

TIP SHEET FOR ADULTS ON ADOLESCENT AND YOUTH* PARTICIPATION IN POLICY DIALOGUE WITH AUTHORITIES

*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 policy dialogues with authorities, focusing on what staff should do before, during and after the policy dialogue. A complementary tip sheet for adolescents and youth participating in policy dialogues is available.

These tip sheets are part 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 policy dialogue

✓ Identify safe ways to engage adolescents as partners from the start!

- Engage adolescents to help set the agenda, design policy dialogue session(s), determine who to invite and determine timing and approaches.

✓ Advocate for regular working sessions between policymakers and adolescent representatives, rather than one-off meetings, to increase opportunities for respectful and accountable participation.

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

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

- 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., for 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.

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

✓ Share information in clear, accessible 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.

✓ Target the right people. Seek feedback from adolescents to target duty bearers with the power to make policy or practice changes on issues affecting adolescents.

✓ Respect adolescents' own time commitments to study, work, leisure, etc., and plan preparatory meetings and policy dialogues at times that suit them and/or offer multiple choices when scheduling meetings. Ensure clear communication about timelines of agreed-upon tasks.

✓ Allow time to prepare. Ensure adolescent representatives have time to prepare before meeting with policymakers. Give them time and space, as well as training and mentoring when needed to:

- Discuss and identify their key messages to improve policies/practices.

- Explore why such improvements are important and to prepare supporting arguments.
- Strengthen their communication, presentation and negotiation skills.
- ✓ **Prepare and train adults** (organizers, policymakers) 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. This includes:
 - Ensuring voluntary participation, with informed assent from adolescents and informed consent from parents/guardians, and ensuring individuals are aware that they can opt out if they change their mind.
 - Assessing risks associated with direct engagement with authorities and ways to reduce those risks.
- Ensuring realistic expectations of adolescents about opportunities.
- Allocating a child safeguarding focal point and preparing with adult chaperones to consider adolescents' physical and emotional needs.
- Providing logistics and reimbursement for safe travel and accessible and safe accommodation arrangements¹.
- Identifying meeting venues that are accessible to adolescents with disabilities (e.g., ramps, handrails, accessible toilets).
- Ensuring adolescents know their rights and know 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 representatives visit and get familiar with the policy dialogue venue or online platform in advance (*see tip sheet on online engagement*).

DURING the policy dialogue

- ✓ **Ensure sufficient logistic and administrative support.** Ensure adolescents know who their liaison is for any queries. If there is any travel, make sure adolescents travel and reach home safely.
- ✓ **Help create a friendly, collaborative working session,** ensuring:
 - Icebreaker introductions to get to know one another.
 - Respect for different views and trust-building.
 - Sufficient time for discussion among participants, including opportunities for small group breakout discussions.
 - Possible use of creative arts and other interactive methods to express views.
- ✓ **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 recommendations.
 - Make sure all parties agree on next steps and have mutual expectations.
- ✓ **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 the policy dialogue to enhance accountable participation

- ✓ **Reflect and learn with adolescents** about their participation in the policy dialogue and its impact. What was successful? What was unsuccessful or challenging? What could be done differently next time? Why?
- ✓ **Encourage adolescent representatives to share feedback with peers** in their constituency and other allies about the conference, its results and next steps.
- ✓ **Ensure policymakers/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.
- ✓ **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.