

TIP SHEET FOR ADOLESCENTS AND YOUTH* ON 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 adolescents and youth to support meaningful participation and representation (of their peers) in policy dialogue with the authorities. Policy dialogues are purposeful meetings involving people who develop or update policies and other interested people who are invited to share their views and suggestions. The purpose of a policy dialogue is to suggest improvements to a specific policy and/or the way it is implemented and monitored.

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 policy dialogue

✓ Ask questions to find out more.

- If you are invited to participate in a policy dialogue with authorities, ask questions to determine if it is relevant to you and your interests. Consider the question, how will I benefit from taking part?
- Make sure you have clear information about the potential roles of adolescents before and during the policy dialogue to inform your voluntary participation.
- Remember to ask about logistics and expenses. (For example, how will travel costs or internet costs be covered?)

✓ Increase inclusion, representation and participation of marginalized adolescents who are most affected by the issue(s) being discussed in the policy dialogue. You may want to consider:

- Encouraging the organizers to invite representatives from other marginalized groups.
- Suggesting alternative ways to create inclusion (for example, via video messaging or online participation).
- Consulting with your wider network and/or other adolescents from different backgrounds to help bring different perspectives.
- Promoting election of representatives from adolescent-led groups with opportunities for diverse representation (considering gender, age, race, ethnicity, abilities, etc.).

✓ Share your ideas and suggestions to help design the policy dialogue agenda and methods in ways that respond to adolescents' interests and needs. For example:

- Get involved in core planning teams.
- Consider using creative methods or cultural art forms to express views, ideas, and priority messages and to enhance dialogue on your priority concerns.

✓ Use opportunities to gather views from your peers to be a better representative. If you are a representative who will speak on behalf of your peers, ask adults to help you schedule preparatory meetings with your peers (especially those most affected by the policy issue). Together you can:

- Discuss why the policy is important to you.
- Discuss how the policy affects adolescents from different backgrounds. Does it affect adolescents differently based on their gender, age, disability, race, ethnicity, family income, education level, etc.?
- Discuss and identify specific changes to improve the policy/practice.
- If possible, gather data (facts, stories) to support your recommendations.

✓ Seek support and/or training to strengthen your communication, negotiation and problem-solving skills (see tip sheets on public speaking, adolescent participation in advocacy events, and adolescent participation in document reviews).

✓ **In collaboration with organizers, assess potential risks and discuss and prioritize ways to keep safe.** Make sure that you:

- Receive information about the policy and that it is shared with your parents/guardians, if appropriate. If you are under 18 years old, you will need informed consent from your parents/guardians to participate.
- Know your rights and who to report to if you feel uncomfortable, unsafe or unwell.

- Consider your privacy and safety for offline and online engagement (*see tip sheet on online engagement*).
- Have clear information about safe travel arrangements to and from the policy session.
- Carry contact details of the project liaison and emergency services if you are away from home.

DURING the policy dialogue

✓ **Be comfortable.** Wear comfortable clothes. Consider dressing in layers to prepare for fluctuating room temperatures.

✓ **Introduce yourself and encourage the development of a respectful, collaborative environment** where each individual can freely express their views and be heard.

✓ **Be specific and ask for what you want.** Tell policymakers the specific changes you recommend to improve the policy or practice. Explain why you care about the issue and how the proposed changes will improve people's lives in your community/country.

✓ **Listen to others carefully,** recognize their position, and find common ground to have a constructive working session.

✓ **Ask the audience to share feedback** with you to be accountable to you and your peers. Try to influence and be clear about the final agreed-upon points and next steps from the policy dialogue.

✓ **Prioritize efforts to stay safe and well.** Inform a trusted adult if you feel uncomfortable, unsafe or unwell. Request the support you need from accompanying adults and make sure you always have emergency contact details so you can contact one of the organizers or emergency services if needed. (*For online safety, see tip sheet on online engagement.*)

AFTER the policy dialogue to enhance accountable participation

✓ **Follow up and ask for feedback** from policymakers about how they have responded to your suggestions.

✓ **Share feedback with peers,** especially those who helped you prepare for the policy dialogue and other supporters. Share updates from the policy dialogue, as well as results and next steps.

✓ **Reflect and learn** from your participation in the policy dialogue and its impact. What was successful? What was unsuccessful? What could be done differently next time? Why? How can you

use this experience to positively influence issues that are important to you?

✓ **Discuss and seek support for follow-up action initiatives.** Discuss ideas with your peers and share concrete follow-up action ideas with adults to see if they can support your initiatives.

✓ **Advocate for regular meetings** among adolescent representatives and government officials.

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