



Youth Empowerment through co-creative Activity development

Guidelines for an inclusive co-creative 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 4.1 Guidelines for an inclusive co-creative process
Type	
No. Deliverable	

Introduction

Before initiating the co-creative process, a series of preparatory activities were conducted to foster a supportive and collaborative environment. These efforts aimed to build trust, encourage mutual understanding, and lay the foundation for meaningful youth engagement within the community.

One of the key activities was based on the photovoice methodology and involved local youth. Through photography, participants shared personal stories that reflected their sense of connection and belonging to their community. This visual storytelling approach provided valuable insights into their lived experiences and perspectives. The photovoice stories collected in the YEA project from partner countries Belgium, Italy, and Finland have been compiled and published on the project's official website: <https://yeayouth.eu/photovoice/>. You can read more about the photovoice method and how it was implemented in the YEA project in the article the consortium authored: <https://www.theseus.fi/handle/10024/885685>

In parallel, representatives from the municipality and staff from local organizations participated in a survey inspired by the NOISE (Needs, Opportunities, Improvements, Strengths, Expectations) analysis. The purpose of the analysis was to gain insight into how different organizations perceive and experience networking and collaboration within their communities, with a particular focus on promoting youth inclusion and participation. The analysis was conducted through an online survey distributed between December 2023 and April 2024, combining multiple-choice and open-ended questions to capture both quantitative data and personal reflections. In total, 48 professionals responded to the survey: 22 from Finland, 16 from Belgium, and 10 from Italy.

These initial activities culminated in a series of workshops designed to strengthen interpersonal connections and build “social bridges” among participants. The workshops encouraged dialogue and empathy, helping individuals understand diverse perspectives on community membership and engagement.

Together, these preparatory steps were instrumental in identifying opportunities for enhanced youth involvement and ensuring that the subsequent co-creative process could be implemented effectively and inclusively.

WHAT?

What will I find in these guidelines?

These guidelines outline the key structure and sequential steps designed to support an inclusive and effective co-creative process. The framework is organized into the following phases:

- **Brainstorming** – Generating initial ideas and encouraging open, creative input from all participants.
- **Organization of Ideas** – Structuring and refining concepts to identify common themes and priorities.
- **Resource Identification and Task Allocation** – Determining available assets and assigning responsibilities to ensure balanced participation.
- **Activity Implementation** – Executing the planned initiative collaboratively, with attention to inclusivity and shared ownership.
- **Sustainability Planning** – Exploring strategies to maintain and build upon the outcomes of the activity over time.

Using additional methods

In addition to the structured activities outlined here, incorporating flexible and adaptive methods within a co-creative process is essential to truly meet the needs of participants. This includes being responsive to the group's energy, interests, and emerging dynamics by allowing space for spontaneity and organic flow. Facilitators may choose to deviate from pre-planned agendas to explore unexpected insights or follow the natural direction of group discussions. Adapting methods in real time—whether through creative exercises, open dialogue, or informal interactions—can deepen engagement and foster a sense of ownership among participants. By remaining attuned to the group and embracing a fluid approach, the co-creative process becomes more inclusive, authentic, and impactful.

WHY?

What is the purpose of using these guidelines?

When considering the execution of these guidelines in your community, it is important to consider some of its benefits. Earlier in the project, a literature review was completed to identify and describe aspects related to building social bridges, especially with vulnerable youth, as well as community engagement. Some of those aspects are also valuable for implementing co-creation activities. Below are some highlights from that literature review which demonstrate why co-creation can be a useful method to empower youth.

Through the Contact hypothesis, Allport (1954) stated that intergroup contact will reduce prejudice, especially if four conditions are met. These are equal status, common goals, intergroup cooperation and support of authorities, law or customs. In other words, the co-creation process can be set up to support inclusive and unprejudiced collaboration among all its participants.

Because some of the vulnerable youth participants in the co-creation process may have migration backgrounds, it is important to note how this process could be used to provide essential aspects to immigrant youth and families. Bruhn and Gonzales (2023) found that spaces of belonging are essential to their experiences of migration. If creating these spaces is part of the co-creative process, the participation of youth with migration backgrounds has a chance to be of great benefit.

Lastly, supporting individuals involved in the co-creative process can have an influence on their life in three dimensions (Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, 2023). Their participation can affect them individually and the choices they make regarding which activities they would want to engage in. Moreover, they may consider how they could engage with groups in the community. And extending further out, their participation could lead to taking part in opportunities that benefit the common good of the greater society around them.

WHO?

Who are the guidelines for?

Although these guidelines were developed internally through collaboration of the partnership, specific stakeholders within the communities of Pelt (Belgium), Vantaa (Finland), and Palermo (Italy), were encouraged to use them. Their cooperation and evaluation of this co-creative process helped finalize these guidelines for people belonging to the following categories:

- Local youth organisations
- Support organisations
- Municipalities

HOW?

How should you use these guidelines to implement a co-creative process within your community?

6

Consultation of these guidelines will assist in the implementation of an inclusive co-creative process within your community. Below are a few general steps that are important to consider during each phase of the process.

Create the appropriate atmosphere

- **Consult the Youth Advisory Plan** – This plan, developed as part of the project, serves as a foundational resource for guiding youth-centered activities. It outlines key principles, practical recommendations, and considerations to ensure that planning and implementation are aligned with the needs, interests, and rights of young people ([YEA, 2024](#))
- **Be inclusive** – Create a safe(r) environment where all participants feel safe, respected, and empowered to share their perspectives. Use facilitation techniques that encourage equal participation, such as small group discussions, anonymous input tools, or rotating speaking opportunities, to ensure that every voice is heard and valued. In addition to this, ask for personal pronouns before starting activities so that all people can feel seen and respected.

- **Take pauses** – Recognize and respect the diverse needs, times and energy levels of participants. Incorporating regular breaks and moments for reflection helps maintain focus, reduces fatigue, and supports emotional well-being, especially during intensive or emotionally charged sessions.
- **Use check-in and check-out activities** – Begin and end each session with simple, structured moments that allow participants to express how they're feeling, share expectations, or reflect on their experience. These practices help build trust, foster connection, and encourage ongoing engagement throughout the co-creative process.
- **Be mindful of new participants** – Create spaces that help welcome new people integrate smoothly into the process. Offer clear introductions, context summaries, and opportunities to ask questions or share perspectives, ensuring they feel informed, valued, and included from the outset.

Use of a check-in/check-out

As mentioned in the previous section, using check-ins and check-outs during workshops or meetings can significantly enhance the experience and outcomes for participants. Check-ins can help set the tone, build connection, and encourage participation. Check-outs help participants reflect on learning and offer an opportunity for feedback. Here are a few things to keep in mind when using a check-in/check-out:

- **Keep it simple:** Use straightforward questions or prompts that are easy for participants to respond to.
- **Be inclusive:** Ensure everyone has a chance to participate, either by going around the room or using a digital tool for responses.
- **Be brief:** Keep check-ins and check-outs concise to respect participants' time.
- **Use varied formats:** Mix up the format to keep it engaging, such as using verbal responses, written notes, or digital polls.

Identify strengths

Identifying strengths during workshops is crucial for maximizing the potential of participants and enhancing the overall effectiveness of the workshop. One possible way is to ask participants to summarize their strengths and those of others, in this

way participants actively reflect on their strengths. Write these down on a separate flipchart and take them to the next phases. During this project and throughout the co-creative process, “good practices” were gathered into a booklet that can be used as a reference.

Communication

Effective communication plays a vital role in ensuring the success and inclusivity of the co-creative process. Beyond formal workshops and meetings, participants should be provided with multiple opportunities to contribute their input through informal channels, allowing for continuous engagement and reflection. Clear and consistent communication between each phase of the process helps maintain transparency and alignment among all stakeholders. Tools such as memos, agendas, and progress updates can be regularly used to keep participants informed, clarify expectations, and support their active involvement. These communication strategies not only enhance coordination but also foster a sense of shared ownership and accountability throughout the co-creative journey.

Utilize additional resources

To further enrich the co-creative process, additional resources can be integrated to support participants and enhance the overall impact of the initiative. Among these, the “*Booklet of Good Practices*” can serve as a valuable tool, offering practical examples and insights gathered throughout the project. This booklet is compiled of successful approaches and lessons learned during the co-creative activities carried out across Belgium, Finland, and Italy. By drawing on real-world experiences from diverse cultural and community contexts, the booklet provides inspiration, guidance, and adaptable strategies for participants. Its use can not only reinforce the collaborative spirit of the process but also ensure that effective practices could be shared, replicated, and sustained beyond the project's duration.

Phase 1: Brainstorming

Objective

The brainstorming phase helps collect ideas of activities. Here below, it is possible to use the Disney Creative Strategy (Dilts, 1995) as an example, however, another method can be used.

It consists of three phases:

- The dreamer
- The realist
- The critic



Figure 1: Venn-diagram based on Disney Creative Strategy (Dilts, 1995)

Activity

The dreamer

Important!

- In the beginning, look without restrictions and without critical thinking.
- Everything is possible and everything is accepted.
- The creative and visual thoughts that arise should not be hindered by reality and possible risks. What matters is the power of brainstorming and the quantity of all the ideas put forward.

Actions

Start by asking participants to think of ideas for activities. Ideas can be written down and eventually hung in the room. Using post – its, participants can add additional thoughts. Afterwards, a short discussion can follow in a group.

Helpful questions at this stage:

- What do we want to achieve (the bigger picture)
- What if ... (this or that is possible or may or ...)
- What does it look like when we have realized everything? What do we see then, what is the case then?
- How do we define the solution to the problem?
- What are the benefits of this solution?

10

The realist

Important!

What is achievable?

From the realist's perspective, look at the possible ways to achieve the goal. It is about achieving a dream. Therefore, limitations and possible risks should not be seen as obstacles, but as challenges.

Actions

Helpful questions at this stage:

- How can we apply this idea in reality?
- What is the action plan to apply the idea? How do we get there? What do we need?
- What is the timeline to apply the idea?
- How do we evaluate in a timely manner whether we are still on the right track? What do we need to consider?

The critic

Important!

- What are you still missing?
- How can I improve an idea?
- What would I add to an idea that would make it feasible and/or interesting.

Actions

From the perspective of the critic, look at how the end user will experience the plan or idea.

Possible gaps and risks are critically examined, and changes and points of improvement are suggested.

Helpful questions at this stage:

- What could be wrong with the idea?
- What is missing? What things are missing?
- What are the risks and pitfalls?
- Why might we not implement or execute it?

Phase 2: Organisation of ideas

Objective

This phase will structure the ideas from Phase 1: Brainstorming and to compile a final list of ideas. These ideas will then become the activities to be implemented later in the project.

Activity

Review brainstorming

Prioritize!

First, all materials from Phase 1: Brainstorming are displayed and distributed in the room.

After that, the intention is for all participants to go through the ideas again and have the opportunity to add some additional information.

Depending on the number of ideas, each participant makes a top 3 or top 5 of best ideas.

Let's discuss

What do you think?

After debate, make a collective top 3 or 5 of the whole group, by adding up all the rankings. The ideas that everyone in the group can get behind are then further structured into a timeline. The group can debate the feasibility in that timeline. This timeline need not be made in detail, just a rough estimate.

What's it going to be?

At the end of this activity, the goal is to obtain a final chosen list (by the group). And that it is clear what is meant by that activity, so that everyone can fully support this plan.

When faced with a resistance from a participant, you can add the "wisdom of the minority" through the deep democracy method. Specifically, you ask the 'minority' the following question: 'What would you add to this idea that would make you feel comfortable with it?' This way you get a richer idea and experience teaches us that it

is often small things that are important to a person. Rarely is it about the core of the idea. When it does concern the core, not everything has been put on the table in the preceding debate.

End this activity with the following:

- a final list of activities
- a clear understanding about each activity, shared by each member of the group.
- any comments to bring to the next phase
- a rough outline of the timeline

The next phase will delve deeper into the distribution of tasks for participants to perform this activity.

Phase 3: Identifying resources and task distribution

Objective

In this phase, it is important to obtain a clear job description with a role for everyone on the team so that the activity can be carried out properly and brought to a successful conclusion.

Activity

Identifying different tasks

Explore all tasks

In this section, list all tasks by activity. This activity roadmap can be used for inspiration. It contains all the parameters for organising an activity.

One way of working is to break down the different tasks using flipcharts and, together with the script, fill in the parameters with the group.

14

Using the RACI

The RACI is a way of dividing responsibilities for the various tasks among the diverse people collaborating in the activity (Jacka & Keller, 2009). The RACI is divided into the following elements: Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed.

- Responsible: who is performing this task?
- Accountable: who coordinates and oversees the task? Who maintains an overview?
- Consulted: Who can help support or should be consulted regarding this task?
- Informed: Who should be informed, kept up to date with regard to this task? Communication about the task or activity is also part of this.

It is important not to include every detail in a RACI, but rather the larger important tasks. You can also use it by activity. In that case, the various elements may have multiple responsibilities. And then you can again break it down by task.

For example, the activity is organising a sports event.

- R: A team is responsible for carrying out the sports event that day
- A: an employee of the municipality's sports department keeps an overview
- C: there is a need for practical support, what equipment to use, who sets up the sports venue?
- I: the sports hall needs to be informed, the young people who can participate need to be informed.

Do it again and again!

You can then subdivide again per RACI letter, otherwise there is the trap that several people are responsible and nothing comes to fruition.

In this example, you can further break down 'responsible' into:

- R: everyone in this team gets their defined task
- A: one person in the team keeps the overview and communicates to the A of previous RACI (the sports department employee)
- C: each member of the team has a primary task as well as a secondary in which they support the other members.
- I: each team member keeps the rest of the team informed about the progress of their task.

Phase 4: Execution of activity

Objective

Executing a planned activity successfully involves several key considerations to ensure everything runs smoothly and achieves the desired outcomes.

Activity

Leading up to the execution of the activity, review the notes and results from the previous phases. This helps with planning preparations, maintaining clear communication, and effective execution.

During the activity, monitor progress and identify issues early that could cause problems.

Gathering feedback during the activity, and especially after, can help you understand what worked well and what could be done better. This will be further evaluated in the next phase.

Phase 5: Sustainability of activity

Objective

At the end, it is crucial to help determine the strengths and opportunities of the different aspects of the co-creation process.

Activity

This short questionnaire will seek to determine the strengths and opportunities of the different aspects of the co-creation process. This co-creation process included the following workshop themes:

Phase 1: During the “Brainstorming” phase, the Walt Disney Method was suggested as a tool and consisted of three phases (Dreamer, Realist, Critic)

Phase 2: During the “Organisation of Ideas” phase, a list of ideas was compiled and details regarding event planning were written down.

Phase 3: During the “Identifying Resources and Task Distribution” phase, the RACI (Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed) Model was suggested as a tool to help plan the activity.

If using the survey during interviews/focus group, use the questions to guide the discussion.

Role

Role:

- What role did you have during the planning of the events?
- Facilitator
- Organisation/Municipality representative
- Youth

Phases

We would like to know more about your experiences during the workshops. If you have answers that are specific to a particular workshop, please indicate that in your answer. Please see below a quick overview of the workshop themes.

- What do you take away from the workshops?
- Why did you think it was important?
- What would you do differently?
- How/when was your voice heard (participation)?
- How/when was your voice heard (participation)?
- Were you able to contribute to the consultation?

Sustainability

The following questions are about your thoughts regarding how this process and related activities could be implemented in the future.

- Who needs to be involved to make the co-creation process a success?
- What are the indications of a successful co-creation process?
- What changes, if any, were there regarding youth participation in the community for future planning?
- Any additional comments/clarifications/thoughts?

Overview: Phases of the co-creative process



List of references:

Allport, G.W. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. New York, NY: Doubleday & Company Inc.

Bruhn, S.; Gonzales, R.G. (2023). Geographies of Belonging: Migrant Youth and Relational, Community, and National Opportunities for Inclusion. *Soc. Sci.* 2023, 12, 167. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12030167>

Dilts, R. (1994). *Strategies of Genius: Aristotle, Sherlock Holmes, Walt Disney, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart* (1st edition). Meta Publications, U.S.

Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (2023). Osallisuuden osa-alueet ja osallisuuden edistämisen periaatteet. <https://thl.fi/fi/web/hyvinvoinnin-ja-terveyden-edistamisen-johtaminen/osallisuuden-edistaminen/heikoimmassa-asemassa-olevien-osallisuus/osallisuuden-osa-alueet-ja-osallisuuden-edistamisen-periaatteet>

Jacka, J. M., & Keller, P. J. (2009). *Business Process Mapping Workbook: Improving Customer Satisfaction* (2nd edition).



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.