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Responding to COVID-19 and building our future

Young people’s voices should not be ignored in this crisis. They have so far been needlessly excluded from the conversation on coronavirus. Their views, experiences and ideas must be heard to shape how we respond to the pandemic and build a better future. No decision about young people should be made without young people.

This is a guide on how to listen to young people in a digital setting. It applies whatever the context but is particularly relevant as we respond to the coronavirus pandemic and build our future together. Below we have summarised some of the major issues facing young people as a result of this pandemic showing why taking action now is so important.

Young people have been (and will continue to be) one of the groups hardest hit by the pandemic - their future plans have been uprooted and their mental health concerns increased:

- Young employees are most likely to have lost work due to furloughing, jobs losses and hours reductions.1
- There are over one million young people with known needs that have been amplified by the pandemic and an estimated two million young people with emerging needs triggered or caused by COVID-19.2
- 83% of young people say the pandemic has made their mental health worse.3
- Across England 4.1 million children are living in poverty, and approximately one million children and young people, as well as their families, still do not have adequate access to a device or connectivity at home.5
- Two thirds of young people are concerned about the impact of the virus on their future.6,7
- Young people feel that their voices have not been heard in the pandemic, and that they have not been offered a role building their futures in its wake.8
- 88% of people working in the youth sector indicate they are likely or very likely to reduce service provision to young people.9

Despite this, Beatfreeks’ Take the Temperature Report found that 92% of 14-25 year olds feel this could be a moment to change society for the better. They have a desire to participate as active citizens, to help society and build our collective future.10

#PowerOfYouth Campaign

Throughout June and July 2020, we’re asking organisations and decision-makers to take part in a National Conversation of the #PowerOfYouth. This digital listening event guide supports you to take part by making space to hear young people’s views, experiences and ideas, and co-create solutions to the issues you both care about as we build our futures.

The National Conversation on the #PowerOfYouth forms part of a wider #PowerOfYouth campaign – a nationwide collaborative effort aiming to recognise young people for their efforts, empower more young people to make a difference, and give young people opportunities to shape their future. Find out more about the campaign at www.powerofyouth.iwill.org.uk.
The Guide
Who wrote this?

This guide has been created on behalf of the #iwill campaign by Beatfreeks – a youth engagement and insight agency who connect young people to businesses, governments and funders. Find out more about them here.

Who is this for?

This guide explains how to hold a listening event with young people to hear their views, ideas and experiences on what your organisation could be doing, and how you can address the issues you both care about.

Why do this?

Young people think big – it’s important we make space to hear their views and ideas. We should partner with young people to tackle our common challenges. Young people are your organisation’s current or future beneficiaries, customers, volunteers or workforce. It will save you time in the long run to ensure that their knowledge, ideas and insights shape your outlook from the outset.

In order to create positive change, all decision makers and organisations should:

1. Listen to young people directly
2. Act on their thoughts, wants and needs

Who is this for?

This is designed for application in:

- **THE PUBLIC SECTOR** (central and devolved government departments, local councils, combined authorities, mayors, NHS services, schools, colleges, universities, trusts, etc)

- **THE THIRD SECTOR** (charities, centres, arts and cultural organisations, funders)

- **THE PRIVATE SECTOR** (businesses, brands, media)
Find below seven top tips to take into account when planning, delivering and evaluating a listening event with young people. The aim of the event is to listen to what young people think, want and need in order to open up conversations between decision makers, organisations and young people, elevating their perspectives.

This will help to futureproof your organisation, embedding partnerships with young people into decision making structures and ensure their voices continue to be heard and actioned on.

Young people are willing and ready to participate. They can breathe life, talent and energy into projects and have the appetite to do so. Build them a seat at your table.
CO-DESIGN AT ALL STEPS

- This event is in response to young people's desire to shape their future. It is designed to engage and attract young people. For these two reasons, young people should be involved in planning your listening event.

- BUT: you don’t need to hold a listening event in order to design your listening event.

- What you should do, is hold conversations with a few young people about what your initial listening event should look and feel like. Once your first public event has happened, use outcomes to inform a more inbuilt state of listening to young people as an organisation.

- This could be further regular listening events or a completely different co-designed mechanism which collates young people’s voices and uses them to implement change.

BETTER REPRESENTATION

- It is impossible to have everyone’s voices represented at a single listening event, but this is not to say you should not be conscious of who is in the room, and who is missing. Address it and establish methods to act on it.

- Try to move beyond the young people you have always engaged. This is an opportunity to find out how to cater for those you don’t normally engage.

- Work with the young people you are already engaged with to bring their peers and colleagues to your listening event.

- Work with organisations connected to the young people you don’t normally engage with, and seek to establish partnerships where possible.
Listening events can be held in a variety of sizes, but should be conducted in different ways for different numbers. Below are some key principles you should consider applying to your event, regardless of its size:

1. Consider offering the position of chair or co-chair to a young person. Get some young people you work with closely in the room to act as your facilitators, advocates and champions. Conversations will flow more naturally with positioned young people you know leading and provoking conversations and ideas.

2. An effective event provokes young people to respond to each other as much as they are responding to you. The best ideas are formed from a dialogue between participants and facilitator, not from one-way question and answer between an organisation and their audience.

3. Start as you mean to go on. At the start, make space to ask people why they are here and what they want to get out of it, this sets the tone of co-creation and allows young people to direct the session from the off.

4. Generally, the smaller the group, the longer the event can be, as there is more consistent engagement with all participants. That being said: short and more frequent events are more productive than longer and spaced out ones.

5. Provide information and an opportunity to pose questions in advance of the event.

6. Use multiple facilitators where possible. Ideally you will have someone facilitating, someone note-taking and someone looking after your tech.

7. Whether you work with young people everyday, or rarely work with them, always, always, always be true to yourself as an organisation. Young people respect authenticity, so be honest and be you.

8. Use interactive digital tools which enable the whole group to be engaged without talking. Some good examples are Mentimeter and Slido.

### Scales of event

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10 participants</th>
<th>100 participants</th>
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<td>- This is a small enough group to engage everyone in a discussion at once</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Protect time for everyone to speak and find ways to prevent a few people from dominating the overall conversation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Time suggestion: 1.5 hr</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>30 participants</strong></td>
<td><strong>Host a planned conversation between 5-10 participants which can be informed by conversations held in the wider group and by ideas collected in advance. This smaller group of 5-10 people could be rotated throughout the event so that more participants have a platform.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Pay particular attention to use of interactive digital tools such as live-polling, gauging people’s reaction to the conversation and its direction.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Time suggestion: 0.5 – 1 hr</td>
<td><strong>- Use interactive digital tools which enable the whole group to be engaged without talking. Some good examples are Mentimeter and Slido.</strong></td>
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- **- Use mechanisms to allow participants to suggest topics for small group discussion** |
- **- Time suggestion: 1 – 1.5 hrs**
Accessibility is not an added bonus but should be built into the planning of your event. It also means lots of different things, for lots of different groups. Clarity and communication ahead of the event are crucial to its success.

Internet / Phone Access

A. Consider providing mobile data, top-up vouchers or bursaries to participants who may not have access to the internet if you are able.

B. Use conferencing platforms you can dial-in to.

C. Think about how information and feedback can reach those who can’t access the event. This ideally takes place beforehand, so that it can inform the discussion.

Content

A. Avoid using excluding language, phrases, synonyms or jargon. These young people might have never come into contact with you as an organisation - be clear on who you are, what you do, what you want to do, and what you want from young people. Consider how the language you use would sound to someone who's never even heard of your industry let alone your project/event.

B. Avoid gendered language like ‘guys’ and where possible get people to add their pronoun to their name.

C. Provide a space where people can seek clarification on the information.

People with Additional Needs (further guidance here)

A. Communicate the agenda of the event, and as much information as possible, to participants ahead of time. This should be optional to read. Offer a clear contact point for clarification

B. Advise people to contact you in advance with their specific access needs, but maintain a base level of accessibility always

C. Offer multiple ways people can interact with the session (asking questions and giving ideas verbally, in the chat, or in advance for example)

D. Provide regular breaks and communicate them ahead of time

E. Be clear on how to mute session audio and that it is okay to do so, if anyone needs to take an unscheduled break

F. Provide instructions on how to use the platform you’re using, ideally including screenshots.
It is essential to protect young people and your staff at all times, whether physical or digital. Follow your internal safeguarding policies, procedures and practices. Most, if not all, apply in this setting. You can view a Safeguarding checklist for online youth work from Youth Link Scotland here.

There are some key factors to consider when holding events with young people online:

**Location/Environment**
- Young people and staff should avoid streaming from potentially inappropriate settings.

**Create a safe space**
- At the start of the event, set up clear ground rules for participation and procedures for how this will be managed
- Provide content warnings for any content which may be triggering for young people

**Recording and Personal Data**
- Think about the platforms you are using and whether they require the sharing of personal data. Collect the appropriate consents for personal data and media recording. Record the session, with consent from everyone involved, so you can protect young people and yourself.

**Digital Platforms**
- In order to control who is part of the event, participants should register in advance.
- Organisers should then use a waiting room to admit participants who have signed up in advance.
- Locked video conferencing software can be used to prevent anyone from joining.
- For larger events consider muting all audio channels.
FOLLOW-UP

- In planning, think ahead about how this event will fit into your wider work and further listening engagement. Have someone in the room taking notes and be clear on what you need to gain consent for recording.

- **Act when you’ve listened and got young people listening.** Close the event with concrete actions as to your next steps. This could be anything from establishing another session, to an actionable change to services you provide, to a commitment to communicate any changes by a certain date.

- If young people have mentioned needs which you already cater to, and are delivering on, point them in that direction.

SHARE WHAT YOU’VE LEARNT

- The more organisations which engage young people and use their opinions and voices, the more it becomes normalised that young people should have a seat at the table. The more young people feel that their voice has been heard and acted on, the more likely they are to voice them in the future.

- In holding a listening event, your organisation is contributing to a national movement platforming and implementing the voices of young people.

- Therefore, it helps to let young people and other organisations know what you are doing. Share headlines which come out of the listening session, and actions made as a result, on social media with #PowerOfYouth. Share a post, write a blog or film a blog. Tell the world that you are acting on the direct needs of young people.

- Consider sharing your headlines with your networks or even in the press. Flag your progress with #iwill and they can help promote it too.
A listening event is just the first step in listening to young people and implementing the changes they’ve suggested. Continue to look out for young people’s voices and search out their needs.

The end goal is that young people’s voices are embedded in the cultures and practises of organisations. #iwill explain some ways you can continue your youth social action journey on their website, and you can find more information on how you can get involved in other parts of the Power of Youth campaign here.
About #iwill

Young people aren’t just the leaders of tomorrow. They have the energy, skills and ideas to change society and the environment for the better today, and have a critical role to play in addressing the key challenges our country faces. We must support and empower them to be active citizens, both now and in the future.

That’s why the #iwill campaign, composed of over 1000 organisations from across the UK, aims to make participation in social action the norm for young people aged 10 to 20. Find out more at www.iwill.org.uk

About Beatfreeks

Beatfreeks is an engagement and insight agency with a vital community of young creatives.

We work with brands, government and funders who see value in sharing power with young people.

Our model is simple: the more young people exercise their influence through creativity, the more relevant institutions become, and the more they can shape the world together.

For more information visit www.beatfreeks.com or contact info@beatfreeks.com
Endnotes

WE FACE CHALLENGES TOGETHER, SO LET'S WORK TOGETHER.