefits, identify challenges, and refine proposals. The micro-experimentation concept is introduced in this stage to test certain proposals on a smaller scale before they are fully implemented. Micro-experiments should be selective and strategic, based on clearly agreed-upon criteria such as feasibility, potential impact, and relevance to the community, as well as on the evidence and feedback collected by the YPL participants throughout the previous stages of the cycle. Facilitators should guide participants in evaluating which proposals can be realistically tested with available resources, ensuring that the chosen micro-experiments are actionable, focused, and aligned with the objectives of the Youth Policy Lab.

Once the micro-experiments are selected, participants should collaboratively design the implementation plans. This includes defining success criteria, outlining data capture strategies, and identifying potential resources required for each experiment, in case of necessity make the action plan, set deadlines, people or organisations responsible, etc.

The design process may include, but is not limited to:

**Defining specific objectives for each micro-experiment, ensuring that these objectives align with the overarching goals of the Youth Policy Lab.**

**Planning the logistics of each micro-experiment, from identifying key stakeholders to determining financial, technical, and human resources needed for implementation.**

**Setting clear metrics for evaluating the success of the exact micro-experiment or micro-experiments.**

The meeting of this stage marks the transition from theoretical discussion to practical testing. It serves as a reality check, a way to verify the effectiveness of solutions in real-world contexts. More precisely, this allows stakeholders to test assumptions about the policy solutions, and identify potential difficulties or barriers to implementation, as well as to refine ideas based on real-time data and experiences from the experiment

### **World Café for Micro-Experimentation Design**

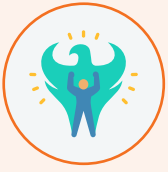
The World Café format may be used to have participants move between tables at which different aspects of the micro-experimentation plans are discussed. This format encourages collaborative idea-sharing and ensures that all perspectives are considered when designing the micro-experimentation plans.

Each table could focus on one aspect of the design, such as *objectives*, *resources*, *evaluation criteria*, or *potential challenges*. After each round, participants rotate to a new table, bringing their ideas and feedback from the previous table.

### **SWOT Analysis for Micro-Experiments**

SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) may also be organised for each micro-experiment. This exercise can help the participants identify potential risks, challenges, and opportunities associated with each proposal.





## STAGE 10

### Micro-Experimentation

Micro-experimentation (ME) is the next core component of the Youth Policy Lab methodology. It serves as a testing ground for innovative policy solutions and proposals that emerge from the YPL process. The idea behind micro-experimentation is to test small-scale, real-world applications of the proposed policy solutions, allowing participants to evaluate the effectiveness, feasibility, and impact of their ideas before recommending broader implementation. This testing phase provides valuable insights and data, helping to refine the proposals and assess whether they can be adapted or mainstreamed into larger policy frameworks.

### Structure and Organisation of Micro-Experimentation

Each selected micro-experimentation has a dedicated working group composed of Youth Policy Lab participants and possibly external stakeholders or experts. These working groups are responsible for implementing the micro-experimentation, coordinating its execution, and gathering the necessary data. While the core group of participants is drawn from the Youth Policy Lab, the working group can include other relevant actors, such as community organisations, local businesses, or service providers, who may bring additional assets to the success of the experimentation and can contribute resources, knowledge, or support. This ensures a collaborative approach to testing and increases the likelihood of successful implementation. These partnerships can also help to expand capacity and access additional resources that may not be available within the Lab itself.

A key element in micro-experimentation is the definition of success criteria and the development of assessment methods. These should be collaboratively defined by the working group to ensure alignment with the goals of the Youth Policy Lab and the real-world challenges being addressed. The success criteria will help the group understand what constitutes a successful outcome and what metrics will be used to assess the results.

The success criteria should be:

**Specific:** clearly articulated and measurable.

**Relevant:** tied directly to the policy issue being tested.

**Realistic:** achievable within the constraints of the micro-experimentation.

**Time-bound:** clear timelines for assessment.

The working group must also agree on the evaluation methods that will be used to measure the outcomes of the micro-experimentation. These methods may include both qualitative data (e.g. interviews or focus groups) and quantitative data (e.g. surveys or statistical analysis). The data captured will provide the evidence needed to demonstrate the effectiveness of the tested solutions and will inform the final recommendations for broader adoption.

In most cases, micro-experiments emerge directly from the discussions within the Youth Policy Lab. However, it is important to acknowledge that these experiments often do not come with dedicated budgets, as they are conceptualised and designed during the YPL process. Ideally, when a policy agency commits to participating in a Policy Lab, they should also be prepared to allocate some resources to test the solutions before they are finalised into recommendations. The lack of pre-allocated budgets for micro-experiments often becomes a challenge. In some cases, this can result in proposals that require significant funding being postponed or even discarded despite their potential value. While financial constraints are a valid concern, a thorough examination of available resources, partnerships, and alternative funding sources can provide creative solutions for moving forward. A collaborative approach with stakeholders might help in finding ways to fund these experiments through shared resources or alternative models of support.

Exploring the capacity of the participants themselves to support the micro-experimentation phase can uncover new opportunities for implementing solutions. In many cases, minor changes in behaviour or processes, rather than large financial investments, can lead to significant improvements. Encouraging stakeholders to reallocate resources or tap into existing infrastructure can enable the implementation of MEs without the need for substantial budgets. This shift in mindset often involves motivating participants to see the value of small-scale changes, which can have a big impact without requiring massive financial resources.





## STAGE 11

### Evaluation

This stage of the Youth Policy Lab is dedicated to assessing the impact, feasibility, and effectiveness of the solutions generated throughout the Youth Policy Lab process. The primary objective of this stage is to evaluate how well the micro-experiments and proposals from earlier workshops have achieved the intended outcomes. This stage allows stakeholders to reflect on the process, measure results, and gather valuable insights for future improvements.

The evaluation begins by assessing the impact of the proposed solutions. This includes measuring the direct outcomes, such as improvements in youth employment, engagement, or policy change, and determining whether the solutions address the core policy challenge effectively. Both quantitative and qualitative methods may be used to capture feedback. Surveys and questionnaires provide numerical data on the success of the solutions, while focus groups and interviews allow participants to share deeper insights and personal experiences.

In addition to assessing impact, the evaluation process examines the feasibility and sustainability of the solutions. Proposals are tested for scalability, ensuring they can be adapted and implemented in different contexts. Success criteria are defined in collaboration with stakeholders, and the feasibility of each proposal is evaluated based on its alignment with available resources, existing infrastructures, and the political climate. This phase also highlights any challenges or barriers encountered, allowing participants to refine their solutions and develop action plans for addressing obstacles.

Finally, the evaluation phase focuses on identifying lessons learned throughout the Youth Policy Lab process. By reflecting on what worked well and what could be improved, the evaluation provides essential feedback for the ongoing development of the Youth Policy Lab methodology. This ensures that future cycles of the YPL remain effective, inclusive, and adaptable to the changing needs of youth and policymakers alike.

The analysis of evaluation results can sometimes be complicated, as it may involve both positive impacts and serious challenges that need to be addressed for successful scalability or mainstreaming. The group will need time to engage in critical reflection on the feedback gathered from stakeholders, the broader community, and the participants themselves. This is a crucial step in improving the policy proposals, ensuring that the recommendations are realistic and actionable.

Some key considerations during this phase include:

**Were there any unforeseen challenges in the implementation of the proposed solutions?**

**Can the solutions be scaled up or adapted for broader applications?**

**How can the proposals be improved to ensure they are more effective or feasible?**



## STAGE 12

### PL 3 - Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

The last workshop of the Youth Policy Lab serves the following critical function: to formulate the final policy recommendations that will constitute the official deliverable of the Youth Policy Lab. This workshop is crucial because it produces the formal output of the Lab, but also because it provides an opportunity to reflect on the process, assess the outcomes, and determine how the proposed solutions can be scaled up or mainstreamed into policy. The recommendations are not just theoretical; they should be practical, evidence-based, and aimed at solving specific problems identified throughout the Youth Policy Lab process. The quality of the recommendations will be critical, as they represent the official output of the Youth Policy Lab and will be assessed by decision-makers and experts.

A few key questions to consider when formulating the recommendations:

**Why is this recommendation needed? What problem does it solve, and why is it important?**

**Who is the recommendation for? Who will benefit, and what impacts are expected?**

**What evidence can be used to support the recommendation?**

**To which authority should the recommendation be addressed? This could be a local government agency, a policymaker, or another organisation.**

**Are there other authorities or stakeholders who should also be involved in implementing the recommendation?**

**What resources or methods should be used to implement the proposal, and who should be involved in carrying it out?**

**Is there a clear action plan with steps or action lines for implementing the recommendation?**

To effectively address all the tasks, the final workshop should be well-structured and divided into key phases, allowing participants to engage in critical reflection on the evaluation results before diving into the formulation of the final recommendations. The final workshop may begin with a review of the evaluation results, including feedback from various stakeholders, analysis of the impacts of the proposed solutions, and reflections on any challenges encountered. Participants may discuss the effectiveness of the implemented proposals, focusing on their strengths and areas for improvement. Once the discussion is complete, the focus shifts to developing the policy recommendations. This phase requires careful attention to details, ensuring that the recommendations are practical, evidence-backed, and tailored to the specific needs of the community. It is important to reach a consensus on the recommendations.

This may include further refining or combining proposals based on feedback, ensuring that the recommendations reflect a broad consensus and are supported by the majority of participants. The recommendations should then be formally documented and prepared for delivery to the relevant authorities. The final recommendations must not only be feasible and evidence-based but also actionable, offering a clear path for implementation. The careful formulation of these recommendations ensures that the Youth Policy Lab produces meaningful, sustainable solutions that will benefit the community and address the identified policy challenges.

The follow-up of a Youth Policy Lab (YPL) ensures the sustainability and long-term impact of the recommendations and solutions generated through the process. After the final workshop and the formulation of policy recommendations, it is essential to continue the engagement of participants, stakeholders, and the broader community in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of these recommendations. The follow-up phase allows for continuous feedback, reflection, and improvement, ensuring that the work of the Youth Policy Lab remains dynamic and responsive to the real-world needs of the community.

One of the key elements of the follow-up phase is involving Youth Policy Lab participants as part of a follow-up group that actively monitors the implementation of the recommendations. These participants, who have been directly involved in the co-creation process, are well-positioned to assess whether the solutions put forward are being implemented as planned and whether they are achieving the intended results. The follow-up group should be composed of a mix of youth participants, local stakeholders, and policy experts who can provide valuable insights into the practicalities of implementation. This group will meet periodically to review progress, identify challenges, and make adjustments where necessary to ensure that the policy recommendations are successfully integrated into local policies and initiatives.

In this role, the group's responsibilities may include:

**Tracking the progress of the implementation.**

**Identifying any barriers or challenges in the implementation phase.**

**Suggesting adjustments or improvements to enhance the effectiveness of the recommendations.**

**Reporting back to the broader community and stakeholders about progress.**

As the recommendations are implemented, feedback collection is essential for assessing the effectiveness and impact of the solutions. This feedback should be gathered continuously from the target group - the youth and communities most affected by the policy challenge. By maintaining open lines of communication and actively seeking input, the Youth Policy Lab can ensure that the process is dynamic and that any necessary adjustments can be made to improve outcomes. For example, after implementing a recommendation to improve youth employment opportunities, feedback could be collected from local youth to understand whether the programme is helping them to find jobs, what challenges they face, and how the programme could be improved.

Another crucial aspect of the follow-up phase is exploring the integration of Youth Policy Lab praxis into the broader policy-making context of the city, region, or even the country. By doing so, the Youth Policy Lab process can have a long-lasting impact, influencing institutional change and policy-making practices at multiple levels of governance.

This process might involve:

**Collaborating with local governments to integrate the participatory, co-creation approach of the YPL into existing policy-making frameworks.**

**Exploring ways to bring youth voices into formal policy processes as a regular part of decision-making.**

**Expanding the YPL's reach and impact by involving other regions or national bodies interested in adopting similar models of participatory governance.**

**Building partnerships with other youth-focused networks, policy innovation hubs, or peer learning groups to expand the impact of the Youth Policy Lab.**

By advocating for the inclusion of participatory methods and youth engagement in ongoing policy practices, the follow-up phase can help to institutionalise the Youth Policy Lab model, making it a sustainable part of the governance process.

Last but not least, effective communication is essential to ensure that the results and impacts of the Youth Policy Lab are clearly articulated and understood, both by the general public and by key stakeholders. Communicating not only the final policy recommendations but also the process - including the participatory methods, youth involvement, and co-creation aspects - is important for demonstrating the value of this approach to governance. The communication might be done by public reporting on the progress of the implementation phase, highlighting key milestones and challenges, various social media campaigns to engage a broader audience, especially youth, about the ongoing work of the YPL and its impact, as well as workshops, webinars, or community meetings where participants can share their experiences, lessons learned, and impact of the Youth Policy Lab process with wider audiences. Policy briefs, reports, or case studies that present the findings and outcomes of the Lab in a clear and actionable format for decision-makers may also be produced. Communication should also be used as a tool for advocacy, helping to raise awareness about the importance of youth participation in policy design and the benefits of co-creation in solving complex social issues.



