



Youth Empowerment through co-creative Activity development

Booklet of good practices of the inclusive co-creation process

2025



Co-funded by
the European Union

Document information

Project title:	Youth Empowerment through co-creative Activity development
Project Acronym:	YEA
Programme:	KA220-YOU – Cooperation partnerships in youth
Project Number:	2022-2-BE05-KA220-YOU-000099630
Start date:	1.6.2023
End date:	31.5.2025
Work Package:	WP4
Related WP(s):	WP2 & WP3
Lead Organisation	
Dissemination level	
Document's name	MR 4.2 Booklet of good practices of the inclusive co-creative process
Type	
No. Deliverable	

Booklet of Good Practices

WHAT?

What are “good practices”?

The YEA project decided that it would be useful to not only provide local communities guidelines for an inclusive co-creation process, but some ideas to be able to successfully implement them. These “good practices” are a collection of recommendations that were highlighted during each of the phase of the co-creation process as well as some validated tips and tricks.

WHO?

Who are these “good practices” for?

Although these good practices were established through collaboration efforts among specific stakeholders within the communities of Pelt (Belgium), Vantaa (Finland), and Palermo (Italy), we encourage the use of these good practices for anyone belonging to the following categories that would like to implement an inclusive co-creative process within their communities:

- Local youth organisations
- Support organisations
- Municipalities

The YEA project uses “support organisations” to describe organisations focusing their work on support for youth with migration backgrounds, such as asylum centres and refugee centres. Individuals from these organizations may include employees or volunteers in positions as directors, coordinators, social workers, and youth workers.

Additionally, anyone wishing to be a part of their community can use this booklet to learn about different ways they could contribute to a co-creation process. It is encouraged to put their expertise and experience out there to build more connected local communities.

General

Building a connection

For the YEA consortium, it proved to be a benefit to include aspects in our project that build upon creating a connection between different groups within a community. By beginning our project with an activity for youth based on the photovoice methodology it allowed the voices of youth, also from vulnerable situations, in the community to be heard in a unique and inspirational way. As a matter of fact, without the use of the photovoice activity, the subsequent workshops in the "Defining your Group", "One Voice" and "Co-creation process" could not have been as successful. The photovoice allowed facilitators to better understand young people's needs, desires and challenges, while also shedding a light to youth workers, practitioners, municipality representatives of the complex world, vulnerabilities and aspirations of today's young people.

Managing expectations

At the beginning of the process, consider the expectations from the participants. Be sure to understand their acceptance and willingness to actively support and participate in the process. Each should be aware of the costs (time and resources) of being involved. Additionally, participants should think about what they will be able to get out of the experience, whether it is an expanded network, a sense of belonging or empowerment, or enhanced community engagement.

A clear understanding of who will be involved in the co-creation process and represent themselves or organisation will help with gaining insight into commitment levels. Although everyone from an organisation doesn't need to be involved, check to see which staff member best represents the goals of the process.

Lastly, share with the participants expected timelines and meeting schedules, but also be ready to ensure flexibility.

Maintain communication throughout

Clear and concise communication is vital to any collaboration and plays a crucial role also in the co-creative process. Utilizing notes and memos will guide meetings and will help new participants be able to jump right in. Building upon these notes and keeping

everyone updated through shared documentation was a strategy that the Finnish partner used. Be sure that these are also available for everyone to read and give feedback. In Italy, the partner created a WhatsApp group to discuss feedback whereas in Belgium, photos were taken of whiteboards to ensure clarification of any notes. Having consistency also helps. This can mean having regular meetings at the same time and same place, potentially joining before or after existing meetings when many participants are already gathered.

Additional thoughts

Networking

- Authenticity: Be genuine in your interactions. People appreciate sincerity.
- Follow-up: Maintain connections by following up after initial meetings.
- Value exchange: Offer help and share knowledge, not just seek benefits.

Collaboration

- Clear communication: Ensure everyone understands goals, roles, and expectations.
- Respect and inclusivity: Value diverse perspectives and create an inclusive environment.
- Conflict resolution: Address disagreements constructively and promptly.

General Practices

- Active listening: Pay attention to others' ideas and feedback.
- Reliability: Be dependable and follow through on commitments.
- Adaptability: Be open to new ideas and flexible in your approach.

Phase 1: Brainstorming

Good Practices

Effective brainstorming can lead to innovative ideas and solutions. Here are some examples from the YEA project that could be considered when in this phase of the co-creation process. At the end, there are some general tips to help guide the execution of this phase.

Use different materials

Offering different types of materials and methods of expression can allow participants to be creative and play to their strengths. In Belgium, the facilitator made the use of magazines and encouraged participants to cut out pictures for the activities during the brainstorming session. This proved to be an effective way to engage the participants. For some of the participants, Dutch was not their native language and sometimes the ability to express themselves in words was difficult. Using pictures were effective to demonstrate their ideas. It was more accessible and took away or reduced the effects of a language barrier for the participants.

6

Establish the role of facilitator

From the beginning of the co-creative process, a facilitator should be decided upon. The role of the facilitator can differ for each co-creative process, but it is important to have someone that will establish an inclusive and safe(r) space, in addition to engaging the participants. In Finland, the facilitator recognized that some of the participants had feelings of anxiety when attending the workshops. To help reduce anxiety, the facilitator spent time to visit and talk with the participants to become an approachable figure. Trust was established and participants had less of a deterrence to join in the brainstorming. Ideally, this would take place before the brainstorming phase, and if not, consider taking a few moments at the beginning of a workshop. Having the facilitator take on the role of supporting all participants during the co-creative process can lead to participants feeling welcome, that they belong and are heard.

Take good notes

Encourage one person or two people to take notes of the ideas shared during the session. These people would be responsible of keeping track of the stream of thoughts and could oversee updating the absent participants. This could enhance a sense of accountability and commitment of the building process. Additionally, a good practice from Italy is to launch the idea of creating a common space (e.g. through WhatsApp or Google Drive) where all ideas will be uploaded, so that everyone could get back to them when they wish to. This could help convey the idea that they are in the middle of a process, that everyone plays part, and that it will be developed thanks to everyone involved.

Additional thoughts

Preparation

- Define the objective: Clearly state the problem or goal to focus the session.
- Gather resources: Provide any necessary background information or materials.

During the session

- Encourage open-mindedness: Foster an environment where all ideas are welcome, no matter how unconventional.
- Avoid criticism: Hold off on evaluating ideas until the brainstorming session is over to keep the flow of creativity.
- Build on ideas: Encourage participants to expand on each other's suggestions.
- Stay focused: Keep the discussion on track and relevant to the objective.
- Use visual aids: Utilize whiteboards, sticky notes, or digital tools to visualize ideas.

Post-session

- Categorize ideas: Group similar ideas together to identify common themes.
- Evaluate and prioritize: Assess the feasibility and potential impact of each idea.
- Action plan: Develop a plan to implement the best ideas.

Phase 2: Organisation of ideas

Good Practices

Organizing ideas effectively can help you turn thoughts into actionable plans. Here are some good practices to follow in addition to some general tips:

Begin thinking about the end activity

At this part of the co-creation process, it can be beneficial to begin imagining how the activity that is being planned looks like in the end. It doesn't have to be the "finalised" version, but it is good to be able to begin thinking about what the participants prioritize. Begin discussing the parameters of the activity such as, who is the desired target, how many people is it for, and what resources are needed. It can be helpful to utilize service design tools to clarify co-creation and its phases during workshops and to visualize the project's phases, processes, and agreed-upon items.

Build on good communication

Remember, this process is guided, however, communication between participants should be encouraged and active. Hopefully, there are already ideas about establishing an appropriate communication method during the previous phase, but now is the time to implement it and use it. In Finland, they used the concept of a shared folder that participants could always access and provide feedback and thoughts on documents created by notetakers or the facilitator. Additionally, a WhatsApp group or other communication channels where direct communication and feedback can be posted is an efficient and effective way to maintain engagement. Communicate actively with stakeholders by sending the agenda and invitation to the workshop in advance and reminding them of an upcoming workshop. After the workshop/activity, send a memo and clearly communicate the agreed-upon items and deadlines.

Give time and space for networking

Realize that networking between the participants can happen at any time during the co-creative process. Networking is not only an important aspect of the co-creation process but also allows participants the opportunity to establish new connections,

find common goals that were not yet exposed, and facilitate the exchange of new ideas. Networking is also not only for the professionals involved but can be important for the youth to understand the different roles organisations play in their communities. Be aware of this and give time and space for networking to take place.

Additional thoughts

Initial Collection (see also 'Brainstorming' phase)

- Brain dump: Write down all your ideas without worrying about order or structure.
- Use tools: Utilize digital tools like mind maps, note-taking apps, or physical tools like sticky notes.

Categorization

- Group similar ideas: Identify common themes and group related ideas together.
- Prioritize: Determine which ideas are most important or feasible to pursue first.

Visualization

- Mind maps: Create visual representations of your ideas to see connections and relationships.
- Flowcharts: Use flowcharts to outline processes or steps.

Refinement

- Evaluate: Assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT analysis) of each idea.
- Simplify: Break down complex ideas into smaller, manageable parts.

Documentation

- Organized notes: Keep detailed and organized notes for future reference.
- Action plans: Develop clear action plans with specific steps and deadlines.

Phase 3: Identifying resources and task distribution

Good Practices

Identifying resources and distributing tasks effectively are crucial for successful project management. Here is a short collection of good practices to follow along with some general tips on monitoring this phase:

Use existing experience/resources

Everyone has experiences they can share to help plan an activity, whether that was as a coordinator or as a participant. Draw on this experience by having people share their stories of what worked or didn't work in the past. This knowledge can be vital to the success of this co-creation process. In Belgium, there were discussions about previous activities organised by the municipality, and it was through these discussions that youth were able to share that communication used by the municipality was not the most effective, while the municipality expressed to the youth that many events are restricted by budgeting. Understanding the resources that are available will help facilitate the planning process, identify gaps, and hopefully prevent an unsuccessful activity.

10

Identifying resources that already exist can help with planning and executing an activity. These include but are not limited to:

- Physical locations
- Networking groups to recruit participants
- Organisations that already organise activities that have resources at hand

Everyone can contribute

There may be cases where some of the participants might have limited access to the resources that is needed during this phase. As tasks are being distributed, it should be clarified that the size of the contribution doesn't matter. Tasks should be appropriate for each participant and take into consideration the reach, expertise, interests, and experiences of the participant. In Italy and Belgium, the youth played a

crucial role in recruiting other youth for the activity. They might not have had the experience of organising events but had the knowledge of how to quickly communicate with their peers.

Lastly, it is important to have clear identification of roles and active participation from everyone involved. This can be emphasised by acknowledging that everyone is working together towards achieving the common objective.

Additional thoughts

Monitoring and Adjusting

- Regular check-ins: Hold regular meetings to monitor progress and address any issues.
- Flexibility: Be prepared to reassign tasks or resources as needed.
- Feedback loop: Encourage team members to provide feedback on task distribution and resource allocation.

Phase 4: Execution of activity

Good Practices

Executing an activity effectively involves careful planning, clear communication, and continuous monitoring. Here are some good practices to follow:

Facilitate youth empowerment

Throughout the co-creative process, the consortium witnessed how the youth involved were developing positive connections with each other and with the other participants, including staff from organisations and representatives from the municipalities. There can be both short-term and long-term benefits by facilitating and encouraging these new associations. The expansion of their network will hopefully give them the tools and the incentive to continue being an engaged member in the community.

Use youth as a guide

When involving youth in the co-creation process for an activity that is for the youth, be sure to use them to help guide day-of activities. Checking in often with them will help ensure the activity is meeting their expectations. They know best what they want, when they want it and how they want it. This doesn't mean that the youth make all decisions, but that they are involved in any decisions that might change the course of the day.

12

Develop and maintain trust

An important aspect of the co-creation process is the development of trust. This is something that can take time to develop and may be difficult for some youth from vulnerable situations to experience. By following some of the guidelines and good practices, participants can be provided a space that is conducive to developing trust in their new connections. Trust youth with tasks before and during the activity. It will help with their self-efficacy and give them a sense of empowerment.

Additionally, this trust is not only applicable to individuals involved in the process, but also to the process itself. This co-creation process takes effort on everyone's behalf and there may be times when it seems like it isn't going how it was planned. All

partners experienced this in one way or another, by having limited engagement, last-minute changes in resources, problems with recruitment. Trust that the foundations have been laid and that small steps in the right direction are still steps in the right direction.

Additional thoughts

Planning

- Set clear objectives: Define what you aim to achieve with the activity.
- Create a detailed plan: Outline the steps needed to complete the activity, including timelines and milestones.
- Prepare resources: Ensure all necessary resources (materials, tools, personnel) are available.

Communication

- Brief the team: Make sure everyone involved understands their roles and the overall goal.
- Open channels: Maintain open lines of communication for updates and feedback.

13

Execution

- Follow the plan: Stick to the outlined steps but be flexible to adapt if necessary.
- Monitor progress: Regularly check the progress against the plan and make adjustments as needed.
- Quality control: Ensure the activity is being executed to the required standards.

Problem-Solving

- Identify issues early: Be proactive in spotting potential problems.
- Quick resolution: Address issues promptly to avoid delays.

Phase 5: Sustainability of activity

Good Practices

When at this stage of the co-creation process, it is important to consider aspects that can help its participants feel empowered to maintain a sense of engagement within the community. The following few items are things that were highlighted at the end of the co-creation process in Belgium, Finland and Italy. In addition, conducting an evaluation at the end of an activity can give valuable feedback and involves assessing its outcomes, processes, and impacts to understand its success and areas for improvement.

Time investment

After the activity is executed, it is beneficial to discuss the amount of time that was needed to plan and execute the activity from the perspective of all participants of the co-creative process. Looking at the time each organisation or individual put into the process and assessing whether it was appropriate related to the tasks and available resources might give insight into any discrepancies compared to what was expected. Having individual and group conversations will continue the open dialog that is encouraged in the co-creation process but will also give space to addressing any concerns. Evaluating these points relating to time investment can give good insight of the activity's potential in the future.

14

Network leading to collaboration

Considering the positive effect that the co-creation process can have on networking in the community, this can be used as an advantage when evaluating the sustainability of the activity. Networking creates opportunities for organisations and individuals to understand one another's strengths and weaknesses when it comes to planning and executing activities for their target groups. Another benefit of gaining perspective on sustainability of an activity is being able to see how resources can be pooled together to be able to add or improve an existing activity, therefore saving time and resources.

For example, the “Open doors walk” organized in Vantaa, Finland was a great example of how organisations realized the benefits of doing such an activity. By supporting and encouraging the participation of other organisations within their networks, planning

and execution became easier because the tasks became distributed and the infrastructure of the activity was already established. Attendees also provided positive feedback on seeing multiple organisations within community be involved.

Be innovative

Looking for ways to improve is an important part of the evaluation process and should explore how to make it innovative. Innovation here can be viewed from the activity itself by considering questions such as “What new activities might appeal most to our target groups?”. In addition, activities could become more innovative in how they are planned by considering different strategies of recruitment, communication, and activity execution. In Italy, the activity was executed using a hybrid modality. This was a success because it broadened the reach of the activity to increase participation.

Additional thoughts

Doing an evaluation

- Define objectives: Clearly outline what you aim to evaluate, such as effectiveness, efficiency, and impact.
- Choose metrics: Select relevant metrics that align with your objectives (e.g., participation rates, satisfaction levels, skill development).
- Use multiple methods: Combine qualitative and quantitative methods, such as surveys, interviews, observations, and data analysis.
- Compare against benchmarks: Evaluate the activity against predefined benchmarks or goals.
- Identify trends: Look for patterns and trends in the data to understand broader implications.

15

Getting feedback

- Stakeholder involvement: Engage participants and other stakeholders in the evaluation process to gather diverse perspectives.
- Highlight strengths and weaknesses: Clearly identify what worked well and what needs improvement.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.



Co-funded by
the European Union

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.