



PATHWAYS TO PARTNERING WITH YOUTH-LED GROUPS AND ORGANISATIONS

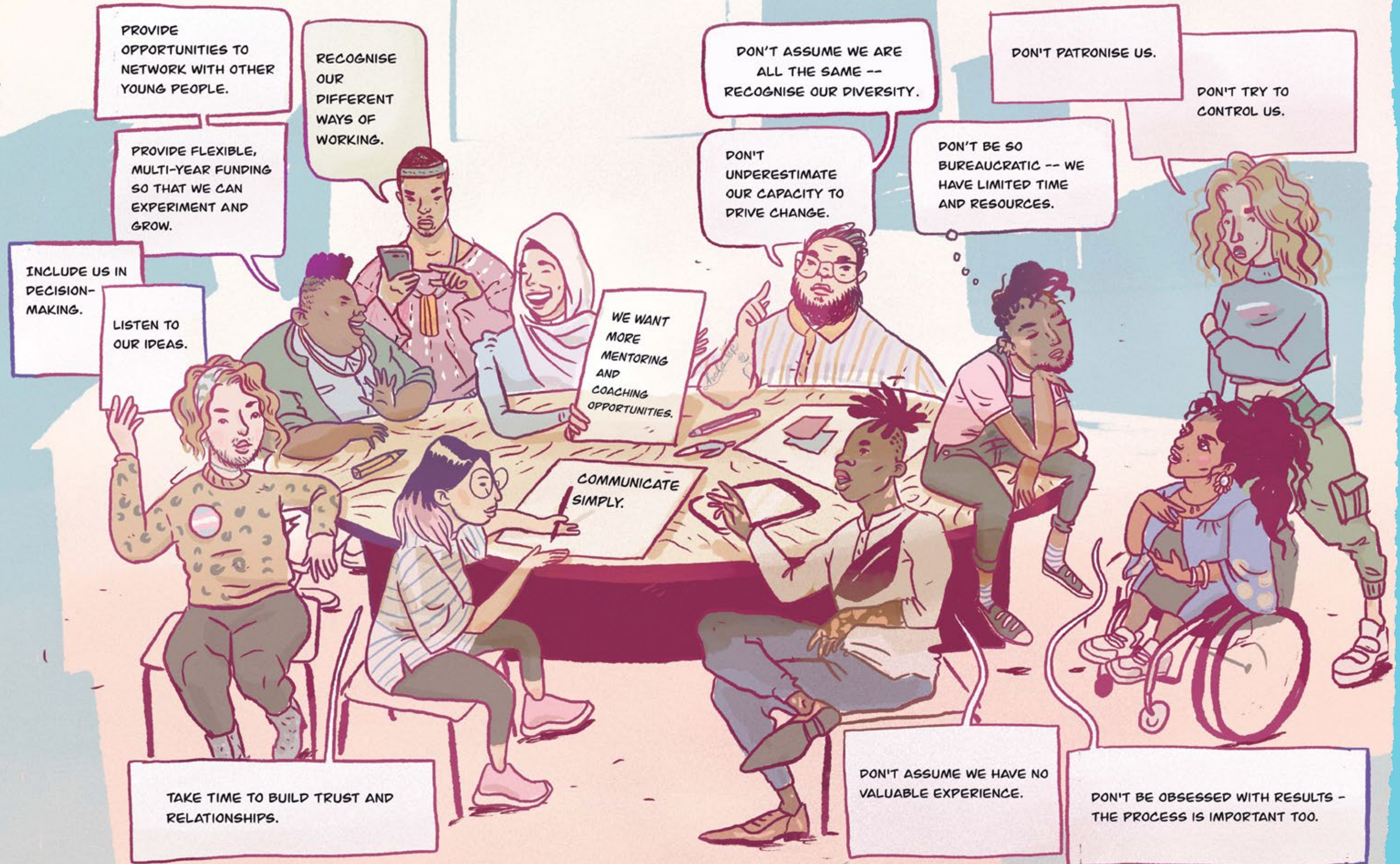


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HOW TO PARTNER WITH YOUTH-LED ORGANISATIONS

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE SAY



INTRODUCTION

This guidance is developed to be read in conjunction with the guidance to Seven Key Steps to Building Better Partnerships. It suggests ways in which Plan International staff might have to adapt their practice so that they can build better partnerships with youth-led groups/organisations – both formal and informal and at community, local and national levels.

Youth-led: We use the word youth-led if young people are the principle decision-makers in the organisation and are the ones who Plan International negotiate the partnership with. Adults may be involved in the organisation but they are not the principle actors. It does not refer to organisations which have a youth advisory group or which work for youth and consult them but do not engage them fully in decision-making.

Age – this guidance focuses on organisations mainly led by those aged 18 to 24. A separate document will address partnerships with organisations or groups led by children between 10 and 18 years. While youth may be defined differently in different countries, Plan International focuses on this age group. However, we recognise that youth-led organisations are very diverse in age and believe that this guidance is still relevant to those that include young people outside this age group.

Partnerships may look very different depending on who we are partnering with and what for, but the principles underpinning the partnerships are the same. This guidance makes some suggestions about how youth-led organisations might be different from other organisations that Plan partners with, and what we can do to build strong and effective partnerships with them.

The most important guidance is to be open to learning what the organisation/group is like and how it operates. The most important skill needed is **deep and empathetic listening and observation**. Ask yourself what your own prejudices and biases might be. If you find yourself thinking ‘well, that’s typical of young people!’ ask yourself what evidence you have for that. Be prepared to have your assumptions and your ideas of what an organisation can be challenged! Be FLEXIBLE and OPEN TO LEARNING – the way we do things is NOT the only right way.

We will engage effectively with organisations of children, youth and young activists; and learn to mitigate the risks this might bring.
100 MILLION REASONS

KEY STEP 1: IDENTIFYING PARTNERS AND DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS

1.1 Partner mapping



How might youth-led groups be different from other partners?

You may not have heard of a youth group or organisation if:

- Adults do not know about them.
- They don’t have formal registration.
- They use ways of communicating their presence that you are not connected to, e.g. youth-orientated social media platforms.
- They meet in different places to adult organisations.

As with all partnerships, being clear about the potential purpose of the partnership and why you need to partner before you start mapping is crucial.

Do an internet search.

Consider getting younger staff who are active on social media involved.

Ask your Youth Advisory Panel, youth groups and children/school clubs youth groups that you know.

Ask organisations that already have a track record of working with youth groups.

Look for organisations that are regarded by young people as representing them.

What could you do differently?



Things to consider



Do you have staff with experience and skills in working with youth?

Keep initial criteria to a minimum — don’t inadvertently exclude by using criteria such as financial management capacity

Have you identified youth groups/organisations that you haven’t heard of before? If not, try harder!

On first contact, be clear about the process of selecting partners – don’t build up false expectations.

Include all the youth groups you find out about.

Useful tools:
How to map a youth network

Youth Networking Tool

1.2 Finding out more

How might youth-led groups be different from other partners?



Youth groups/organisations may have different ways of communicating and organising to those you are used to:

They may not have an office or be available in Plan working hours.

Their policies and practices may not be written down.

They may be suspicious of people who contact them because they have had negative experiences of working with adults.

They may be uncomfortable in formal meetings.

Leadership and membership may be fluid and change often.

What could you do differently?



First contact could be through social media.

Ask them how, where and when they would like to meet/give further information.

Explain what you are doing and the selection process.

Ask open questions and listen to them – be clear about what you will do with the information they give you.

Answer their questions simply and honestly.

Don't assume that young people have less ability and competence than adults – ask them how they would best like to be presented with information about Plan.

Have information about Plan available in a variety of media.

Use simple jargon-free language to describe what Plan does.

Things to consider



There may not be any formal leadership.

Gender & inclusion – ask about the make up of the organisation, who do they represent? If there is more than one person present, make sure that everyone has a chance to speak.

Ask what you need to do to make sure all groups represented by the organisation are included at this stage.

Agreeing how long the meeting together will last may be helpful.

The young people will be looking at you – what picture of Plan are you giving by your clothing, mode of transport, gender and age mix, behaviour, selection of words and overall engagement?

KEY STEP 2: MUTUAL APPRAISALS

2.1 Mutual organisational assessment

How might youth-led groups be different from other partners?



Youth groups/organisations may organise themselves differently from other civil society organisations or they have chosen to have a very formal structure:

Their governance may be very informal or very formal.

Their policies and practices may not be written down.

They may have very different ideas from you about what makes a strong and legitimate organisation.

They may be suspicious of large organisations wanting sensitive information about them.

They might have had negative experiences of working with large local organisations or INGOs.

Start by sharing values and looking at where these connect.

Decide together what areas you are going to cover and why (including non-negotiables on both sides) and who will be involved – agree the questions you will ask together.

Focus more on quality of the work rather than systems.

Ask how they manage finance rather than asking for specific documents.

Mutuality: decide together where you are going to do the assessments – in each other's offices, in a neutral place.

Make sure there is equal time for the young people to ask questions about Plan International.

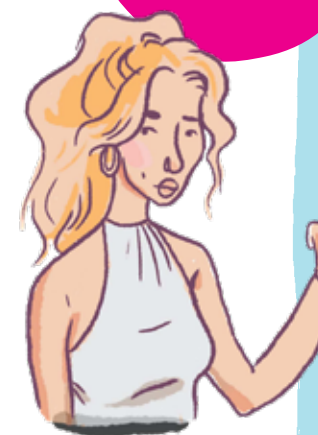
Doing a single activity together might be a better way of getting to know each other than a long written assessment.

Before carrying out mutual appraisal, make sure that (in)formal communication has already taken place and there is good understanding /rapport about both organisation.

What could you do differently?



Things to consider



Consider the purpose of the exercise – this is not about seeing whether the group/organisation is 'good enough' to work with Plan, it is about finding out more about each other and how you can work effectively together.

If you are going to work with a number of youth groups/organisations, it might be worth putting together an assessment in a quiz format that you can use as a basis for assessments.

Safeguarding – make sure you have discussed what this is and found out how they address it in their organisation, since being youth led organisation there might be risk associated with risky behaviours.

Who does the organisation/group want to represent? How are they doing this?

Ask critical questions about gender and inclusion – and be prepared to be asked them too. While many youth-led organisations are more diverse and sensitive to intersectionality than we are, they, like everyone may have blind spots.

2.2 Capacity Assessment

How might youth-led groups be different from other partners?



The capacities that youth groups/organisations need may be different from those of other civil society organisations. Young people may not have had exposure to different ways of organising or thought much about their future requirements – they may be more concerned with the here and now.

Youth organisations often have a large membership base (formal and informal) and thereby different and sometimes stronger accountability structures.

Youth organisations are sometimes not organised as the type of NGO plan normally partners with.

Spend time on surfacing the young peoples' aspirations.

Encourage them to learn from their peer organisations / groups those have excelled.

Don't impose your own idea of what a 'good' organisation should be like on them.

What could you do differently?



Things to consider



Consider potential risks and be open about them.

Avoid over emphasising compliance.

Be clear about Plan's non-negotiables but be prepared to invest in building the group's capacity to meet them.

Do the capacity assessment thoroughly and make sure it not only focuses on skills that are necessary to make the project a success, but also addresses their aspirations and opportunities for organisational growth more broadly.

2.3 Partners Strengthening / Capability reports and plans

How might youth-led groups be different from other partners?



Young people may get information and learn new skills in different ways.

Young people may have limited time to attend traditional face-to-face courses.

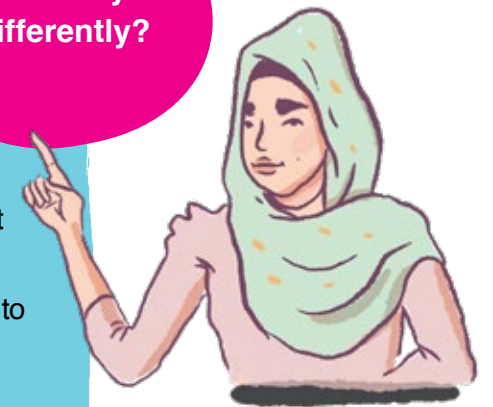
Long-term and complicated plans may seem daunting and boring.

Young people will have skills and capabilities that are not found in traditional assessment forms!

See how they are using ICT4D and social media /networks.

Young people often like to hear from and share experiences with other young people.

What could you do differently?



Ask how they have learnt new things/changed in the past and where they get their information from.

Listen to what they think they are good at and why.

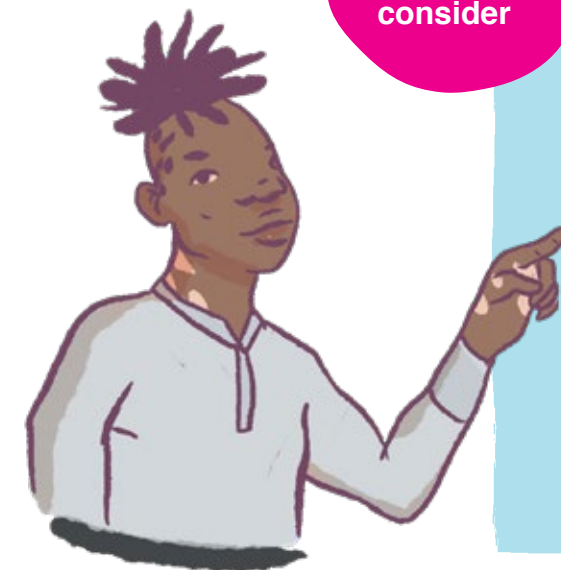
Introduce them to different ways of building capacity that they may not be familiar with.

Consider doing one thing at a time, then reviewing and deciding what to do next rather than having a long term plan.

Consider linking them with other similar groups (both nationally and internationally) to share learning.

Come up with clear areas where they can build the capacity of Plan International in short and long term.

Things to consider



Consider non-traditional ways of learning – social media, video, peer support.

How will they know that their capacity has been built? Consider how they want to measure progress and creative ways you could do this.

Ask them how they think Plan International should measure progress.

Think about how the youth-led group can share their skills and expertise best with Plan staff – this may not always be formal training.

Be realistic about how much Plan can support organisational development.

KEY STEP 3: ASSESSING RISKS

3.1 Risk assessment & mitigation strategy

How might youth-led groups be different from other partners?



Young people may have different attitudes to risk than Plan – or they may not have thought about risk at all.

Plan International may be in a position of power compared to the group/organisation – this brings risks for them that they need to consider.

The organisation/group may not have the financial systems and controls you usually require to grant money to them.

Taking people through situations that might occur rather than talking about risk in the abstract makes it easier to identify real risks.

Ask the question: what risks might you be taking by becoming a partner of Plan International? Be honest about the risks you feel you are taking in partnering with them and what you need to do to mitigate them.

Be prepared to take some risk when there will be a financial arrangement.

What could you do differently?



Things to consider

Don't overestimate the risks just because the organisation/group is organised differently from other partners – find out how they do things rather than checking if they do things the same way as you do.

Youth groups/organisations may not be organised like a larger NGO but often their accountability mechanisms are strong because they have strong legitimacy with their members.

When it comes to financial matters, little and often can be a good approach with simple reporting or compliance formalities.

Useful tools:
Grant making
to youth-led
organisations

3.2 Safeguarding

How might youth-led groups be different from other partners?



Although they are no longer considered as children, young people are vulnerable to abuse. However, the legislation protecting them is different and may be absent or inadequate.

Youth organisations often lack access to mainstream civil society networks which makes them more vulnerable in e.g. shrinking space contexts.

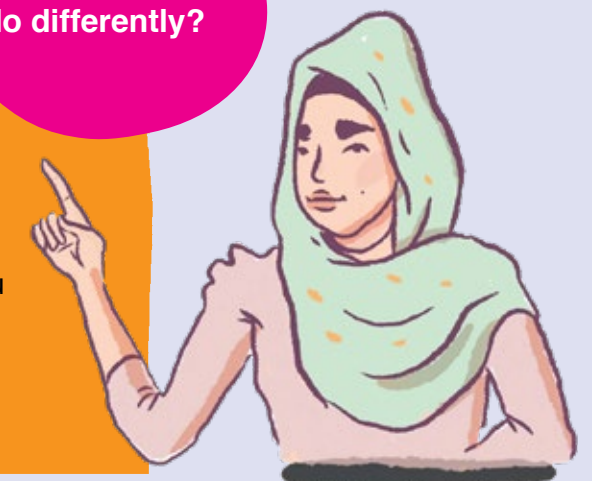
What could you do differently?

Be aware of the legislation around safeguarding young people (if any) in your context.

Talk sensitively to young people about the need for safeguarding children they interact with – and about how they look after themselves and keep safe.

Focus on what they can do rather than acting as though you will be protecting them.

Different genders and excluded groups may be affected differently/require different safeguarding measures.



Things to consider

There may be no separate legislation to protect young people – does legislation aimed at adults really address their needs and vulnerabilities?

Are there other organisations that have experience with safeguarding and supporting young people that you can draw on?



KEY STEP 4: SIGNING AGREEMENTS

Partnership Agreement / MoU development



How might youth-led groups be different from other partners?

The organisation/group may not be registered so a legally binding agreement may not be possible.

Young people may find formal legal language difficult to understand.

It may not be clear at the beginning how the partnership will develop and exactly what you will do together.

Decide together on the formality of the agreement needed for what you want to do together – a collaboration letter may be enough.

If the law or financial regulations require a formal agreement, look creatively at how you can achieve this. You could consider signing with a 'supporting' organisation but this should only be if no other option is possible.

Write the document in clear, simple language – use the local language if possible.

Consider writing the document together.

Allow flexibility but agree and be clear on minimum criteria that must be met on both sides.

Agree how decisions will be made and by whom.

Ensure that key corporate requirements (safeguarding, fraud clauses, code of conduct) are an integral part of the collaboration letter.

What could you do differently?



Things to consider

Make as long a commitment as you can.

You could have a flexible overarching document and then more specific 3 or 6-month workplans.

Who signs in a non-hierarchical organisation/group? If there is change of leadership in group / organisation or in Plan International, reiterate the letter of collaboration in meetings and make sure there is a common understanding of the purpose and nature of the partnership.



KEY STEP 5: MUTUAL OVERSIGHT

5.1 Communication Protocols



How might youth-led groups be different from other partners?

Young people may not be able to meet at regular times. They may prefer to communicate by phone, text or social media rather than by email or letter.

Ask how they would like to communicate and how often.

Agree how you will record and track decisions.

Make sure they can communicate through one or two people that they know and trust. If those people need to change, take time to rebuild the relationship.

Identify preferably young staff in Plan who will collaborate or communicate with them.

What could you do differently?



Things to consider

Don't jump to conclusions if things go wrong or people do not do what you have agreed. Sit down with them and find out why things are not working. Be prepared to tear everything up and start again.



5.2 Reporting



How might youth-led groups be different from other partners?

Young people may not want to read or write long reports.
Plan's ways of doing things may seem bureaucratic and a waste of time that could be spent actively doing things.

What could you do differently?



Agree together why reporting and reflecting on what you are doing is important and how it can improve action.

Make reporting part of a cycle of doing, learning and reflecting.

Agree together what needs to be reported on, why and how.

Keep it short – agree the minimum required.

Regular meetings might work better than written reports – agree the agenda together, document learning and decisions and plan next steps jointly.

Things to consider



What about using videos, images and emojis rather than words?

Podcasts might be a good way of reporting so people can listen on the go.

Let people use the language they are most comfortable with and pay for translation.

Consider graphic visuals for meeting reports.

As Plan staff you need to be open and flexible to make changes in Plan's requirements and processes for reporting.

KEY STEP 6: REGULAR FEEDBACK & ANNUAL REVIEWS

6.1 Feedback



How might youth-led groups be different from other partners?

Young people may not be confident to give honest feedback and may fear repercussions. This may be because of previous experience with other organisations or because they perceive a power imbalance because of differences in age, size of organisation or access to resources.

Tell them about the annual partner survey and show them that it is confidential.

Discuss other ways they could give feedback confidentially.

Make a commitment to treat complaints seriously.

Always respond to and show how you have taken into account the feedback you are given.

What could you do differently?



Things to consider



Consider developing a youth-friendly version of the partnership survey that is more visual and entertaining.

Apps that let you develop polls or quizzes may be a good way to get instant feedback from young people.

You could set up a mutual oversight group with representatives from both organisations.

6.2 Reviews

How might youth-led groups be different from other partners?

The differences are the same as for feedback and reporting (above).

Make the annual review as interactive as possible by co-creating them.

If possible and youth have time and interest, engage them in monitoring other Plan International projects.

Youth organisations/groups may enjoy meeting with other similar groups and be more forthcoming in their feedback if they can talk about it with others.

Be clear about what has been learnt and how this will change things going forward.

What could you do differently?



Things to consider



As 5.2 and 6.1 – polls, visuals, infographics and activities may work well to get people talking and engaged.

KEY STEP 7: EXIT & SUSTAINABILITY

7.1 Sustainability planning

How might youth-led groups be different from other partners?

The organisation/group may be very young and dynamic making it hard to plan for the long-term or be sure about how it will develop going forward.

Financial stability is very difficult to achieve.

Young people's organisations/groups may have high staff/member turnover as people get jobs, move to find work, have changes in their life circumstances.

Alternatively, some youth organisations end up being run by 'older' people because there is nowhere for young people to move on to.

Youth organisations are often member-based so member engagement is a key part of sustainability.

Encourage a practice of reflection or learning that will support the organisation's development. This should be an integral part of the reviewing process. This should include thinking about possible futures.

Support them to think deeply about what sustainability means for them and be prepared to support them to work to achieve this.

Make sure they participate in any proposal writing/project development – practice is important.

Go together to meet potential donors.

Provide extra support when key people leave.

Avoid decision-making which only involves one person from each organisation.

Include reflection on member engagement and include it in sustainability planning.

If possible establish seed funding for their sustainability and link them with potential partners for sustainability.

What could you do differently?

Things to consider

What will you do if:

A person beyond the age limit the organisation has set stays on as leader?

A small group of people begins to take power within the organisation?

Constant turnover of people makes it difficult to work together?

In all these cases, you will need to find sensitive ways of raising the issue with the organisation while making sure they make their own decisions about how to deal with the situation.

Discuss sustainability at each annual review – how long do they want to continue? What do they need in order to survive?

Consider starting with small levels of funding/activity and increasing as the organisation shows that it can manage financially and operationally.

Mentoring by experienced peers or respected elders can be a useful way of supporting growth and sustainability.

What is your role in building the sustainability of the organisation? How can you support without creating dependency?

7.2 Closure/ Exit

How might youth-led groups be different from other partners?

Young people who have experienced loss or desertion are vulnerable when a relationship ends suddenly.

It may be difficult to articulate at the beginning what a 'good ending' would be and there is a risk of dependency or sudden collapse of the organisation.

See 7.1

What could you do differently?

Always consider the future as well as the present – are you supporting autonomy and self-reliance or are you creating dependency?

Be honest and realistic about how long you can commit to supporting the organisation/group.

Encourage the group/organisation to build relationships with other organisations/donors that might support them.

Be clear about what the partnership is aiming to achieve and what success would look like – do this regularly, not just once.

At closure, review and get feedback from the organisation about how the partnership went and what Plan International could do better when working with other youth-led organisations. Build this learning into your practice..

Things to consider

Have a contingency plan for if a quick unplanned exit becomes necessary – this might be final grant to give the organisation time to find alternative funding or support from another agency.

If the organisation/group could get funding direct from the donor should Plan International still be acting as an intermediary?

Should we be encouraging donors to give funding to youth-led organisations directly? [The answer is yes!]

Grant management and financing
See Grantmaking to youth-led organisations



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