

Bringing Youth Perspectives into the Business of Connectivity

Guidance for mobile operators on incorporating young voices in their working practices

June 2025



GSMA

The GSMA is a global organisation unifying the mobile ecosystem to discover, develop and deliver innovation foundational to positive business environments and societal change. Our vision is to unlock the full power of connectivity so that people, industry and society thrive. Representing mobile operators and organisations across the mobile ecosystem and adjacent industries, the GSMA delivers for its members across three broad pillars: Connectivity for Good, Industry Services and Solutions and Outreach. This activity includes advancing policy, tackling today's biggest societal challenges, underpinning the technology and interoperability that make mobile work and providing the world's largest platform to convene the mobile ecosystem at the MWC and M360 series of events.

We invite you to find out more at [**www.gsma.com**](http://www.gsma.com)

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Foreword

For nearly two decades, the GSMA has been working with its mobile operator members on protecting and promoting young people's rights in relation to the digital environment.

In collaboration with the mobile operator community and our external partners, including organisations such as UNICEF, we have developed tools to promote online safety, guidance on working with child helplines and internet reporting hotlines, as well as information on steps that can be taken by mobile operators to minimise potential risks associated with the digital environment, whilst maximising the many opportunities enabled by connectivity.

In our Enhancing Children's Lives through Mobile report, the GSMA and UNICEF outlined the ways in which mobile operators can and are supporting a full range of children's rights across the "3Ps" of child rights: Protection (for example, from abuse), Provision (for example, to education) and Participation (for example, to have their views heard). It is the latter category that this document addresses. Children's right to be heard was enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the child in 1989. Policymakers are increasingly consulting with young people as they develop their approach to children and the digital environment, and there is a growing expectation that the private sector do the same.

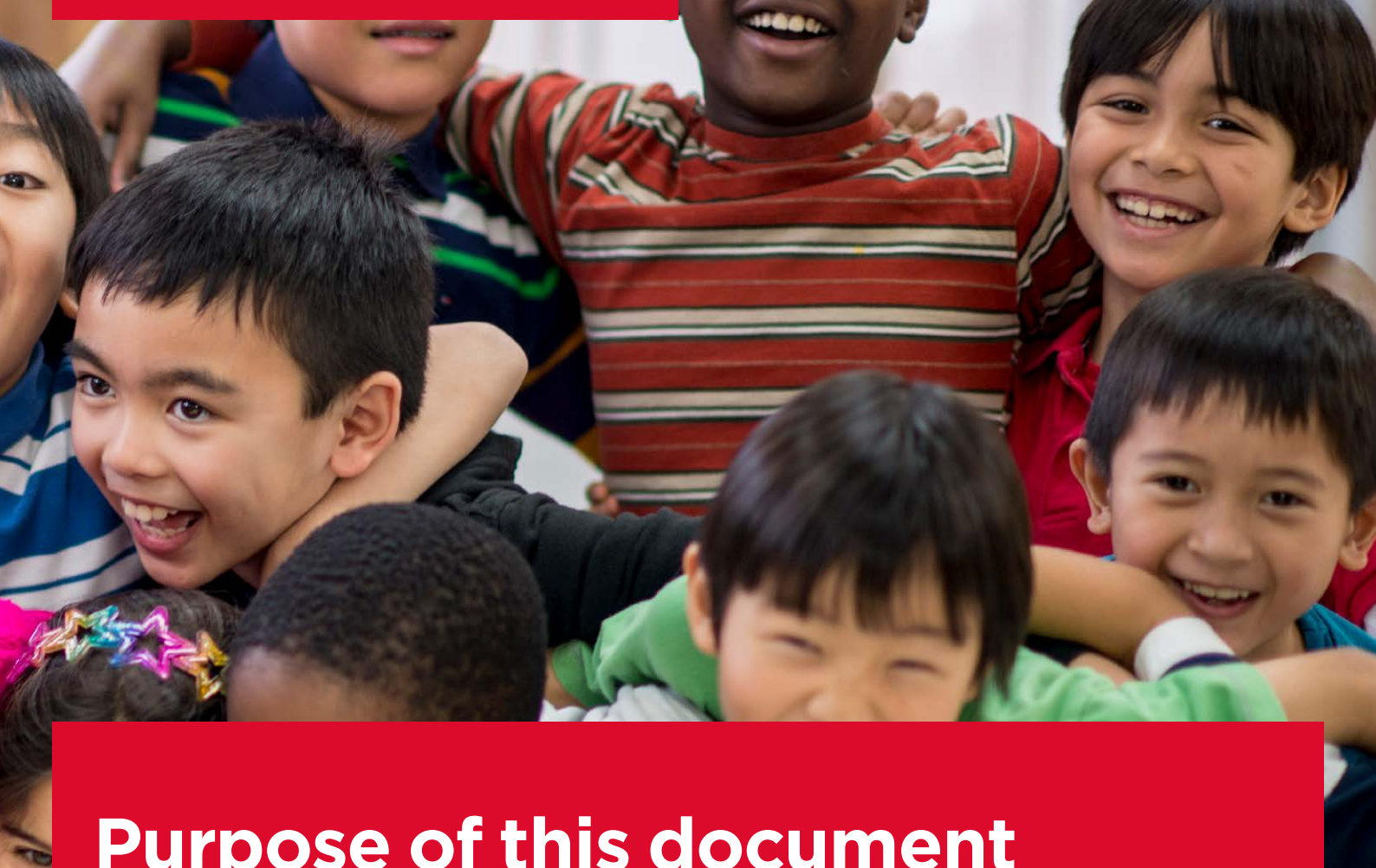
The more we understand about young people's experiences and priorities, the better we can serve their best interests. By harnessing their insights and creativity, we can find better, evidence-informed solutions when addressing issues of importance to them.

Knowing how to engage with young people can feel challenging for businesses. But there is a growing body of good practice examples which show how private sector organisations can engage with young people to gather their views and input, and then use these insights to inform and improve their business practices.

By listening to young people as essential stakeholders - whether as mobile users, global citizens or future employees - the mobile industry stands only to benefit from the richness of their insights and input. The GSMA looks forward to both supporting and learning from its members as we all continue our journey of bringing youth perspectives into the business of connectivity.

Natasha Jackson

Head of Public Policy and Consumer Affairs



Purpose of this document

There are several ways in which mobile operators can benefit from the perspectives and recommendations of children and young people. Mobile operators are:

- Corporates, whose policies – as employers, corporate citizens, and providers of products and services – have wide-ranging implications for children and young people;
- In the business of connectivity, in an era where young people spend a significant amount of time in the digital environment, form communities and raise their voices on matters of importance to them, in ways that have not been available to previous generations;
- The future employers of current children, and the employers of today's young professionals – and they want to attract and retain the brightest talent.

Asking children and young people about their needs and priorities, really listening to what they say, and then reflecting the learnings within business practices, will enable mobile operators to deliver more successfully across all of these areas.

However, as corporates, knowing how best to engage with children and young people may feel challenging. This document aims to support members of the mobile operator community who are taking their first steps on this journey. It outlines existing good practices and expectations for the successful delivery of youth participation initiatives. It also provides case studies and tips for youth participation, based on feedback from young people and child rights specialists during a Youth Participation co-creation workshop hosted by the GSMA.





Why listening to children and young people is important

Children's right to be heard was enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989. However, only recently has a more mainstream understanding and expectation of what this means emerged. Policymakers are increasingly consulting with young people in the creation of strategies and policies. From the inclusion of children at the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) ICT forum and the development of the European Commission's European strategy for a better internet for kids (BIK+) at regional level, to the national Age-Appropriate Design Codes in countries including the UK and Ireland, the input of young people has been key in guiding decision-makers on developing policies that meet the specific needs of children.

In 2021, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child published General Comment No. 25 on children's rights in relation to the digital environment. A General Comment is an authoritative document that gives guidance to governments on what is expected of them when applying the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to specific issues. Governments are then required to report on their progress. To inform General Comment No. 25, the views of 709 children from 28 countries across the world were collected, incorporated, and reflected in the document. The result is nuanced guidance that shows what children value about the digital environment as well as addressing their concerns.



Convention on the Rights of the Child: General comment No. 25 (2021) on children's rights in relation to the digital environment



The children consulted for the present general comment reported that digital technologies were vital to their current lives and to their future:

“By the means of digital technology, we can get information from all around the world”; “[Digital technology] introduced me to major aspects of how I identify myself”; “When you are sad, the Internet can help you [to] see something that brings you joy.”

During consultations, children expressed the view that the digital environment should support, promote and protect their safe and equitable engagement:

“We would like the government, technology companies and teachers to help us [to] manage untrustworthy information online”; “I would like to obtain clarity about what really happens with my data... Why collect it? How is it being collected?”; “I am ... worried about my data being shared.”

UN bodies, including UNICEF and ITU (International Telecommunications Union), and NGOs regularly incorporate the views of young people into the development of programmes through mechanisms including online consultations, youth summits, advisory groups and youth councils. Private sector activity is also evolving in this space. Organisations in the ICT industry, including mobile operators, platforms and social media companies, are increasingly consulting with young people on their digital needs, expectations and experiences. The insights inform approaches to areas such as online safety.

From connectivity to the climate crisis, young people are growing up in a world where issues and opportunities are very different from those experienced by today's public sector decision-makers and industry leaders. To advocate for change and raise their voices on matters of importance, young people are using the tools enabled by connectivity. These efforts include forming communities of like-minded individuals online, and organising social media campaigns and digital petitions.



Youth participation and the mobile industry

Models of Youth Participation

There are three main overarching categories of youth participation:



Consultative participation is research-led and adult-initiated. It recognises the value and importance of young people's perspectives, although there is no potential for young people to influence how their perspectives are used.



Collaborative participation is adult-initiated but involves partnering with children to co-create - with adults handing over some of the control, and empowering young people to influence both the process and the outcomes.



Youth-led participation is where children and young people are raising issues that they themselves have identified and selected. The adult role is that of facilitating and responding.

Mobile operators can benefit from or support every one of these forms of youth participation.

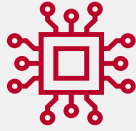
Consultative: Research-led

A number of mobile operators have already commissioned or supported research into specific

aspects of young people's experiences with mobile connectivity. This type of research has allowed them to:



Recognise the opportunities enjoyed and potential risks encountered by children online.



Understand young people's priorities and concerns in relation to the digital environment.



Learn how different young people experience connectivity depending on factors such as geography or gender.



Appreciate the impacts of not having access to connectivity.

Findings help inform operators' own initiatives, such as online safety programmes or investing in partnerships to address specific contributing factors to the digital usage gap, and support advocacy work with policymakers and other stakeholders.

Telia Company: Listening to the views of children

Telia Company's Children's Advisory Panel initiative is run in partnership with child rights organisations from across the Nordics and Baltics. Through the Children's Advisory Panel, Telia has listened to the views of 12,000 children, aged 10-18, on a range of subjects including gaming, misinformation, privacy, and digital learning during the COVID lockdowns.

It describes the aim of this initiative as "to further develop our understanding of how we as a company can improve our own approach to children as users of our technology, and to contribute to the ICT industry's and society's understanding of children as online citizens"

Explore the full range of insights provided by Telia's CAP kids [here](https://www.teliacompany.com/en/articles/childrens-participation)¹



¹ <https://www.teliacompany.com/en/articles/childrens-participation>



Collaborative: Co-creation

By involving young people in the creation of resources for their peers, it is possible to design according to the right needs from the outset. Effectively this means that

communications can be relevant and in youth-friendly language, and propositions and tools will be effective and meet the specific needs of the target demographic.

Vodafone Foundation & Save the Children: Co-creating safer digital futures with young people

Vodafone Foundation and Save the Children have formed a strategic partnership to launch a Europe-wide programme aimed at strengthening digital skills and resilience among children aged 9 to 16. Central to the initiative is the co-creation of digital safety lesson plans, shaped by the voices of young people and informed by new research into children's experiences online. A newly established Digital Wellbeing Youth Board, led by Save the Children, will guide the development of the programme to ensure it addresses the real needs and concerns of young people in a fast-changing digital landscape.

The programme, launching in September 2025 across eight European countries, will be integrated into Vodafone Foundation's existing Skills Upload Junior initiative, which has already reached over 10 million children. It will offer bespoke educational content that goes beyond technical skills, covering topics such as online safety, digital rights, and ethical behaviour. The programme also includes



support for educators, the creation of culturally relevant materials, and the provision of resources to schools, particularly those serving marginalised communities. By combining Vodafone's digital learning expertise with Save the Children's leadership in child protection and wellbeing, the partnership aims to create inclusive, safe and empowering online environments for children.

Laaha (UNICEF): A safe digital space co-created with and for girls

Laaha is a virtual safe space designed by UNICEF with girls and young women to provide reliable, rights-based information on health, relationships, and protection from violence including technology-facilitated violence. Created by UNICEF and partners, Laaha was shaped through consultations with over 500 girls across humanitarian settings like Iraq, Lebanon and Venezuela. Available in over 15 languages, it includes more than 140 interactive modules, safety features like quick-exit options, a user forum, and a chatbot - all built in direct response to what girls said they needed.



Caroline's perspective (adult lead) - GBV Specialist, UNICEF

Designing Laaha through co-creation was both humbling and transformative. As the product owner for this initiative, I came in with experience - but what I gained from working with girls was deeper insight, clarity, and confidence. Their feedback shaped everything: from asking for bright, empowering visuals to prioritizing anonymity and community connection. It reminded me that true safety - especially online - isn't something we define for girls - it's something

we build with them. Consulting girls directly not only improved the platform's relevance and usability, but also built trust and accountability into our process. Their ideas challenged assumptions and pushed our team toward more inclusive, human-centred design. Laaha became more than a product; it became a shared commitment. For me, this journey reaffirmed the value of listening first, designing second - and always centring the voices of those we serve.

Leen's perspective (service user and advocate) - 17 year-old girl from Lebanon

Born in Lebanon, learning often felt like grasping at threads in the dark - but worth the chase. I was lucky to find sources of knowledge, including Laaha, but many girls didn't. That's why I see Laaha as the person who turned on a light. I remember hearing, "We talked with girls across the world and listened to their needs. We tried to put all the information they're scared to ask for." After a few weeks of exploring, I found everything girls need - especially the topics

we're taught to stay silent about. Things considered taboo in many countries, even though they are just scientific facts. Those silences became words, videos, and activities. Laaha is a safe zone for girls and women to explore their questions about health, violence, and relationships. It is free, supportive, and made to empower us. With Laaha, I feel stronger and more confident - and I believe we are becoming a generation that knows and owns its power.

Youth-led: Supporting young changemakers in the digital environment

From the coordinated international Fridays for Future movement through to young individuals using mobile and social media platforms to advocate for change,

examples of agentive young people harnessing the power of the digital environment are both widespread and inspiring.

“Our generation has grown up with new information readily available at our fingertips. Despite some of its negative effects on our culture, social media has let us access important data with ease, allowing us to be more informed than ever. And, just as importantly, the era of social media has given American youth an incredibly powerful tool: an outlet to millions of people all over the world at our fingertips.”

Glimmer of Hope, written by the founders of the US-based student-led “*March for Our Lives*” movement.

Youth-led participation is instigated by young people themselves. So, what is the role of mobile operators in this space?

In general terms, existing mobile operator workstreams that aim to close the digital divide and promote the safe and responsible use of the digital environment by young people are vital aspects of supporting youth-led participation. Young people can only use the digital environment as confident and agentive citizens if they have meaningful access to connectivity and know how to navigate the internet safely – for example, by knowing how

to find information that is reliable and how to keep themselves safe when engaging with communities online.

In addition, a number of mobile operators have invested in programmes specifically designed to empower young people with digital skills that enable them to advocate for change. These include initiatives such as coding programmes allowing young people to create webpages or simple games (Orange SuperCoders) and digital storytelling workshops (Vodacom / UNICEF²) to teach young people how to use their mobile devices to make short films.

Ongoing advisory groups

In addition to one-off consultations and engagements with children and young people on specific issues or initiatives, organisations have also begun investing in ongoing youth advisory groups.

These groups work with organisations on a more regular basis, sharing insights into products, services and solutions, as well as corporate policies.

2 https://www.gsma.com/solutions-and-impact/connectivity-for-good/public-policy/mpower-youth/gsma_study/amplifying-young-peoples-voices-on-local-and-global-issues/

Telstra Foundation Youth Advisory Council



Telstra Foundation's work focuses on empowering and supporting children and young people to thrive in safe, inclusive digital spaces. At the heart of this work is a deep commitment to listening to and amplifying young people's voices.

This commitment comes to life through initiatives like the [Australian Youth Digital Index](https://australiandyouthdigitalindex.com/)³, which explores how young people experience the digital world; through partnerships grounded in co-design with children and young people; and through the Youth Advisory Council, which ensures a strong youth voice informs the Foundation's direction.

The Foundation's Youth Advisory Council is made up of over 20 young people aged 12-18, representing a diverse range of communities and regions across Australia. Council members help the Foundation better understand how digital technology is showing up in young people's lives. They provide valuable feedback on projects, contribute innovative ideas, and create content that resonates with their peers.

Key learnings from working with the Council include the importance of offering opportunities for self-development, recognising and remunerating young people for their time and contributions, and selecting projects where their insights can lead to meaningful change. These lessons are captured in their eight Youth Participation Principles, outlined in their [Youth Advisory Council 2024 Impact Report](https://telstrafoundation.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/TF-YAC-ImpactReport-2024.pdf)⁴.

You can learn more about the Telstra Foundation Youth Advisory Council [here](https://telstrafoundation.com/youth-advisory-council/)⁵.



It is not just mobile operators that are proactively seeking young people's perspectives and input in relation to connectivity and the digital environment.

Platforms are also increasingly consulting directly with young people as core users of their services.

TikTok's Global Youth Council



TikTok launched its Global Youth Council in 2023. Their first cohort included 15 teens aged 14-18, from Brazil, France, Indonesia, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico, Morocco, the UK, and the USA.

To facilitate the Youth Council meetings, TikTok partners with a specialist agency that has expertise in online safety, research and youth participation. The Youth Council has provided feedback on safety tools and resources, reviewed products and policies that are in development, and shared thoughts on broader questions relating to online safety and well-being.

The Youth Council engages directly with leaders within TikTok, so that the young members have their perspectives listened to and acknowledged at

a senior level within the business, and so that the leaders have a channel through which to discuss issues that are important to young people as well as get their input on solutions.



³ <https://australiandyouthdigitalindex.com/>

⁴ <https://telstrafoundation.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/TF-YAC-ImpactReport-2024.pdf>

⁵ <https://telstrafoundation.com/youth-advisory-council/>



Starting out: how to begin engaging with young people

Inviting young people into the corporate environment may seem like a daunting prospect. On the one hand young people need to be treated as equals – for they are the experts on their own lived experience, as well as collaborators and co-creators. On the other hand, they are coming into an adult working environment where they need to feel safe, comfortable, and supported in understanding what is being asked of them and in contributing effectively.

Operators that do not yet have the relevant expertise in-house can partner with specialist organisations that can take responsibility for safeguarding protocols, recruit young people and have expertise in facilitating workshops with children and young people.

When undertaking initiatives which involve consulting or co-creating with young people, the Lundy Model of Participation is a commonly used framework which could help mobile operators plan for effective youth participation.

The Lundy Model of Child Participation

The Lundy Model of Child Participation was first published by Professor Laura Lundy in 2007⁵. It is often used to support youth engagement in child-centric settings such as schools and has also been used internationally by organisations including UNICEF, the European Commission and the World Health Organisation.

The Lundy Model comprises four interrelated conditions that need to be in place for participation to be meaningful. These conditions are as follows:



5 Lundy L. Voice is not enough: Conceptualising Article 12 of the CRC, British Educational Journal. 2007 Dec;33(6)(6):927-942



Examples of the types of supporting questions mobile operators might consider when planning and

executing youth engagement initiatives or workshops using the Lundy Model could include the following:



SPACE

Is the location appropriate for young people? – will they feel welcome and safe? Have you taken steps to ensure young participants feel comfortable engaging freely in discussions? For example, what is the best size of group for the discussions? Have you allowed enough time to make sure all the young people have the chance to be heard?



VOICE

Is the information provided in language that the young people can fully understand? Has the facilitator planned youth-friendly activities to support young people in developing and sharing their views?



AUDIENCE

Are the right people in the room to listen to the young people’s inputs, or is there a clear plan for communicating findings onwards to the relevant people to inform their work? Have you explained clearly to the young people who will benefit from their views, and how these views will be fed into the decision-making process?



INFLUENCE

Did you explain to young people the parameters of their influence? Have you fed back to young people how their input affected the outcomes? Have you explained to them the reasons why not all of their recommendations were used?

Examples of how other organisations have framed supporting questions can be found in the Further Information section at the end of this document.

GSMA's experience

In 2024, the GSMA hosted a workshop that brought together young people, child rights experts, NGOs and academia, as well as mobile operators. The GSMA partnered with a specialist youth participation organisation – Participation People – who recruited the young people, took care of safeguarding considerations and worked with the GSMA to devise a workshop that was fun, engaging and informative for all participants.

The goal of the workshop was to enable members of the mobile operator community to gain firsthand experience of working with young people in a corporate setting, as well as to generate learnings on how to incorporate young voices into the working practices of mobile industry organisations.

Insights from the experience are reflected throughout this document. In addition, the following top tips and key considerations for meaningful youth participation were generated by the participants of the workshop, specifically for this audience:



Don't come up with excuses not to start

Instead, make informed decisions on what kind of engagement your organisation is ready for. If you're not ready for co-creation, start with consultation. It is okay to start with the lower hanging fruit – just start somewhere, and build from there.

WORK WITH PARTNERS

If your organisation doesn't yet have the experience needed to engage directly with young people, work with specialist partners to help inform safeguarding processes and develop good working practice – and learn from them as you work.



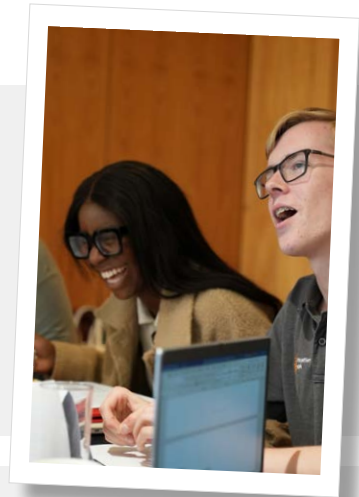
Don't assume

Don't assume all young people are the same; don't assume all young people use connectivity in the same way; don't assume that young people know everything about technology; don't assume what young people do or don't know. Don't assume – ask!



Don't engage with young people without a clear 'why'

Have a vision and a defined mission with a problem to be solved. "The best projects are the ones where there is a clear ask - where they know what they don't know" (young workshop participant).



Empower young people with context and access

Explain how you got to the point of needing their input; if something has been tried and has not worked, share this information; is the person responsible for the issue / initiative at hand in the room? - don't keep young people isolated from the ultimate decision-makers.



AVOID
TOKENISM

Don't ask for young people's input if you are not prepared to listen; if you are co-creating resources, be ready to share decision-making power with your young collaborators.



Don't ask or expect young people as individuals to speak for all young people

Seek out perspectives from a diverse range of young people.



*Don't misrepresent
young people's
views*

Don't cherry pick; don't angle what young people have said to fit your agenda – sometimes initial aims of a project can bias what is 'heard'.



*Explain to young
people how their views
will be used*

Provide feedback, share the outcomes. Don't shy away from telling young people that not all ideas will be acted on; take the time to explain why some proposals cannot be actioned.



*Be flexible when
engaging with
young people*

Allow for unplanned or unexpected inputs.



**PLAN
REALISTICALLY**

Don't underestimate the expertise, resources and time needed for meaningful youth engagement; be ready to invest in all of these for the best outcomes.





Further Information and GSMA Contacts

Further reading on the Lundy Model

Participation People summary of the Lundy Model

https://participationpeople.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Compressed-PP-_-Lundy-Model-Explained-2.pdf

UNICEF/ European Commission: Guidance on Child and Adolescent Participation as part of Phase III of the preparatory action for a European Child Guarantee – section 1.6 focuses on the Lundy Model

https://www.unicef.org/eca/media/19426/file/Child%20and%20Adolescent%20Participation%20in%20the%20CG%20Phase%20III_Version%201.0-Dec2021.pdf

UNICEF UK's use of the Lundy Model to improve pupil participation

https://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2024/05/Lundy-Model-Handout_RRSA_May-2024.pdf

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