

TIP SHEET FOR ADULTS ON ADOLESCENT AND YOUTH* PARTICIPATION IN CONFERENCES

*Note: Tips below refer to adolescents but are intended to cover both adolescent and youth participation.



Introduction: This tip sheet provides suggestions for adults to support safe and meaningful participation of adolescents and youth in conferences, focusing on what staff should do before, during and after a conference. A complementary tip sheet written for adolescents and youth participating in conferences is also available.

This tip sheet is one of a series designed in collaboration with adolescents and youth to support their meaningful participation in specific activities. The tip sheets build upon UNICEF's 'Engaged and Heard!' guidelines for adolescent participation and civic engagement

to ensure adolescents have space (opportunity and information) to freely voice their opinions to relevant adults (audience) who seriously consider and act upon their views (influence) [Lundy's model].

Suggestions are guided by nine basic requirements developed by the Committee on the Rights of the Child (2009) to ensure ethical and effective participation of adolescents that is: i) transparent and informative, ii) voluntary, iii) respectful, iv) relevant, v) adolescent-friendly, vi) inclusive, vii) supported by training, viii) safe and sensitive to risk, and iv) accountable.

BEFORE the conference

✓ Identify safe ways to engage adolescents from the start!

- Include adolescents on the planning committee to influence the agenda and conference design to be more relevant and to maximize opportunities for adolescent participation.
- Include breakout sessions, interactive methods for adolescents to discuss issues and share feedback in plenary sessions, and sufficient free time for informal exchange.

✓ Partner with adolescents as moderators, speakers, panellists, workshop facilitators, members of country delegations, journalists (including social media), visual designers, and/or other roles.

✓ Assign a liaison to connect with adolescent participants and provide regular communication and coordination.

✓ Ensure inclusive and equitable selection processes that enable voluntary participation of adolescents who are most affected by the issue(s) being addressed.

- Support representation and participation of adolescents of different genders, ages, abilities, ethnicities and backgrounds, with proactive efforts to include adolescents from marginalized groups.
- Encourage adolescents to nominate and elect representatives from their networks, if appropriate.

✓ Adequately budget for adolescent participation and representation, including but not limited to costs of preparatory and follow-up meetings, information-sharing, translation costs, in-person transport or chaperone-related costs, accommodation, and support costs (e.g., additional needs of adolescents, such as those with disabilities and/or children, and costs of mobile airtime and internet data for adolescents). Ensure provisions for expenses/funds to be paid upfront to adolescents.

✓ Plan sufficient time for quality preparations with adolescent representatives. International conferences will require planning at least six months in advance to ensure transparent selection of adolescents, consultation and preparations with the constituency they represent, and sufficient time to secure passports, visas, flights, etc.

✓ Develop and share information in a transparent manner with adolescents about the background of the conference, its purpose and timing, the intended role of adolescent representatives, the intended audience, and potential benefits for adolescents, as well as how information will be used and how relevant costs will be covered (e.g., participants' transport, food, refreshment, phone and internet access costs, and compensation).

✓ Share information in accessible, easy-to-understand formats and local languages that participating adolescents and their parents/guardians can understand.

✓ Avoid having English language as a criterion for nomination of adolescent representatives, as this is a barrier to inclusive participation. Encourage everyone to use clear and easy-to-understand language, and support translation and interpretation (including sign language) if required.

✓ Respect adolescents' own time commitments to study, work, leisure, etc., and plan preparatory meetings at times that suit them. Ensure clear communication about timelines of agreed-upon tasks.

✓ Provide support and offer training for adolescents' preparation as speakers, panellists, moderators, facilitators, etc. Ensure that panellists have information about the time, purpose, and order of panel speakers. Support pre-meetings with adolescent speakers, moderators and their peers to prepare for and practise their roles.

- ✓ **Prepare adults** (organizers, moderators, and panellists) to provide a safe and respectful space for adolescents to participate, ensuring attitudes and language (verbal and body language) that demonstrate readiness to listen to adolescents and to take their views seriously.
- ✓ **Ensure participation is safe and sensitive to risk.** In collaboration with adolescents, assess and minimize risks and ensure child safeguarding policies and procedures are systematically applied. Especially for conferences in venues far from home, this includes:
 - Ensuring voluntary participation, with informed assent from adolescents and informed consent from parents/guardians, and ensuring individuals are aware they can opt out if they change their mind.
 - Collecting necessary medical information about adolescents (e.g., about asthma, EpiPen needs or COVID needs/expectations) and ensuring protection of personal data and information.
 - Ensuring realistic expectations of adolescents about opportunities.
 - Allocating a child safeguarding focal point and preparing adult chaperones to consider adolescents' physical and emotional needs. Chaperones and facilitators must sign a written statement of expected responsibilities prior to the event/trip.
- Providing logistics and reimbursement for safe travel and accessible and safe accommodation arrangements¹.
- Providing health and travel insurance and clear guidance for safe travel.
- Planning for emergencies: lost person, health emergency, natural disaster, etc.
- Identifying venues that are accessible to adolescents with disabilities (e.g., ramps, handrails, accessible toilets) and that provide sufficient light and safe spaces for breaks and small group work, as well as large spaces for plenary discussions and creative expression.
- Ensuring adolescents know their rights and who to report to if they feel uncomfortable, unsafe or unwell. Provide them with a short list of key contact numbers in case of emergency.
- ✓ **Help participants feel more comfortable.** Wherever possible, help adolescent panel speakers/moderators/facilitators visit or familiarize themselves with the conference venue or online platform and meet other panellists in advance (*see tip sheet on online engagement*).

DURING conferences

- ✓ **Ensure sufficient logistic and administrative support** for safe accommodation, travel, access to conference facilities, and leisure/free time after formal sessions. Ensure adolescents know who their liaison is for any queries during the conference and make sure adolescents reach home or their hotel safely.
- ✓ **Use icebreaker introductions** at the outset of the conference to help participants get to know one another and feel more comfortable.
- ✓ **Work together** to help create a respectful, collaborative environment where individuals can freely express their views and be heard.
- ✓ **Support adolescents as speakers or moderators** in panel discussions, ensuring time for introductions, presentations from panellists, and Q&As.
- ✓ **Consider using cultural arts, drama and other interactive methods** determined by adolescents' expressed preferences.
- ✓ **Ensure respect for the diversity of adolescents' experiences and perspectives** that may differ based on gender, race, ethnicity, disability, age, sexual identity or other factors.
- ✓ **Ensure accountable participation:**
 - Create space and modalities for adults to respond to adolescents' messages and requests.
 - Make sure all parties agree on next steps and have mutual expectations.
- ✓ **Leverage the media** to amplify adolescent perspectives and messages. Support adolescents' voluntary and safe participation in press conferences, interviews, and use of social media, apps, and messaging tools (e.g., blogs, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and U-Report). Develop hashtags for social media and encourage their consistent use.
- ✓ **Prioritize safeguarding and decision-making** that are informed by the views and best interests of adolescents (*see previous considerations to ensure participation is safe and sensitive to risk*).

AFTER conferences to enhance accountable participation

- ✓ **Reflect and learn with adolescents** about their participation. What was successful? What was unsuccessful or challenging? What could be done differently next time? Why?
- ✓ **Ensure dissemination of a conference report to adolescents** in accessible formats that use visual images and concise, easy-to-understand language. Wherever possible, ensure that adolescent representatives can contribute to and/or review draft and final reports to ensure their perspectives receive due attention.
- ✓ **Encourage adolescent representatives to share feedback with peers** in their constituency and other allies about the conference, its results and next steps.
- ✓ **Ensure policymakers and/or practitioners share feedback with adolescents** about the extent to which they have acted upon their messages. This may require follow-up calls, meetings or emails to identify what has happened after the conference.
- ✓ **Support follow-up action.** Wherever possible, explore opportunities for longer-term follow-up and investment in collaborative and adolescent-led action or advocacy initiatives.

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1. For international events, this may require timely applications to secure passports/identity papers, visas, flights, etc.