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YOUTH-LED FUNDING TOOLKIT FOR LOCAL AREAS

"The voices you hear make the changes you see."

Yash, 18, one of the young people who designed this toolkit

Money for young people, decided with young people. A practical guide for councils, charities and local partners who set up or run funding for young people, and for the young people who help decide where it goes.

Co-designed with twelve young people aged 14 to 18 from across the UK and adults from DCMS, Young Manchester, Libraries Rising, HUDL Youth Development Agency and the Blagrave Trust. Tested with councils, funders and youth organisations.

Written by Participation People for the Department for Digital Culture, Media and Sport, as part of Youth Matters, your National Youth Strategy. Funded by UK Government.

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START HERE

WHAT THIS TOOLKIT IS FOR

This toolkit is for the people who set up and run money for young people: council officers, and equally the charities, community groups and local partners who hold or give out funding. It is also for the young people who help decide where that money goes.

It helps you move from asking young people what they think to deciding with them. It covers the whole funding journey, from who gets asked to be involved to how anyone knows the money made a difference, and it gives you the tools to do each stage: an example application, a scoring sheet, a "no" message worth receiving, a communication commitment for your website, a briefing for every adult in the room.

It sits inside a bigger expectation. Youth Matters, the National Youth Strategy, sets out to "put young people back in the driving seat of their own lives" and makes co-design with young people a condition of DCMS youth funding. This toolkit is the practical way of meeting that expectation when the decision is about money.

It works at any size

The examples in this toolkit range from Salford's £1 Friday-night pot to Southwark's £1.15 million fund and the 1% of Scottish council budgets that go through participatory budgeting. The five tests and the eight stages are the same whether the decision is about a £300 trip, a piece of equipment, a year of activities, a commissioned service, a capital project or a multi-year programme with paid staff. What changes is the time you give each stage and how much of the process young people run themselves. For a small decision, use the short versions of the tools; for a large one, the stages show you where to add the extra checks without taking the decision away from young people.

How you know it is youth-led

Young people's power in a funding decision varies more than the labels suggest. A youth panel can be binding or decorative; a youth vote can reach a town or a youth club. So this toolkit does not ask what your model is called. It asks whether it passes five tests, written by the young people who designed it: young people were in the room when the money, the criteria and the dates were set; a 14-year-old could take part with the support they would normally have; every stage comes with a date and every answer with a reason; adults act as coaches, not bosses; and the money keeps going, visibly, until something has changed. Section 3 has the tests. If your process fails them, this toolkit will help you fix it. If it passes, say so, in writing, and publish the sentence in tool 12.

Who made it

Twelve young people aged 14 to 18 from across the UK designed this toolkit over three online workshops in September and October 2026, facilitated by Participation People. They worked alongside an adult design group from the Department for Digital Culture, Media and Sport, Young Manchester, Libraries Rising, HUDL Youth Development Agency and The Blagrave Trust, who tested every draft against what actually happens inside councils, funders and youth organisations.

Around the workshops we went looking for the evidence. We interviewed adults and young people one to one, including Camden Giving on its resident and young people's panels, and TJ McKie, who sat on Newcastle City Council's youth panel and talked to us through StreetGames. A call-out across the sector brought more than 40 people and organisations forward, and with them real working documents from councils and funders who already do this: Manchester City Council's panel training and scoring sheet, shared by Youth Focus North West alongside its brief on councils across the North West; Shared Future CIC's Choose for Cheetham report; The Listening Fund's resources on sharing power with young people; and written contributions from The National Lottery Community Fund and BBC Children in Need. A discovery and evidence review read more than 60 published sources, from the Gannochy Trust's Youth Panel Fund to Camden Giving's own participatory grant-making toolkit. Everyone named or quoted was sent the passages that mention them and asked to check them before publication.

Everything in quotation marks is a young person's own words, with their first name. Section 12 explains how it was built and how to do the same thing locally.

TWO DOORS

Door 1 – "I'm an adult setting up or running a fund." Read this section, then section 2 (the 5 things adults forget), then pick the nearest example in section 4 and follow the 8 stages in section 5. The tools are in section 6.

Door 2 – "I'm a young person." Go to the young person's page. It is one page, and tells you what you should be given, what you can ask for, and what to do if you are being aired.

There is also an easy read guide

Youth-Led Funding: the easy read guide is a six-page version of this toolkit in short sentences, with the words to know, the eight steps and what you can ask for. It is published alongside this toolkit as a separate PDF, so it can be printed and handed out on its own.

DOOR 1 - FOR ADULTS SETTING UP OR RUNNING A FUND

Before you read on, answer three questions honestly:

1. **How much money, and whose is it?** Is it yours to delegate, or does someone above you keep the final say? If you don't know, find out now. The young people you involve will ask, and this toolkit will make you say it in writing (stage 5).
2. **Which example looks closest to what you have in mind?** Section 4 shows four ways of doing it, each with a real place that has done it, and a few that fit none of the four. Most local areas blend two.
3. **Have you read the five things adults forget?** Communication, the adult role, and time and pay (section 2). If you only read one section, read that one.

The applicant's journey - a design standard

The young people who designed this toolkit were given £60,000 to give out in grants of £500 to £5,000 in a made-up place, and asked to design how a young person applies.

First they designed how to make it impossible for a 14-year-old: bank accounts, references, essays, jargon, "a website straight out of 2007", nobody to ask. Then they flipped every one into a rule.

This is what a young applicant should see and hear at each step. If your process does not do this, the young people who built this would say it isn't ready.

Step	What the applicant should get
Hear about it	They find it where they already are: school and college, youth clubs and youth organisations, posters and notice boards, the organisations they already belong to, a web search that actually finds it. Not social media alone: "not every young person is on LinkedIn 24/7, believe it or not" (Kaiden), and under-16 social media restrictions in the UK, are incoming for 2027.
Get help	• A named person, an actual human, with a phone number and an email, who replies within the time you have published. • A drop-in or a Q&A event where they can hear from young people who did it before. • A bookable 1-to-1 for anyone with additional needs. • An example of a good answer. • A trusted adult who can take calls during and after school hours.
Apply	7 to 10 questions, about 10 minutes, with a word count or time limit on each so nobody feels they have to write an essay. A choice of written, voice note, video, in-person conversation or drawing, and never forced into one: "if they make me do a video and I'm not feeling it, I give up" (Kaiden). Plain words; every term explained. An open box to add anything the form didn't ask. No references, no fees, no minimum income, no track record. If you want to know more, a 15-to-20-minute low-key conversation, not an interview.
Wait	An automatic text or email the moment they submit, with the date they will hear by. An update the day that date moves, with the reason. Never more than two months; a week is what they asked for. Tell everyone how many applied.
Hear back	Yes or no on the day promised, with a reason either way. A yes comes with a call about what happens next. A no comes with what was good, what would make it a yes next time, other places to try, and an invitation to get involved with what was funded. "You don't improve from being aired" Abigail.

One thing you must never ask for: anything that makes a young person think “why do they want to know that?” — their faith, gender, sexuality, address, school, or their parents’ income. If you need something to run the fund, say what it’s for. If you want to know who applies, ask separately and make it optional.

The journey map

Eight stages, one question each, and who usually holds the power.

The colours come from the young people's own assessment of where power sits today: red where adults decide, green where young people get real power, amber where it is mixed.

The point of the toolkit is to move more of it to green, and to be honest about what stays red and why.

	Stage	The question	Who usually decides
1	Involving young people	Who gets asked to be involved, and how?	Adults (red)
2	Preparing to make decisions	What do young people need before they are asked to decide?	Adults (red)
3	Designing an accessible process	Could a 14-year-old actually apply?	Young people (green)
4	Assessing applications	How do we judge fairly?	Mixed (amber)
5	Making decisions	Who decides, and how much power do they really have?	Adults (red)
6	Reviewing and learning	What happens when it doesn't work?	Mixed (amber)
7	Communicating decisions	How do people hear yes or no?	Adults (red)
8	Accountability and impact	How do we know it made a difference, and who checks?	Adults (red)

Every stage page in section 5 has the same shape: what goes wrong, what good looks and feels like, a checklist you can test yourself against, a box for the young person, and a short table showing what is due at that stage and how it changes under each example model.

At the end of each stage there is a link to the next, and to the tools you need.

The journey map as a graphic, and the one-page summary for adults. Both are printable on their own.

JOURNEY MAP

THE FUNDING JOURNEY: 8 STAGES

Eight stages, one question each, and who usually holds the power today.

Key:

- Adults decide
- Mixed
- Young people get real power

The colours are the young people's own assessment. The point of this toolkit is to move more of it to green, and to be honest about what stays red and why.

1 INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE

Who gets asked to be involved, and how?

2 PREPARING TO MAKE DECISIONS

What do young people need before they're asked to decide?

3 DESIGNING AN ACCESSIBLE PROCESS

Could a 14-year-old actually apply?

The one stage where young people said they're usually allowed to help.

4 ASSESSING APPLICATIONS

How do we judge fairly?

5 MAKING DECISIONS

Who decides, and how much power do they really have?

6 REVIEWING AND LEARNING

What happens when it doesn't work?

7 COMMUNICATING DECISIONS

How do people hear yes or no?

8 ACCOUNTABILITY AND IMPACT

How do we know it made a difference, and who checks?

Youth-Led Funding Toolkit for Local Areas - Youth Matters, your National Youth Strategy

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WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

For the people who set up and run money for young people: councils, charities, community groups and local partners. The same journey the young people get, from your side.

AT EACH STAGE, MAKE SURE YOU...

If your process fails these, this toolkit will help you fix it. If it passes, say so in writing.

1 Involving young people

Publish who you're looking for ("no experience needed" included), the dates and the pay before you recruit. Advertise where young people actually are.

2 Preparing to make decisions

Send the pack at least a week ahead, in plain English. Run a pre-meeting. Explain what young people's decision will count for. Pay for prep time, not just meeting time.

3 Designing an accessible process

At least two ways to apply, and never force a video. No more than ten questions. Plain English. Test it with a young person who has never applied.

4 Assessing applications

Publish the criteria and weightings before you open. The same criteria for everyone, with a "what we'd tell the applicant" column. Young assessors trained, paid and in the majority.

5 Making decisions

Publish one sentence before the round opens: is young people's decision binding, a recommendation or a score, and who can change it? If an adult overrides it, explain in writing within a week.

6 Reviewing and learning

Run a pre-mortem before you start. Review every round with young people within a month. If anything is paused or stopped, tell them the same day, with the reason.

7 Communicating decisions

Every no comes with a reason, what would make it a yes and where else to try. Give a yes the same care. Send it on the day you promised.

8 Accountability and impact

Make a report-back to young people a condition of every grant. Publish a plain "what changed" page. Say what happens when the money ends, before it ends.

NEVER ASK FOR

References, a bank account, a track record, or anything that makes a young person think "why do they want to know that?"

THE FIVE THINGS ADULTS FORGET

- **Communication**. "Silence is the biggest problem, and young people have the right to know."
- **The adult role**. Coaches, not bosses. Ask before you tell, and make it easy to say "I don't understand".
- **Time and pay**. Information at least a week ahead. If you can't pay, say so up front.
- **Know why, and be known.** "You can't be a stranger in the community you want to help."
- **Facilitation and safeguarding.** The adult's job is to bring in the perspectives the room hasn't thought of yet, to stop groupthink, not to steer the result.

FIVE TESTS, FROM THE YOUNG PEOPLE

- Designed with young people: they're in the room when the money, criteria and dates are set.
- Accessible and inclusive: a 14-year-old could take part with the support they'd normally have.
- Feedback at every stage: every stage has a date, and every answer has a reason.
- Adults act as coaches, not bosses: no decision is overridden without saying so and why.
- Consistent action until it's complete: it keeps going until something has changed, and you can show what.

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DOOR 2 - FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

You have been asked to help decide where money goes. Maybe on a panel, maybe in a vote, maybe in a group that holds its own budget. This page is short on purpose. It tells you what you should be given, what you can ask for, and what to do if you're being aired.

"Being aired" is when you say something and get no response. It is Kaiden's phrase, borrowed from basketball: you take a shot and it misses. The whole toolkit exists to stop it.

You should be given...	Before you agree to anything
The dates	When each stage happens, how long it will take, and what happens if a date moves. If nobody can tell you, ask why.
A named person	Someone you can message with a question and get a reply from, not a shared inbox or a chatbot.
The information, early	The applications, the criteria, what the money's for and how much there is, at least a week before you have to decide anything.
A pre-meeting	Time to meet the other young people, go through the words you don't know, and look at an example before the real thing.
The honest line about power	Whether your decision is final, a recommendation, or part of a score, and exactly who can change it and why. Written down, before the round opens.
Pay, or an honest reason why not	Your time, ideas and expertise are worth something. If the organisation can't pay, they should say so up front and offer what they can. Never let it be called volunteering when it is work.
A reason with every answer	Every applicant hears why. So do you, if an adult changes something you decided.
A report back	What the money did, in the end. You helped choose it; you get to see what changed.
More than one way to take part	A choice of how you join in - in person, online, in writing, by voice note or through someone you trust - and the adjustments you need to take part fully. If the only option is a workshop in a room on a weekday evening, you can ask for another way.

What you can ask for

If you are being aired - you've asked and nothing comes back - say it in those words to the named person. If there is no named person, that is the first thing to ask for.

If it still doesn't come back, this toolkit says the organisation has failed stage 7 of its own process, and section 7 tells them what to do about it.

What good looks and feels like at each stage is in the "what you can ask for" box on every stage page in section 5. It is the same list the adults get, flipped the other way round. The one-page version is below.

WHAT YOU CAN ASK FOR

For young people who have been asked to help decide where money goes. The same journey the adults get, flipped your way round.

AT EACH STAGE, YOU CAN ASK FOR...

If you have never done anything like this, that is a reason to be chosen, not a reason not to be.

1 Involving young people

What the role is, how long it takes, when, what you'll be paid and who else is there, before you say yes. If you weren't picked, why.

2 Preparing to make decisions

The applications and criteria at least a week early. A pre-meeting where nobody minds you asking what a word means. Time to meet the other young people first.

3 Designing an accessible process

To apply in the way that suits you, and in bits. An example of a good answer. Help from an adult if you need it, and it shouldn't count against you.

4 Assessing applications

To see the criteria before you score, and what your score counts for. A column to write what you'd tell the applicant. To say the criteria are wrong.

5 Making decisions

In writing, before you start: is this final, a recommendation or a score, and who can change it? To choose how far into the hard decisions you go, and to change your mind.

6 Reviewing and learning

To be in the review. To know what changed because of what you said. To hear bad news from a named person on the day, not from the local paper.

7 Communicating decisions

The reason. What would have made it a yes. Where else to try, and who to talk to. If it's a yes: what happens now, and when.

8 Accountability and impact

What the money did, on a page you can read. To visit what was funded. To be told what happens next year before it's decided.

IF YOU'RE BEING AIRED *(you've asked and nothing comes back)*

Say it in those words to the named person. If there is no named person, that is the first thing to ask for. If it still doesn't come back, the organisation has failed its own process, and this toolkit says you can say so.

YOU SHOULD BE GIVEN

- The dates for every stage, and what happens if one moves.
- A named person who replies, not a shared inbox or a chatbot.
- The information at least a week before you decide anything.
- A pre-meeting, and time to meet the other young people.
- The honest line about power (final, recommendation or score), written down before the round opens.
- Pay, or an honest reason why not. Your time is worth something.
- A reason with every answer, including if an adult changes something you decided.
- A report back on what the money did.

ADULTS AS COACHES, NOT BOSSES

- A coach makes it easy to say "I don't understand", and never makes you feel less competent for asking.
- A coach asks before they tell. A boss tells you what to do and keeps the final say.
  A coach writes down what happened to your decision, and why. A boss lets your input "only ever be advisory".
- Hard decisions are never put on you by default. If you want to be part of them, you can, with support, and you can step back any time.
- You are never the only young person on an adult panel.
- If any of this isn't happening, say so. The adults have a page that tells them the same thing.

Youth-Led Funding Toolkit for Local Areas - Youth Matters, your National Youth Strategy

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1. WHY THIS EXISTS

THE HEADLINES

The young people who designed this toolkit were asked to imagine it is October 2027 and a local paper is running a story about a council that used it. These are the headlines they wrote. They are the standard this toolkit, and any area using it, should be measured against.

- **The voices you hear make the changes you see.** - Yash. "Never thought our voices would make an impact, but here we are. Not complaining."
- **Real support: when young people are part of the process.** - Isla. "We have proven how capable young people are when they are so often underestimated."
- **From toolkit to action: council brings fresh ideas from young people to local services.** - Jasmeen. "It was good to see that our ideas were actually listened to and could make a real difference to the services we use."
- **From young voices to real change: council transforms how it listens to young people.** - Abigail
- **Young people are the financial agents of the future.** - Ama
- **Young people are the pioneers delivering change for the future.** - Priscilla
- **Young people in [your area] delivered a £10 million restoration grant.** - Kaiden, with a strapline from Hamilton: "Do not throw away your shot."

A NOTE FROM THE DEPARTMENT FOR DIGITAL, CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Young people are experts in their own lives. They understand the opportunities they need, the challenges they face and the changes that would make the biggest difference in their communities. That is why DCMS wants funding for young people to be shaped by young people, rather than decided solely on their behalf.

This principle sits at the heart of the Government's Youth Matters strategy, which aims to put young people in the driving seat of decisions that affect them. Youth Matters makes clear that it will be *"a requirement of DCMS youth funding for programmes to be co-designed with young people"*. It also sets the expectation that local authorities receiving youth funding can show that *"young people have driven and supported the decisions"*.

This toolkit has been created to help turn those ambitions into practice. It brings together practical guidance, tools and examples to support organisations to involve young people in funding decisions in meaningful and effective ways.

The toolkit is intended for anyone designing, distributing and/or managing funding for young people. That includes local authorities, youth organisations, community groups, schools and colleges, businesses, health services and other organisations or partnerships that work with young people. Whether you are delivering activity through a Young Futures Hub, managing

funding linked to the Youth Matters Fund, or developing your own local programmes, the approaches in this toolkit can help you build stronger youth participation into youth decision-making.

Throughout this toolkit, we use the term youth-led funding. We use it deliberately, but also realistically. There is no single model of youth-led funding and no one correct way to share power.

In some programmes, young people may help identify priorities, shape funding criteria, or advise decision-makers. In others, they may assess applications, sit on funding panels or 'have money delegated to them. Different approaches involve different levels of influence, responsibility and decision-making power but they must all give young people ownership of the choices that they make and support in making them. What matters is not that every programme looks the same, but that young people have a genuine and meaningful role, and that everyone is clear about how decisions will be made and who holds responsibility for them. The most effective approaches are honest about the level of power being shared and create real opportunities for young people's views to affect outcomes.

When young people help shape funding decisions, services are often better connected to local needs, more trusted by their communities and more likely to reach the young people they are intended to support. Just as importantly, young people gain experience, confidence and a stronger voice in the places where they live.

WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE TOLD US

Twelve young people from across the UK mapped every stage of a funding process from their own experience. Some had decided real grants, some had applied and been turned down, three had never touched funding and were there on purpose, to test whether any of this made sense to a newcomer.

Six themes came out, and every section of this toolkit answers one of them.

Theme	In their words
Communication is the biggest failure point	"Silence." No dates, no updates, no reasons. "Deadlines not being met, or them not getting back to you on the day they said." "Just be honest with young people and let them know when something can be done realistically within the set time or not." (Yash)
Feedback is psychological, not administrative	"When you get a rejection, you're very much likely to not feel like you want to apply to anything else." (Yash) "It can be really discouraging when you keep getting just an email saying 'oh, you're unsuccessful this time'." (Abigail) "You don't improve from being aired." (Kaiden)
Access is about format, language, time and criteria	"A lot of the time they're either really long or the language doesn't always make sense to young people." (Eden) Forms you can do in bits; a video you have to do in one go; criteria almost nobody meets in full.

Theme	In their words
Who gets found and who gets picked	"Only those who have experience will get picked." "Only targeting those who are known to the funders." "How do we ensure this funding actually benefits those who need it, not just those who know about it?"
Power, honesty and the adult role	"Adults always get the final say." "It's so fake, and nothing actually progresses." And the answer: "adults should act as coaches, not bosses."
Sustainability, pace and proof	"Funding is never long-term - you get told, never mind, no more money." "It gets dragged out for too long a timeframe." "If no one can tell that there's a change, the money could have been spent in a better way." (Kaiden)

THE PROMISE: WHAT THIS TOOLKIT MAKES IMPOSSIBLE

For young people:

- **Being aired.** Every message gets a reply; every stage has a date. Section 2.1 and section 7.
- **Being kept in the dark.** The criteria, the weighting, the money and the decision are published before the round opens. Section 2.1 and stage 5.
- **Adults ignore young people whenever they feel like it.** If an adult overrides a young person's decision, they say so, say why, in writing, and it goes on the register. Stages 5 and 6, section 11.
- **Adults not valuing young people's expertise.** Pay, preparation and a real role. Sections 2.2 and 2.3.
- **Young people being made to feel inferior.** Coaches, not bosses, and a test an adult can give themselves. Section 2.2.

And for the councils and organisations running the fund:

- **Spending the money and not being able to say what it changed.** Stage 8 and the impact review clause.
- **A round that stalls because nobody owned the dates,** and the people who signed up have drifted away. Section 2.1.
- **Believing something is youth-led when, without anyone meaning it, the decision had already been made before young people arrived.** Stage 5.
- **Hearing the hard feedback only after it is too late to use it.** Stage 6 and the pre-mortem.

A WORD ABOUT "AIRED"

We use it on purpose. It is the young people's word for the thing they most want this toolkit to stop, and it is more exact than "not responded to". Kaiden: "When you say something and just don't get a response, it's being aired." If it is new to you, that is the point.

One of the adults who tested this draft said it was "a useful lesson for adults - how it feels when they encounter language they don't understand". The jargon jar in section 9 is for the words you use that are new to young people - mind the language and jargon gap!

2. BEFORE YOU START: FIVE THINGS ADULTS FORGET

Five things came up at almost every stage of designing this toolkit: "nobody told us anything"; "the adults took over"; and "nobody gave us the time or paid us".

Each gets a page here, then a line on every stage page in section 5. Read these before you commit to anything, because they decide whether what you build is youth-led or just called that.

2.1 THE COMMUNICATION COMMITMENT

The same thorn appeared at 6 of the 8 stages: silence. No dates, no update when things slip, months between applying and hearing, projects that "just died down", a one-line "unsuccessful" with no reason. The young people's verdict: "Silence is the biggest problem, and young people have the right to know." They named this commitment as one of three parts of the toolkit that must not be watered down.

The commitment is a short, publishable promise a local area makes at the start, and keeps. Paste it on the fund's web page. It is tool 5, and it says:

1. **Published dates for every stage** - when applications open and close, when decisions are made, when everyone hears - before the round opens.
2. **A maximum wait.** An acknowledgement the moment you apply; a decision within a week where you can, and never more than two months. If it will take longer, say why in advance. "I understand if things get delayed, but just let us know!" (Isla)
3. **An update the day a date moves,** with the reason.
4. **A named person** a young person can talk to, who replies within the time you have agreed with young people and published. We suggest two working days, and never more than a week. A small charity with two staff and a council youth team will set different numbers; what matters is that young people set it with you, it is written down, and you keep it.
5. **A reason with every no and every yes.**
6. **A report back** on what the money did.
7. **Transparency all the way through:** who decides, how, against which criteria, how much money there is and where it went, written down and put where young people can see it before the round opens, not only after it closes.

None of this needs a big budget. The Gannochy Trust's youth panel in Perth and Kinross sends decision letters within three weeks of the meeting. The Blagrave Trust tells unsuccessful applicants within a month and offers feedback. Camden Giving gives every applicant feedback written from the panel's point of view. North Ayrshire publishes every result and what got built. Budgets are tight everywhere, and most of the people reading this are being asked to do more with less. That is exactly why a written rule helps: a published commitment costs almost nothing, and it saves the time that chasing, re-explaining and losing goodwill would cost later.

> *Making sure the young person is still connected in a way where they are updated about what's going on - where it's going, how it's distributed, how it's going to be used.* **- Ama**

2.2 THE ADULT ROLE: COACHES, NOT BOSSES

Young people chose this as a founding principle. They told us what it feels like from the inside, and when the first draft said "adults speak last in small groups" they sent it back: it separated adults from young people when the point is to work alongside each other. This is the rule they agreed instead, and it is the second part of the toolkit they have asked stakeholders not to touch.

> **The adult rule**
> Adults don't lead the conversation. They ask before they tell, make it easy to say "I don't understand", and never make a young person feel less competent for asking.

What the difference feels like, in the young people's words:

An adult as a boss	An adult as a coach
"You have no autonomy. You always have to go back to them for the next step. You don't feel like you have ownership over decisions, or your input will only ever be advisory. They might be friendly, but focus more on leading themselves than developing you as a leader." (Timi)	"Someone who makes it clear that you're a person they could say 'I don't understand this' to, and not someone who just delegates and then lets you go and figure out your own thing by yourself." (Isla)
"I feel a lot less valued and confident in my own ability, because I don't want to do anything wrong, and I don't feel like I can ask for clarification because that makes me look less competent." (Isla)	"Helpful, teaching, insightful, helps progress." (Kaiden) "Being scaffolded to come to my own conclusions. My voice is going to be heard." (Megan, Young Manchester)
"More like control." (Jasmeen)	"Having someone who supports you makes you feel comfortable to ask for help." (Abigail)

Three jobs belong to adults, and the toolkit says so plainly rather than letting them be used as an excuse. First, the checks: eligibility, safeguarding and due diligence, done before the panel sees anything, so young people are never asked to spot a safeguarding problem. Second, the money: holding the account, paying out quickly and keeping the records. Third, the written answer: whatever young people decide, an adult writes down what happened to it, by when, and why, and shows them. If a young person's decision is changed, the adult who changed it says so and why, in writing, and it goes on the register (section 11).

Hard decisions

Telling someone no, or choosing between two good applications, is never put on young people by default. Young people who want to be part of those decisions can be, with training and support, and can step back at any point. The consent that matters is the young person's and the organisation's, and it is there to protect the choice, never to remove it: a young person who wants to be in the room should never be kept out "for their own good". The young people checked this wording twice. "Should be given as an option, but not mandatory." (Jasmeen)

Training

How do adults know how to coach? Not all do. The adult briefing (tool 6) includes it, and the evidence agrees: the National Lottery Community Fund trained more than 400 funding staff before it felt confident its youth voice work would last. Training is for adults as much as young people: "everyone needs that training before they make those decisions" (Eliana, DCMS). If your area has no one to run it, the youth organisations near you do this for a living. Ask them.

A rule about numbers

Never one or two young people alone on an adult panel. The Listening Fund found it "difficult if there are just one or two young people involved in decision-making with a group of adults"; the young people who designed this said the same thing less politely. Young people in the majority, or a panel of their own.

Coaches, not bosses, does not mean treating young people differently

Young people have told DCMS, and told us, that what they value most is being treated as a full member of the team: a real role, real responsibilities and the same respect an adult colleague would get. TJ, who joined Newcastle City Council's youth panel as a teenager, treated his selection interview as a job interview and has drawn on it in every interview since. The National Lottery Community Fund describes its UK Portfolio Youth Voice Advisers as "recognised as valuable members of our team". So the adult rule is not about adults stepping back from young people; it is about how to be alongside them. A named role, a job description, the same induction and the same expectations as any other panellist, and the scaffolding to grow into it. A coach treats you as capable; a boss treats you as a risk.

> *It's more about being collaborative rather than young people being less.* **– Isla**

2.3 TIME AND PAY

Three linked things young people say adults forget. They checked this section and called it "clear, concise and realistic", which is the nicest thing anyone has said about a funding document.

Time to prepare

Information in advance, at least a week; a pre-meeting; and time to give input properly rather than "whenever suits the funders". Young panellists meet each other before they sit together: "when you get to know the young people before you do a panel with them, it's so much easier" (Yash). Manchester City Council trains its young panel before they see a real application: what youth work is, the words they will meet, a go at judging example applications, and then the young people write their own criteria and scoring. That sequence is tool 2.

Pace

A process that runs so long young people forget what session three was about is not youth-led, whatever the paperwork says. "If it's going on over nine months, it's quite a stretch to have young people remember what he's talking about in session three out of twenty." (Kaiden) Suggested maximums: no more than six weeks from the pre-meeting to the decision; no more than two months from application to answer; no more than forty applications in front of a panel in one sitting. Avoid exam weeks, religious festivals and school holidays for anything that needs young people in the room.

Pay

Young people are valued but rarely compensated for their time and expertise, unlike the adults in the room. This toolkit sets an expectation of payment, in line with DCMS's own guidance on youth voice in policy making: plan and budget to pay young people for their time; ask each young person their preferred form of payment, often cash or a bank transfer; vouchers, accreditation or work experience are alternatives to offer, not substitutes for asking; travel and other expenses are reimbursed, are paid for in advance, so young people are never out of pocket. Published rates are in tool 8: Islington Giving pays its Young Grant Makers £14.80 an hour; Camden Giving pays London Living Wage plus 10% for every hour including training; Lambeth paid 11 to 15 year old Young Inspectors £13.15 an hour. Participation People pay young people £21.70 / hour plus bundled holiday pay at 12.07%.

If you can't pay

Be upfront, offer what you can - expenses, food, accreditation, a reference, a residential, a work experience placement, an award nomination, CV support - and never pretend it is voluntary when it is work. "A lot of these opportunities are run by charities who have very limited resources, so they're doing the best they can, but there is room for improvement where resources allow." (Isla) Some young people will tell you the experience mattered more than money: TJ, who was not paid during his years on Newcastle's panel, says it "opened doors" and got him jobs. That is a reason to make the experience as rich as his, not a reason to skip the pay.

One caution: for 16 to 25 year olds, payment can affect benefits, and vouchers count as earnings unless HMRC has agreed otherwise. Tell young people this before they accept, and help them tell the DWP.

The cost nobody budgets

Running a round well takes staff time, and it is more expensive than an officer deciding alone. Camden Giving's school-based panels work out at just under £100 per young person per session, about £1,500 a session for fifteen young people before staff time and food, and the team is blunt that "it is more expensive to do it this way". That is the price of the decision being real. When England gave 150 councils £115 million to spend through young people's panels in 2006, the 5% administration allowance was not enough; Devon paused a new £160,000 youth fund within months because the paperwork outran the team. Budget the time, or don't start.

> *Young people being valued but not compensated for their time and expertise.* **– Isla**

2.4 KNOW WHY, AND BE KNOWN

Two more things, from Camden Giving, who have run participatory grant-making with young people for longer than almost anyone in England. They are about what happens before stage 1.

Know why

Natasha Friend has coached dozens of organisations through setting up participatory grant-making, and the thing that unlocks every later question is being clear why you are doing it. Is it because young people make better decisions? Because it is their right? Because the money came from somewhere powerful and the people it is for are not? Camden Giving's answer is right first: "it isn't always that we think they make better decisions - there are times when I think they haven't - but it's their right to make those decisions." Once your team can say it's “why” in one

sentence, the model, the governance and the pay follow from it. If you can't, you will end up arguing about them one at a time. The why also decides what you fund, and there's a trade-off either way.

A specific fund, say a football kit fund or a holiday activities fund, is easy to explain and easy to assess. It's great for the groups that fit it. It's no help at all to the youth centre that just needs to keep the lights on and pay its staff.

An open fund has the opposite problem. "Anything that benefits young people" sounds generous, but it means everyone thinks they qualify. You get far more applications than you can fund, most of them get rejected, and the groups you turned away have spent hours on a form for nothing. A high rejection rate quietly tells people not to bother next time.

Someone always loses out. The question is whether you choose who, or let the fund design choose for you. Decide on purpose, and say so.

Be known

Daniel's one piece of advice for an area starting from scratch was not a template. "You can't be a stranger in the community you want to help." In Camden Giving's first year the grant-making came second; meeting people came first. The young people who are hardest to reach arrive by referral, from the Children in Care Council, youth justice workers, organisations working on knife crime, and referrals only come when people trust you. Skip this and you build a fund for the young people you already know, which is exactly what stage 1 warns about.

2.5 SKILLED FACILITATION: SAFEGUARDING, TRAUMA AND CHALLENGING VIEWS

Section 2.2 says adults are coaches. This section is about the skill that takes, because it is the thing organisations say scares them most, and it is not the sharing of power. It is safeguarding and holding the room.

You don't need a particular job title

Camden Giving's grant-making team includes a former youth centre manager, a social worker, someone trained in law and someone who came from working with older adults. What they share is a starting point of humility: a 16-year-old knows what they are worrying about better than a professional with fifteen years' experience does. The adult's job is to bring in the perspectives the room hasn't thought of yet, to stop groupthink, not to steer the result. Youth workers are trained for exactly this, and where your area has them they are the first people to ask; the point is that the door is open to other adults too, if they come in with the same humility.

Safeguarding is the part to plan for

The further you go towards young people with first-hand experience of the issues the fund addresses, the more likely safeguarding will come up in the work itself. Camden Giving puts a safeguarding plan around a young person where one is needed, buys a laptop if that is what is missing, and uses audio versions of applications for panellists whose literacy or sight makes the paperwork a barrier. Flexible money for exactly this kind of adaptation sits in their budget before a round opens. A trauma-informed approach is not a training course; it is expecting this, and planning for it.

Be ready to challenge discrimination

Some of the young people you hand power to will arrive with misogynistic, homophobic or racist views. Shifting power to young people has to be done in a way that is anti-discriminatory. In practice that means a facilitator with the confidence to say "hang on - is that actually true? Are we making an assumption about that group?", space to talk it through, and a line: if, during training, you do not have faith that a panel will award grants in an anti-discriminatory way, they do not award grants. Most young people are great; some have let go of the views they arrived with because someone gave them room to.

A room with challenging views is where skilled facilitators earn their keep. There are not enough of them, and they cost money (section 2.3). If your area doesn't have one, the youth organisations near you do.

> *If we're shifting power to young men, we need to make sure we're doing it in a way that is anti-discriminatory. It's a real skill.* **- Natasha Friend, Camden Giving**

3. FIVE PRINCIPLES, WRITTEN AS TESTS

The young people agreed on 5 principles and asked for them to be kept together: "all always needed".

We have written each as a test a local area can fail, so the principles do work rather than decorate.

Each shows the worry it answers, in the young people's words, and one real example of passing and one of failing.

1. Designed with young people

It will fail if...	...young people are brought in after the pot, the criteria or the timetable have been fixed. But better late than never: if you missed the start, bring young people in now, say so, and start with them next time. It is not all or nothing.
You would see...	Young people in the room when the money, the criteria and the dates are decided; their names on the design; a line in the published commitment saying what they changed.
It answers the worry that...	"It's so fake, and nothing actually progresses"; "adults always get the final say".
Passing it looks like	Frome Town Council gave eight Year 8 pupils £10,000 and let them design the form, the eight criteria and the scoring before anyone applied.
Failing it looks like	The Scottish Government's evaluation of participatory budgeting found young people were "largely absent from steering groups" that set the rules, and mostly turned up as applicants for the small grants adults had designed.

2. Accessible and inclusive

It will fail if...	...there is only one way to apply or take part, or a 14-year-old couldn't do it with the support they would normally have. Needing adult support is not failing; being given no choice is.
You would see...	At least two ways to apply and to take part - in person, online, in writing, by voice or through someone you trust - and never only a workshop in a room; plain words with every term explained; places reserved for young people new to funding and for those the fund is meant to reach; a published check on who took part and who didn't.
It answers the worry that...	"How hard it can be for first-time applicants, and how inaccessible"; "only those who have experience will get picked".
Passing it looks like	North Ayrshire runs its youth vote online, in schools and in youth centres, staffs a helpline for anyone without a device or the confidence, and shares the money equally where turnout is unrepresentative.

Failing it looks like	The evaluation of England's Youth Opportunity Fund found forms "too lengthy and complex", applications dominated by groups already known to the youth service, and only 56% of councils thought their panel represented their young people.

3. Feedback at every stage

It will fail if...	...anyone hears "no" (or "yes") without a reason, or a stage passes with no update.
You would see...	A date for every stage; an acknowledgement the moment you apply; a reason with every answer; a named person; a "no, but".
It answers the worry that...	"Not closing the feedback loop"; "not being transparent and actually following through".
Passing it looks like	Camden Giving gives every applicant feedback from the panel's perspective; Gannochy writes within three weeks.
Failing it looks like	A plain-English scoring sheet with no column for what to tell the applicant; a council that gives feedback only on request.

4. Adults act as coaches, not bosses

It will fail if...	...an adult overrides a young person's decision without saying so and why, or an adult leads the conversation when they were asked to support it.
You would see...	The adult rule (section 2.2) on the wall; young people in the majority; a written answer to everything young people decide; adults who can say "I don't know, let's find out".
It answers the worry that...	"Adults always get the final say"; "too many chefs ruin a dish, too many egos ruin a team".
Passing it looks like	Camden Giving: "our trustees have never overturned a panel decision they don't like." Blagrave's young advisers made the grant an equal amount for applicants so more people could be funded, a decision only a panel with real power can make.
Failing it looks like	A youth assessment with no stated weighting next to officer scores weighted 10/30/20/20, so nobody can say how much the young people counted. (A real council framework, shared with us in confidence.)

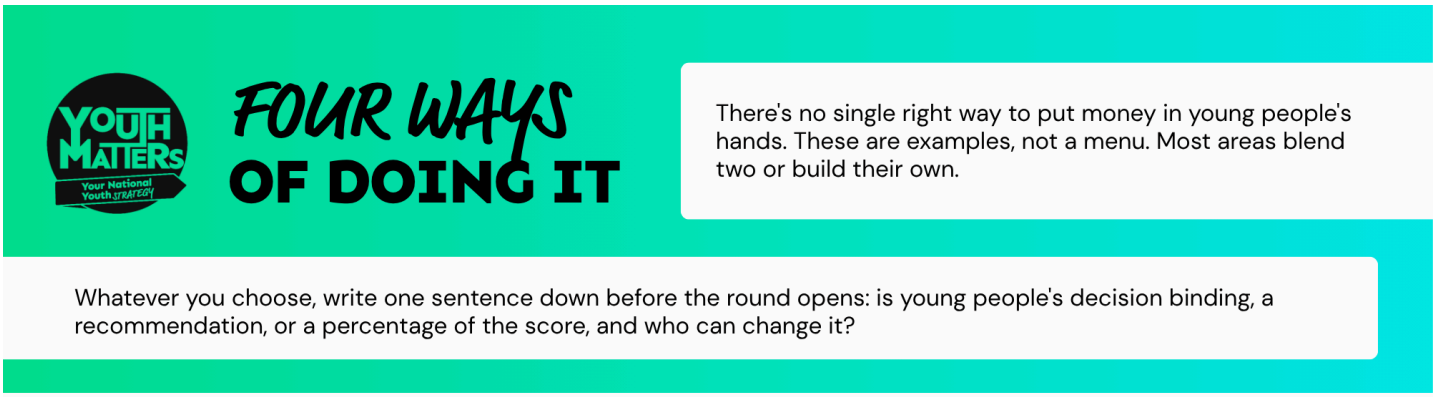
5. Consistent action until it's complete

The young people asked for this one in three sentences, not one. It keeps going until something has changed. Every decision is written down where people can see it. And there is something to show for it at the end.

It will fail if...	...the process stalls, the money is spent and nobody can point to what changed, or a decision is made that isn't written down.
You would see...	An annual calendar; a percentage of a real budget rather than a one-off pot; a public "what changed" page; a decision register anyone can read.
It answers the worry that...	"Empty promises"; "funding never stays"; "services suddenly being cut".
Passing it looks like	Islington Giving has run its paid Young Grant Makers every year since 2018; two former Young Grant Makers now co-lead it. Southwark put 10% of a £1.15 million youth fund in young people's hands by a cabinet decision that has to be actively reversed.
Failing it looks like	Warrington's youth panel for resource decisions disappeared when the youth service was moved into another department; it is in consultation only now. YouthBank UK, which once supported 80 youth-run grant funds, went into liquidation in 2011.

Two things that are not a sixth principle, on purpose. The young people also worried about things dragging on so long that people lose interest, and about not knowing exactly who a fund is for and what will happen to your application.

They decided these are things to check at every stage rather than state once, so pace lives in section 2.3 and on every stage page, and clarity about who the fund is for lives in the communication commitment and in stage 1.



4. FOUR EXAMPLE WAYS OF DOING IT

There is no single right way to put money in young people's hands. Here are 4 examples, each with a real place that has done it, how much power young people actually held, and where adults tend to take the power back. They are examples, not a menu: other approaches exist, more will develop, and most local areas blend two or build their own. Nor are they tied to a size of pot: a grant panel can decide £500 or £500,000, a vote can set priorities for one youth club or a whole county, and youth-informed commissioning covers a single holiday provider as well as a multi-year service with paid staff.

The young people's rule for every one of them is the same. A young person does not care what the model is called, but cares a great deal what happens to them at each stage. That is why every stage page in section 5 shows how it changes under each example.

Whatever you call your model, one sentence matters more than its name: how much weight young people's decisions carry, and who can change it. Before the round opens, write that sentence down and publish it. It will look like one of these. "Young people's decision is final, and nobody can change it." Or: "Young people's decision is a recommendation; the grants committee can change it only if an application fails an eligibility or safeguarding check, and will tell the panel why in writing." Or: "Young people's scores count for 40% of the total score." Stage 5 holds you to it; tool 12 is the template.

EXAMPLE 1 - YOUTH GRANT PANEL

What it is	Young people assess applications and recommend or decide which organisations or groups get grants from a pot the council, a funder or an organisation holds.
Real examples	**Gannochy Trust Youth Panel Fund** (Perth and Kinross): twelve young people aged 14 to 25, recruited through youth work partners and care-experienced services, hold written delegated authority from the trustees to approve up to £100,000 a year. **Frome Town Council**: eight Year 8 pupils designed the form, criteria and scoring and awarded £10,000; the council ratified it. **Islington Giving Young Grant Makers**: twelve 16 to 24 year olds a year, paid £14.80 an hour, since 2018. **Camden Giving: r**esident and young people's panels decide the borough's participatory grants, including three-year grants of up to £30,000 for youth groups in Camden. B**BC Children in Need:** a panel of 10 young people Aged 16 – 22 from across London awarding Small Grants in London of up to £45,000 (£15,000 per year). This was delivered in partnership with Camden Giving who managed recruitment, safeguarding and communications with the panel. **Manchester City Council** trained a young people's panel to assess its youth and play grants and is now training Youth Council members as a Youth Bank panel.
How much power young people actually hold	It varies more than the name suggests. Gannochy and Camden Giving: binding. Frome: binding in practice, ratified by the council. Dorset: a mixed panel of young people, councillors and officers deciding by majority vote. Many councils: young people score, adults decide. The young people who designed this toolkit put red dots on "deciding" for this reason.
What's good about it for young people	Real decisions on real money; skills in reading, judging and saying no well; a route back as an adviser or facilitator - Islington's and Camden's former panellists now run sessions. Local knowledge changes outcomes: when Camden Giving gave an AI the same criteria and applications, it picked an organisation the young people had rejected because they knew free services already existed locally.
Where adults tend to take the power back	An unweighted youth score next to weighted officer scores; a "final decision panel" that meets after the young people; the "no" letter written by adults alone; a lone young person on an adult panel.
One change that makes it youth-led	Delegate in writing, the way Gannochy's trustees did, and publish the sentence in tool 12.
This fits best when...	There is a defined pot, more applications than money, and an organisation willing to say in writing that young people decide.

YOUTH GRANT PANEL

WHAT IS IT?

For the people who set up and run money for young people: councils, charities, community groups and local partners. The same journey the young people get, from your side.

REAL EXAMPLE

Gannochy Trust, Perth and Kinross. Twelve young people aged 14–25 have written authority to approve up to £100,000 a year.

HOW MUCH POWER?

It varies: from binding, to "young people score, adults decide".

WATCH OUT FOR

A "final decision panel" that meets after the young people, or a lone young person on an adult panel.

ONE CHANGE THAT MAKES IT YOUTH-LED

Delegate in writing, and publish who decides.



BEST WHEN...

There's a defined pot, more applications than money, and an organisation willing to say in writing that young people decide.

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EXAMPLE 2 - PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

What it is	A wide group of young people in an area propose ideas and vote on how a pot is spent, often through pitches and a public vote.
Real examples	**North Ayrshire Council**: 4,131 young people aged 8 to 25 cast 12,393 votes on almost 100 projects sharing £56,000 in 2022, and it runs every year - a youth steering group shortlists, voting happens online through Young Scot and in schools and youth centres, and where turnout is unrepresentative the money is shared equally. **Choose for Cheetham** (Manchester, 2025): over 100 young people aged 8 to 18 voted on more than £200,000 at a market-stall event, their vote weighted 60%, with the applicant organisations scoring each other for the other 40%. **Derry City and Strabane**: a youth co-design panel of ten set the criteria for a £20,000 pot that about 1,000 young people voted on online.
How much power young people actually hold	The vote decides, but adults decide who hears about it, what is eligible, and whether the vote reaches beyond the young people already in youth groups. The young people named the risk exactly: "not all young people will have an equal say, and some will not speak their opinion." Every evaluation agrees: votes skew to the already-confident, and 16 to 24 year olds are the hardest to reach.
What's good about it for young people	Scale and visibility - thousands rather than twelve; the result is public and so is what got built; a stable annual cycle people learn to expect.
Where adults tend to take the power back	Screening ideas out before the vote without saying who screened or why; making it a one-off; letting the vote be the only accessible bit.
One change that makes it youth-led	A youth steering group that shortlists, and an equity check published with the result: who voted, who didn't, and what you did about it. North Ayrshire's officer's advice: "don't use the term participatory budgeting with young people", and plan four to five months ahead.
This fits best when...	The money is for things in a place that lots of young people will use, and you can reach them where they are - school, youth centres - not only online.

PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

WHAT IS IT?

Young people across an area propose ideas and vote on how a pot is spent.

HOW MUCH POWER?

The vote decides, but adults decide who hears about it and what's eligible.

ONE CHANGE THAT MAKES IT YOUTH-LED

A youth steering group shortlists the ideas, and you publish who voted and who didn't.

BEST WHEN...

The money is for things lots of young people will use, and you can reach them where they are: in schools and youth centres, not only online.

REAL EXAMPLE

North Ayrshire Council. 4,131 young people aged 8–25 cast 12,393 votes on almost 100 projects sharing £56,000, and it runs every year.

WATCH OUT FOR

Ideas screened out before the vote with no reason given, or a one-off that never comes back.



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EXAMPLE 3 - DELEGATED BUDGET

What it is	A youth group, youth council, youth bank or school council holds a budget of its own and decides how to spend it, within agreed rules. In every example we could verify, an adult body still holds the bank account; what is delegated is the decision.
Real examples	**Southwark Council** put 10% of its £1.15 million Positive Futures for Young People Fund directly in young people's hands by a cabinet decision, with the Youth Parliament on the panel for the rest. **The Youth Opportunity Fund** (2006-2010) put £115 million through 150 English councils with panels of 13 to 19 year olds deciding; the national evaluation found their decisions "were generally respected" and the approach "effective and worthwhile". **Salford**'s youth centres bank £1 or 50p a session from young people and the young people decide what it is spent on - the smallest and purest version anyone sent us. **South Lanarkshire** puts at least 5% of Pupil Equity Funding through pupil votes: over £607,000 in a year.
How much power young people actually hold	The most, when the rules are written down and the pot is a fixed share of something bigger. The least, when it is a one-off "extra" that is first to go in the next budget round.
What's good about it for young people	Ownership. The group learns to run money, not just judge it; the decision is theirs on the day.
Where adults tend to take the power back	Sign-off that quietly becomes approval; administration so slow the money is paid late; the group never being asked who outside it can join.
One change that makes it youth-led	Make it a percentage of a standing budget by a decision that has to be actively reversed, pay grants up front, and publish how new young people join the group.
This fits best when...	There is already a youth council or group with the time and support to run money, and a host that will hold the account without holding the decision.

DELEGATED BUDGET

WHAT IS IT?

A youth group, youth council or school council holds its own budget and decides how to spend it, within agreed rules.

REAL EXAMPLE

Southwark Council. 10% of a £1.15 million youth fund put directly in young people's hands by a cabinet decision.

HOW MUCH POWER?

The most, when it's a fixed share written into the rules. The least, when it's a one-off extra.

WATCH OUT FOR

Sign-off that quietly becomes approval, or money paid out so late it loses its point.

ONE CHANGE THAT MAKES IT YOUTH-LED

Make it a percentage of a standing budget, pay grants up front, and publish how new young people can join.



BEST WHEN...

There's already a youth group with the time and support to run money, and a host that will hold the account without holding the decision.

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EXAMPLE 4 - YOUTH-INFORMED COMMISSIONING

What it is	Young people help write what a service for young people should do and help choose who provides it. This is where the jargon is heaviest - procurement, specification, tender - and where the charities reading this toolkit will most often be on the other side of the table, as bidders.
Real examples	**Liverpool City Council** (2026): a youth panel with "direct power to grant in full, offer a reduced offer or to reject" £70,000 of public health money, having seen the applications in advance and challenged the presenters. **Gloucestershire County Council**: 6-8 trained young people scored tenders with their own eight questions, weighted at 15%, and three projects the adult panel had rejected were funded on the young people's scores. **Wolverhampton**: no new holiday activity provider joins the council's framework without a successful pitch to a panel of children and young people. **Halton**: Youth Cabinet and Children in Care Council members on the steering panel for youth grants and holiday provider decisions. **Young Futures Hubs**: DCMS expects co-creation with young people and local partners to shape what each hub offers, how young people are referred in and how the workforce is developed. Decisions about the physical space, where the hub sits, and its signage and branding - down to the style and colours - are made locally with young people through co-creation.
How much power young people actually hold	A stated percentage or a stated gate - or none. Young inspectors and youth commissions are under scrutiny, not commissioning, unless the organisation is required to answer them; Camden Council's young inspectors report to a scrutiny committee that asks what changed since last year, which is the simplest accountability we found.
What's good about it for young people	Influence over the services they actually use, and the local knowledge test in reverse: young people who have attended a provider know things an officer cannot.
Where adults tend to take the power back	Young people on the panel "to add perspective" with no weight; recommendations nobody is required to answer; the language.
One change that makes it youth-led	Publish the weighting (Gloucestershire's 15% changed three awards) or make the youth pitch a gate (Wolverhampton), and start the jargon jar before the first meeting.
This fits best when...	A council or health body is buying a service young people will use, and is willing to give young people's scores a published weight.

YOUTH-INFORMED COMMISSIONING

WHAT IS IT?

Young people help write what a service should do and help choose who provides it.

REAL EXAMPLE

Gloucestershire County Council. Trained young people scored tenders on their own questions, weighted at 15%. Three projects the adults had rejected got funded on their scores.

HOW MUCH POWER?

A published percentage, a gate providers must pass, or none at all.

WATCH OUT FOR

Young people there "to add perspective" with no weight, or recommendations nobody has to answer.

ONE CHANGE THAT MAKES IT YOUTH-LED

Publish the weighting, or make a youth pitch a gate. Explain the jargon before the first meeting.



BEST WHEN...

A council or health body is buying a service young people will use, and will give their scores a published weight.

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OTHER WAYS THAT DON'T FIT THE CARDS

Priorities first, then grants	A mass youth vote sets the priorities a grant round must meet; adults run the awards with young people in the room. **Ceredigion's Rhoi dy Farn** ballot (2,252 voters aged 11 to 18) shaped £50,000 of youth work grants. Cheaper than a full vote; weaker at stage 5. Say which it is.
Hybrid vote plus peer scoring	**Choose for Cheetham's** 60/40: young people's votes and applicants' scores of each other, combined by a published formula.
Percentage rules	The simplest way to make it permanent: **Scotland's 1% of council budgets** through participatory budgeting; **South Lanarkshire's 5% of Pupil Equity Funding;** **Southwark's 10% of the youth fund**. One decision, repeated every year unless someone actively reverses it.
Youth-led bids	Young people writing and holding their own grants. The most common thing called "youth-led" is young people delivering, not deciding. Both are good; say which you mean.
Alumni ladders	Former panellists and former grantees coming back as advisers, facilitators and staff: Islington, Blagrave, Camden Giving, Leaders Unlocked. This is what "coaches, not bosses" looks like when it works for years.
Young advisers inside the funder	Young people are recruited into a funder's own funding team structures, paid as staff, shaping how applications are assessed and training colleagues. **The National Lottery Community Fund's** Youth Voice Advisers (piloted in 2024; eight now in post, paid £22 an hour for up to ten hours a month) advise on youth voice applications across its UK Portfolio and soon to be co-creating their role in our environment funding. Honest about where it sits: the young people's scope was to decide their own meaningful role inside an existing programme, which the Fund places across 3 and 4 on the power scale, not 5.

BUILD YOUR OWN

Most local areas blend two, adapt one, or build something new. Some approaches that don't fit the cards:

PRIORITIES FIRST, THEN GRANTS.

A youth vote sets the priorities, then adults run the awards with young people in the room. Ceredigion: 2,252 young people voted to shape £50,000 of grants.

VOTE PLUS PEER SCORING.

Young people's votes are combined with applicants scoring each other, using a published formula. Choose for Cheetham: 60% youth vote, 40% peer score.

VOTE PLUS PEER SCORING.

Young people's votes are combined with applicants scoring each other, using a published formula. Choose for Cheetham: 60% youth vote, 40% peer score.

PERCENTAGE RULES.

A fixed share of a budget, every year, unless someone actively reverses it. Scotland 1% · South Lanarkshire 5% · Southwark 10%.

YOUTH-LED BIDS.

Young people write and hold their own grants. That's delivering, not deciding. Both are good; just say which you mean.

ALUMNI LADDERS.

Former panellists come back as advisers, facilitators and staff. Islington, Blagrave, Camden Giving.

Whatever you choose, the 8 stages and the 3 things adults forget still apply.

Youth-Led Funding Toolkit for Local Areas – Youth Matters, your National Youth Strategy

Funded by UK Government

A SHORT DECISION HELPER

Three questions that point towards the nearest example. Tool 9 has the longer version.

1. **How much money, and is it yours to delegate?** A fixed pot you control points to a grant panel or a delegated budget. Money you are spending on a service points to commissioning. A share of a budget for a whole area points to a vote.
2. **How many young people do you need to reach, and can you reach them where they are?** Twelve well-supported young people are a panel. Thousands in schools are a vote. If you can only reach the ones already in your youth groups, start with a panel and recruit openly.
3. **How much risk will the people above you tolerate?** If the answer is "they must keep the final say", say so in writing and make the young people's score count for a published percentage. Honesty about a recommendation is more youth-led than a pretend delegation.

Most local areas will blend two, adapt one, or build something of their own. The 8 stages and the 5 things adults forget apply whatever you choose.

5. THE FUNDING JOURNEY: EIGHT STAGES

This walks both readers through a pot of money from "who gets asked" to "how do we know it made a difference", with the same shape at every stage so it is predictable and skimmable.

The adult reads the checklist; the young person reads the box underneath it, which is the same list flipped the other way round.

The power check shows where the young people who designed this toolkit said power sits today.

STAGE 1 - INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE

Who gets asked to be involved, and how?

What goes wrong

An unclear selection process with no dates or timings, relying on young people to be available whenever suits the funders. Only targeting those already known to the funders: "only those who have experience will get picked". Young people valued but not compensated for their time. And the quiet version: a youth council that has had the same members for three years, and nobody has asked how anyone else joins. Whoever you reach first is whoever you reach, and 16 to 24 year olds can be the hardest to recruit and retain of all.

What good looks and feels like

Opportunities go out through schools and colleges, youth organisations, posters and notice boards, email lists, and the digital platforms young people actually use, not social media alone. Clear criteria for who is wanted and why, including people with no experience, with places reserved for them. A pre-conversation or 1-to-1 for anyone thinking of getting involved. Pay and dates published before anyone signs up. Camden Giving recruits through referral partners including the Youth Offending Service and interviews informally so that "lived experience beats learned experience". Its newest route is schools: last academic year it ran participatory grant-making with three groups at Haverstock School, a session at Acland Burghley School and two youth clubs, 106 children and young people in all, and the mix of T-level, ESOL and GCSE-resit students gives a very different panel from an A-level-only sixth form. The warning that came with it: getting into schools is the hardest door of all, and it usually depends on one member of staff who opens it.

Checklist - for the adult, and testable

1. Publish who you are looking for, including "no experience needed", how many places, and what young people will be paid or given, before you open recruitment.
2. Advertise where young people are: schools, colleges, youth organisations, local newsletters, notice boards and the digital platforms they actually use. Never rely on social media alone; ask young people where that is.
3. Publish the dates and time commitment up front; fit around school, college and exams.
4. Reserve places for young people new to funding and for those the fund is meant to reach, and report at the end how many you got.
5. Count how many people chose “no” as well as “yes” - it is their children’s right to choose to take part and not to take part after all!
6. Offer a conversation before anyone commits, and a named person to ask.

7. Tell everyone who applied what happened, including those not selected, with a reason and a way to stay involved.
8. Never one or two young people alone on an adult panel: a majority, or a panel of their own.

What you can ask for - for the young person

You should know, before you say yes: what the role is, how long it will take, when the sessions are, what you'll be paid, and who else will be there. If you have never done anything like this, that is a reason to be chosen, not a reason not to be. If you weren't picked, you should hear why, and what else you can do.

> *If you're trying to help people to get experience in something and be involved, then you need to give that experience to the people who don't have it.* **- Isla**

Tools	Adult briefing (tool 6); pay and time guide (tool 8); who-took-part check (tool 13).
Power check	Red. Adults decide who gets in the room.
The five things adults forget	• Update due: who was picked and why, to everyone who applied, within a week. • Adult does: the checks, the recruiting, the publishing. • Adult doesn't: pick only the young people they already know. Pay owed: the role description says what is paid before anyone applies.
By example	• Grant panel: recruit panellists openly, not only from one youth council. • Vote: only youth-led if young people outside youth groups can reach it - voting in school, not only online. • Delegated: say who is in the group holding the budget and how others join. • Commissioning: bring young people in before the specification is written. Your own: who did you reach first, and who will you miss?
Next	Stage 2 - Preparing to make decisions

STAGE 2 - PREPARING TO MAKE DECISIONS

What do young people need before they are asked to decide?

What goes wrong

Not giving young people enough time or support to give their input. Long questionnaires, essays, criteria almost nobody meets in full. Too much jargon, nothing in advance, not disability friendly, no communication. Youth Scotland's honest evaluation of its Glasgow pilot found forty applications in one session was too many and that "match funding" and "retrospective funding" were never explained.

What good looks and feels like

Young people are well prepared in advance: a pre-meeting to talk through the process, the information sent beforehand, a glossary of the words they will meet. Young panellists meet each other before they sit together. Manchester City Council's panel training does it in this order: what

youth work and play are; the words (universal, targeted, conflict of interest); a go at judging real example applications as good or bad; the council's criteria; and only then the young people design their own criteria and scoring and agree them as a panel. Camden Giving starts further back still: session one asks what a charity is, what a grant is, whether £2,000 is a lot of money and what it can do, and what the big issues are where you live. Only in session two do the applications arrive. Audio versions of applications are standard for anyone whose literacy or sight makes the paperwork a barrier.

Checklist - for the adult, and testable

1. Send the pack at least a week ahead, in plain English, with a video or audio version.
2. Run a pre-meeting: how the money works, what the criteria mean, what a good and a weak application look like, and every word in the jargon jar explained. Jargon bingo (tool 16) is a ten-minute way to do the last part.
3. Give young panellists time to meet each other first, and something social if you can.
4. Explain, before they start, what young people's decision will count for and what adults will still decide: the stage 5 sentence.
5. Cap what a panel reads in one sitting (no more than forty applications; summaries where you can) and avoid exam weeks.
6. Pay for preparation time, not only meeting time.

What you can ask for - for the young person

You can ask for the applications and the criteria at least a week before you decide anything; a pre-meeting where nobody minds you asking what a word means; to meet the other young people first; and to be told, before you start, whether your decision is final, a recommendation or part of a score. Yash: "when you get to know the young people before you do a panel with them, it's so much easier."

> *Young people are well prepared in advance - having a pre-meeting to talk through any questions they might have about the process, and being sent the information in advance.* **- Eden**

Tools	Panel training sequence (tool 2); jargon jar (section 9) and jargon bingo (tool 16); adult briefing (tool 6).
Power check	Red.
The five things adults forget	• Update due: the pack, a week before; the pre-meeting date. • Adult does: the training, the glossary, the example applications. • Adult doesn't: hand over forty applications on the night. • Pay owed: preparation time paid; information at least a week ahead.

By example	• Grant panel: training, pre-meeting, information in advance. • Vote: plain information about the pot and the rules for everyone who might vote; pitch support for applicants. • Delegated: budget basics, the rules and the bank arrangements explained. • Commissioning: specification, tender and procurement explained - the jargon jar starts here. • Your own: what will young people need to know that you take for granted?
Next	Stage 3 - Designing an accessible process

STAGE 3 - DESIGNING AN ACCESSIBLE PROCESS

Could a 14-year-old actually apply?

What goes wrong

Forms not accessible in language or format. Only one way to apply: large paragraphs of writing. Very formal language that makes it hard to understand what they actually want.

The young people designing this guidance, listed the rest in four minutes: needs a bank account, needs references, needs a track record, a website "straight out of 2007", weird file formats, no one to ask, deadlines in exam week.

What good looks and feels like

Options for written, video or audio applications; a letter, a portal, a conversation, a drawing.

Forms broken into the essential parts, then an informal chat to get to know someone.

Choice, not a switch: a form can be done in stages, a video has to be done in one go, so offer both and force neither.

Word counts and time limits so nobody feels they must write an essay to prove they care, and a few quick-answer or tick-box questions.

The young people built the whole journey: it is the applicant's journey in Door 1 and the example application in tool 1. The young people who had never applied for anything tested it and said: "Yes, the application form is clear and I understand it."

Checklist - for the adult, and testable

1. Offer at least two formats for every application; never only long written answers; never force a video. Offer easy read, audio and a call instead of a form, and say so at the top.
2. If any part of the process is online - the form, the web page, the vote - build it to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.2) at level AA, the standard public bodies are expected to meet (w3.org/TR/WCAG22). In practice: it works on a phone, it works with a screen reader, nothing is carried by colour alone, and any video has captions.
3. No more than ten questions (the young people said seven to ten, about ten minutes to complete from start to finish); a word count or time limit on every open question; every question says why it is asked (for example: "we ask about your age, gender, ethnicity, faith or

disability only to check who the fund is reaching; it is not scored, and you can skip it"); an open box for anything the form didn't ask.

4. A light first stage - a short form or a conversation - then more detail only from those shortlisted. If you need to know more, a 15-to-20-minute low-key conversation, not an interview.
5. Plain English at a reading age of about 12; every term explained; test it with a young person who has never applied.
6. Say how long it should take, who to ask for help, and when they are available; say when a young person might want a named adult alongside them, especially for a big idea, and make clear that having one does not count against them.
7. Never ask for: an application fee; references; a bank account (a trusted organisation can hold the money); a track record; anything intrusive.
8. Young people co-design and test the form before it is published.
9. Say what happens to a big idea. The same form is the front door for a £300 trip and a skate park; if an idea needs planning permission, a building or a long-term budget, the panel carries it into that process with the young person, not the other way round.

What you can ask for - for the young person

You can ask to apply in the way that suits you - written, voice note, video, a conversation - and to do it in bits. You can ask what a word means and expect an answer. You can ask for an example of a good answer. You should never be asked to pay, to find a referee, or to have a bank account. If you need an adult to help you, that is fine, and it should not count against you.

> *It's easier to break up your time between a ten-page form - you can fill in one question and do the rest the next day. With a video you have to do it all in one shot, and it's so awkward because you're showing your face.* **- Yash**

Tools	Example application (tool 1); jargon jar (section 9); communication commitment (tool 5).
Power check	Green. The one stage where the young people said they are usually allowed to help.
The five things adults forget	• Update due: the acknowledgement the moment they apply, with the date they will hear by. • Adult does: the plain-English rewrite, the formats, the help. • Adult doesn't: ask for anything the checklist says never to ask for. • Pay owed: a form that takes ten minutes, not an afternoon.
By example	• Grant panel: application in two or more formats, co-designed by young people. • Vote: how ideas are submitted and how the vote works, online and in person. • Delegated: a light internal process the group designs for itself. • Commissioning: bidders answer young people's questions in plain English; young people write part of the tender. Your own: could a young person who has never applied for anything do yours on a phone?

Next	Stage 4 - Assessing applications

STAGE 4 - ASSESSING APPLICATIONS

How do we judge fairly?

What goes wrong

Not being updated when there are delays; long gaps between applying and a decision. How applications are chosen, or what was wrong with yours, is often not disclosed. The quiet version: criteria written for organisations with a finance officer, so the well-written weak application beats the badly-written strong one, and the first-time applicant never had a chance. The evaluation of England's Youth Opportunity Fund found panels "swayed by whoever turned up to present".

What good looks and feels like

Criteria and weightings published before applications open, in plain questions a young person can judge. The same criteria for everyone. Assessors write notes they would be comfortable sharing with the applicant. Young assessors trained, paid and in the majority. Everyone told the decision date, and told the day it moves. Tell everyone how many applied, and offer an online meet-up to see each other's ideas. This stage is staff-heavy for a reason: with fifteen young people in three small groups, making sure nobody is agreeing just to get through an awkward session takes a facilitator per group, whose job is to bring in the case for the application nobody liked and against the one everybody did.

A note on the word "applications": this stage applies just as much where there are none - ideas in a youth vote, pitches to a youth council, bids in a tender, or the themes a youth justice team's young people want their service to invest in. Read "applications" as "whatever is on the table".

Checklist - for the adult, and testable

1. Publish the criteria and weightings before applications open, and the stage 5 sentence about whose score counts for what.
2. Write the criteria as plain questions a young person can answer; if a young person couldn't judge it, ask whether it should be there at all.
3. Same criteria for everyone; a "what we would tell the applicant" column on every scoring sheet.
4. Adults check eligibility, safeguarding and legal points only, before the panel sees anything, and say so.
5. Young assessors trained (stage 2), paid, and in the majority; score individually first, then together.
6. Tell applicants the decision date, and update them the day it moves.

> **What you can ask for - for the young person**
> You can ask to see the criteria before you score, and to be told what your score counts for. You can ask for a column to write what you would tell the applicant. You can say the criteria are wrong. If you are an applicant: you can ask what you are being judged on, by whom, and when you will hear.

> *It's often not disclosed how they chose the applicant or what actually was wrong with yours, and it can be really discouraging when you keep getting just an email saying "oh, you're unsuccessful this time".* **– Abigail**

Tools	Assessment criteria and scoring sheet (tool 2); the one sentence (tool 12); communication commitment (tool 5).
Power check	Mixed.
The five things adults forget	• Update due: the decision date, and any change to it, the day it changes. • Adult does: eligibility and safeguarding checks first; the published criteria; the training. • Adult doesn't: score last and loudest, or re-weight after the fact. • Pay owed: assessment time paid; no more than forty applications a sitting.
By example	• Grant panel: young people score against published criteria; adults check eligibility only. • Vote: the vote is the assessment; the adult eligibility check is published. Delegated: the group's own criteria, written down. • Commissioning: young people score named criteria with a visible weighting; bidders present to young people who have seen the bids in advance. • Your own: what would the first-time applicant need to have a fair chance?
Next	Stage 5 – Making decisions

STAGE 5 - MAKING DECISIONS

Who decides, and how much power do they really have?

What goes wrong

Adults hold the power at the moment of decision. "Adults always get the final say." The most common version is a youth score with no stated weight sitting next to officer scores, and a "final panel" that meets after the young people have gone home. A board that ratifies a young steering group's recommendation is fine, as long as everyone knows.

What good looks and feels like

Young people's opinions are valued throughout; listening to young people's voices even when they differ from professionals'. The honest sentence, published before the round: binding, recommendation or a percentage, and who can override it, on what grounds. Where it is genuinely delegated, it is written down: Gannochy's trustees delegated in a resolution; Camden Giving's trustees "have never overturned a panel decision"; Liverpool's panel could grant in full, reduce or reject. Where it isn't, say so and make the recommendation count.

Scrutinise the process, not the outcome

Camden Giving's trustees sign off every round, but what they sign off is the process. They are not asked whether funding a particular organisation was a good decision; they are asked whether the panel was well supported and well informed enough to make it. There is a second, earlier switch: if a panel's training shows it would not award money in an anti-discriminatory way, it does not award money (section 2.5), and that is used before anything is on the table, not after. Where a partner insists on keeping a traditional override, the honest way to do it is to call the young people advisers, not decision-makers, and say so from the start.

Checklist - for the adult, and testable

1. Before the round opens, publish the sentence: "Young people's decision is binding / a recommendation / X% of the score, and the only people who can change it are … on these grounds (legal, safeguarding, money) …". Never change it afterwards.
2. If an adult can override, name who, and commit to explaining in writing within a week and putting it on the register (section 11).
3. Record every decision and its reason on the day, in a form the panel would be comfortable publishing.
4. Young people choose how far into the hard decisions they go, with support, never by default, and can step back at any point.
5. Young people are in the majority on anything that decides; a panel of their own where you can.
6. Whoever signs off asks "were the young people well supported to decide?", not "do we like what they decided?". If an adult body does keep a veto, call the panel advisers and say so.

What you can ask for - for the young person

You can ask, before you decide anything: is this final, a recommendation, or a score - and who can change it? If the answer is "we'll see", the process has failed this stage. You can ask to see what happened to your decision, in writing. You can choose how far into the hard decisions you go, and change your mind.

> *In my envisioning of being a young person on the panel, I thought it was really empowering to know what you can expect, and to have something to hold the adults running the panel accountable to.* **- Megan, Young Manchester**

Tools	The one sentence (tool 12); panel terms of reference (tool 14); power barometer (tool 15); the register (section 11).
Power check	Red.
The five things adults forget	• Update due: what was decided and what happened to it, in writing, within a week. • Adult does: holds the account, does the legal checks, writes the answer. • Adult doesn't: override silently, or let a recommendation quietly become advice. • Pay owed: decision day paid; pastoral support for the emotional load of saying no.

By example	• Grant panel: is the recommendation binding? Say so in writing. • Vote: the result is binding; what could override it, and why, is published first. • Delegated: young people decide; adult sign-off is for legality only, and says so. • Commissioning: young people's score has a stated weight in the award decision. Your own: write the sentence, then ask a young person whether they believe it.
Next	Stage 6 - Reviewing and learning

STAGE 6 - REVIEWING AND LEARNING WHEN IT GOES WRONG

What happens when it doesn't work?

What goes wrong

Taking feedback from young people but being less receptive to constructive criticism than to praise. Projects that "just died down" with no communication and no resources to carry on. The young people's own pre-mortem on what could go wrong added the rest: staff who "went off what they thought and assumed" so young people left; a round nobody could be bothered to keep going; scrutiny that wasn't there before the fund went live; a website that fell over; a councillor who ran off with it. Real versions exist: a grant that funded two young people to go on holiday; a youth panel that disappeared in a restructure.

What good looks and feels like

Review and meaningful change: something visibly different next time. A review with the young people involved within a month of every round, critical feedback asked for first. A published note on what changed as a result, and what didn't and why. If a round is paused or stopped, young people are told the same day, with the reason, by a named person. Camden Council's young inspectors report to a scrutiny committee that asks every year what changed since last time.

Checklist - for the adult, and testable

1. Run the pre-mortem (tool 11) before the round opens: "it's six months from now and it has gone wrong - what happened?" Fix what you can in advance.
2. Review every round with the young people involved, within a month; ask for the critical feedback first.
3. Publish what changed as a result, and what didn't and why.
4. If a round is paused, cut or stopped, tell young people the same day, with the reason, and say what happens to them and to the applications.
5. Say before the money ends what happens when it ends.
6. Make sure the fund survives a reorganisation: a percentage rule, an annual calendar, and a decision someone would have to actively reverse (section 8).

What you can ask for - for the young person

You can ask when the review is, and to be in it. You can ask what changed because of what you said last time. If something is paused or stopped, you should hear it from a named person on the day, not from the local paper, and you should hear what happens next. Yash's project "just died down"; this toolkit says that is not allowed to happen quietly.

> *We were having quite frequent meetings, and all of a sudden, with no communication, things just died down. Because we weren't told anything and we weren't given any resources to work on our own, it just kind of went.* **- Yash**

Tools	Review-and-learn checklist (tool 10); pre-mortem (tool 11); section 7, when it goes wrong.
Power check	Mixed.
The five things adults forget	• Update due: the review date, within a month; the "what changed" note. • Adult does: asks for the hard feedback first and answers it in writing. • Adult doesn't: hear only the praise. • Pay owed: review session paid; the "what changed" note within a set time.
By example	• All four: review with young people after every round and show what changed. • The differences are small; the point is that it happens at all, and that the fund is built to survive the next restructure. • Your own: who would notice if this quietly stopped?
Next	Stage 7 - Communicating decisions

STAGE 7 - COMMUNICATING DECISIONS

How do people hear yes or no?

What goes wrong

No feedback to improve after being unsuccessful; a one-line "unsuccessful this time". Being aired. Months of silence and then a form letter. The young people scored a typical rejection email - "we regret to inform you... a large number of applications... unable to provide individual feedback... best of luck" - at 2 out of 10, "only because there's something". "We wish you the best of luck" they described as "incredibly fake, almost like they're taking the mick". Their worry is not the no; it is being left with nothing to improve on and nowhere to go next. "If not, it invokes that feeling of just not good enough, and then an apathy towards future applications." (Kaiden)

What good looks and feels like

"No, but": a reason, help to improve, and other places to try. If individual feedback really is impossible, the general reasons most applications miss - "something that has been useful for me is when organisations provide general feedback that applies to lots of people" (Isla). The criteria restated. How many applied and how many got through. Where the idea goes next, if it genuinely goes somewhere. The person's name. Abigail's formula: "yes because you did this well; no, but you

still did this well, in the future do this." A yes comes with a call about what happens next, not just an email.

Checklist - for the adult, and testable

1. Every no comes with a real reason or the general reasons most applications missed, what would make it a yes next time, other places to try, and a named person to talk to.
2. The same care for a yes as for a no: what happens next, when, and who.
3. Send it on the day you promised; if it will be late, say so before the day.
4. Young people help write the feedback, and choose whether to deliver it, never by default.
5. Publish the results to everyone who took part, not only applicants; say how many applied and how many were funded.
6. Only promise to pass an unsuccessful idea on - to a youth council, a needs assessment, another fund - if you have a real route to do it and will tell the applicant what happened. "If there isn't bandwidth for individual feedback then there may not be bandwidth for this." (Isla)
7. The template is tool 3, written by the young people. Sixty to a hundred words is enough.

What you can ask for - for the young person

You can ask for the reason. You can ask what would have made it a yes. You can ask where else to try, and who to talk to. If the answer is a one-line "unsuccessful", reply and ask for the rest; this toolkit says you are entitled to it. If you got a yes, you can ask what happens now and when.

> *You don't want to be working 80-hour weeks just to get people feedback. But what you could do is have overall feedback, or say some reason why someone did or didn't get it, so people can improve.* **- Kaiden**

Tools	The "no, but" message (tool 3); the yes message (tool 4); communication commitment (tool 5).
Power check	Red.
The five things adults forget	• Update due: the decision on the day promised; results to everyone who took part. • Adult does: writes or co-writes the reason; names a person; sends it on time. • Adult doesn't: send a one-liner, or leave it to an automated portal. • Pay owed: if young people write the feedback, that is paid work.
By example	• Grant panel: young panellists involved in writing feedback; "no, but" as standard. • Vote: results published to everyone who voted; unsuccessful ideas get reasons. • Delegated: the group reports back to the peers it represents. • Commissioning: unsuccessful bidders hear the young people's view; young people are told the outcome and why. • Your own: read your last rejection letter as a 14-year-old would.

Next	Stage 8 – Accountability and impact

STAGE 8 - ACCOUNTABILITY AND IMPACT

How do we know it made a difference, and who checks?

What goes wrong

"Empty promises", "funding never stays", "services suddenly being cut after a certain period". Ofsted found the same thing in 2011: young people often influenced commissioning, but monitoring "took insufficient account" of their views. Money goes out; nobody can say what it changed; next year the pot is smaller and nobody asked the young people. The young people who tested this draft asked for more on exactly this: "not enough about impact measuring and how young people actually get the most of it."

What good looks and feels like

Impact reviews with those you funded as a condition of getting the money. Honesty with young people if anything changes or can't be done. Young people deciding what "made a difference" means before the money goes out, and sitting on whatever checks it afterwards. North Ayrshire publishes what was built; Newcastle's youth panel does the monitoring visits; Cardiff's young panellists read the end-of-project reports. Measure what it did to the deciders too: Camden Giving tracks what happens to its young grant-makers afterwards, and everyone who has made a grant with them joins an alumni group that now sets the strategy for the fund as a whole, so the people who decided one round shape what the next one is for.

Checklist – for the adult, and testable

1. Make a report-back to young people a condition of every grant or contract (tool 7), with a date.
2. Young people help decide what "made a difference" means before the money goes out: three plain questions, not a framework.
3. Publish a plain "what changed" page within a set time, to everyone who took part.
4. Say what happens when the money ends, before it ends; never let it be the "hot new thing" that quietly isn't replaced.
5. Young people sit on whatever checks the fund: monitoring visits, scrutiny, the annual review.
6. Report who took part and who didn't, against what you set out to do at stage 1 (tool 13).

What you can ask for - for the young person

You can ask what the money did – not a spreadsheet, a plain page. You can ask to visit what was funded. You can ask what happens next year, and to be told before it is decided. If nobody can tell you what changed, Kaiden's rule applies: "the money could have been spent in a better way."

> *If no one can tell that there's a change, it can't be that significant a change, which usually means the money could have been spent in a better way.* **– Kaiden**

Tools	Impact review clause (tool 7); who-took-part check (tool 13); the register (section 11).

Power check	Red.
The five things adults forget	• Update due: the "what changed" page, by the date in the grant conditions. • Adult does: writes the condition into every grant and chases it. • Adult doesn't: file the monitoring report where nobody reads it. • Pay owed: monitoring visits and the annual review are paid time for young people.
By example	• Grant panel: funded groups report back to the panel. • Vote: show what was built or done; a public "what changed". • Delegated: the group accounts to its peers and to the council. Commissioning: young people on contract monitoring; the provider reports to young people. • Your own: who checks, and would a young person recognise the answer?
Next	Section 8 – Keeping it going

6. TOOLS AND TEMPLATES

Things a local area can use on Monday morning. Each one is a direct answer to something young people said.

Adapt them; don't make them longer. They are built to run as a sequence - commitment, briefing, application, criteria, decision sentence, messages, review - and you can opt out of any step you don't need, as long as you say so.

Tool	What it is for
Tool 1	The example application - the form a 14-year-old could do on a phone
Tool 2	Assessment criteria and scoring sheet, with the column that tells the applicant
Tool 3	The "no, but" message, written by young people
Tool 4	The yes message
Tool 5	The communication commitment, one page for your website
Tool 6	The adult briefing, one page for every adult who joins
Tool 7	The impact review clause
Tool 8	The pay and time guide
Tool 9	The model decision helper
Tool 10	The review-and-learn checklist
Tool 11	The pre-mortem
Tool 12	The one sentence about power
Tool 13	The who-took-part check
Tool 14	Panel terms of reference, the short version
Tool 15	The power barometer
Tool 16	Jargon bingo

TOOL 1 - THE EXAMPLE APPLICATION

Built from the eight application journeys and ten design rules the young people created, and tested by the young people who had never applied for anything. Ten questions maximum; here are nine.

Offer it written, as a voice note, as a video, as a conversation or as a drawing, and say so at the top.

Every question says why you are asking, which the young people singled out: "it shows that it's not just about filling a paper, it's about understanding young people's ideas" (Jasmeen).

Every open question has a limit, because "if you're really passionate you're going to be writing for ages... and some people just aren't very good at writing" (Abigail).

	Question	Limit	Why we ask
1	What do you want to do? Tell us in your own words, or show us.	150 words, or 90 seconds of audio or video	So we understand the idea, not the paperwork.
2	Who is it for, and how do you know they want it?	100 words / 60 seconds	The fund is for young people in [area]; you know them better than we do.
3	What would be different afterwards? How would we, and you, know?	100 words / 60 seconds	This is what we will ask you about at the end. Keep it simple.
4	Roughly how much do you need, and what would it go on? A list is fine. If you don't know, say so and we'll help.	A list or a number	Grants are £[X] to £[X]. We are not looking for a budget spreadsheet.
5	When would it happen?	Tick one: in the next 3 months / 3 to 6 months / later	So we can plan the money and the check-ins.
6	Who is in your team, and do you have an organisation that can hold the money for you?	Tick: yes, it is… / no, please find us one	You do not need a bank account. A trusted organisation can hold the money.
7	Is there anything that would make it hard for you to do this, and how could we help?	60 words, optional	So we can offer the right support, not so we can judge you.
8	How would you like us to contact you, and when is a good time?	Tick: text / email / call / WhatsApp, and a time	We will reply within [the time you have published].
9	Anything else you want us to know that we haven't asked?	100 words, optional	The form will never cover everything.

At the top of the form: how long it should take (about 10 minutes); the date you will hear by; the name, number and email of the person to ask; when the drop-in and Q&A are; that you can apply in writing, by voice note, by video, in a conversation or with a drawing, and ask for an easy-read version; whether you'd like an adult to help you with the application, and that it won't count against you; and the sentence about who decides (tool 12).

What happens the moment you press send: an automatic text or email saying we have it, the date you will hear by, and who to contact. If that date moves, you hear the day it moves, and why.

Never on the form: a fee, references, a bank account, a track record, parents' income, or anything that makes a young person think "why do they want to know that?"

Then, if you need more: a 15-to-20-minute low-key conversation, in person or online, with the questions sent in advance - "not too much talking and a lot more of the young person describing themself" (Yash).

Big ideas: if what comes through the form is a skate park rather than a trip, the form has done its job. The panel decides whether the idea is worth carrying into the heavier process - planning, a building, a long-term budget - and a named adult carries it with the young person. The young person is not sent away to find the planning department.

TOOL 2 - ASSESSMENT CRITERIA AND SCORING SHEET

Adapted from the plain-English scoring sheet Manchester City Council's young people's panel uses - five criteria as plain questions, scored 1 to 5 - with the column the young people said was missing: what we would tell the applicant.

Tested against the experience of young people already sitting on grant panels and with funders.

Score individually first, then compare. Where you disagree, ask whether it is about the application or about the criteria.

Criterion, as a plain question	Score 1-5	Scoring key	What we would tell the applicant
Is this something young people in this area actually want? How do they know?		1 = little or no detail; 3 = some clear detail; 5 = lots of very clear detail	
Will young people be involved in running it, not just attending?		Same key	
Is the idea clear, and does the money match it?		Same key - "clear" means a 14-year-old could explain it back	
Would something be different afterwards, and could we tell?		Same key	
Does it reach young people who don't usually get this? (First-time applicants score here, not against their track record.)		Same key	

Questions to ask your panel when you design the criteria

- Did the well-written weak application beat the badly-written strong one?
- Did the first-time applicant have a chance?
- Is there a criterion a young person couldn't judge, and should it be there at all?
- What should count for more: the idea, the people, or the plan?
- And the one from a real council framework we were sent: if the young people's score has no stated weight next to the officers' scores, how much did it really count?

TOOL 3 - THE "NO, BUT" MESSAGE

Written by the young people, from the parts they said a "no" has to contain. Use it as a template, in this order. Sixty to a hundred words is enough.

Hi [first name],

Thank you for applying to the [area] Youth Fund, and for the time you put into it - we could see it.

We're not able to fund [project name] this time. We had [X] applications and could fund [Y].

The panel liked [one specific thing]. What held it back was [one specific reason], or: the most common reasons applications didn't get through this round were [two or three general reasons], and we've attached the criteria again so you can see what we were looking for.

If you can show us [what would make it a yes], apply again in [month] - we'd like to see it.

Two other funds that might fit you are [A] and [B]. [If true:]

We're also passing your idea to [who], because it tells us something about what young people here need, and we'll tell you what they say by [date].

Call or message me on [number] - I'm happy to talk it through.

[Name], [area] Youth Fund

The rules, in the young people's words

A reason, or the general reasons most applications missed: "if individual feedback cannot be given, write what most candidates didn't do to get through" (Jasmeen).

Positive framing where it is true: "applications were strong" (Isla). The numbers: "there were 2,000 applications, 100 were shortlisted, 5 selected - to see what you're up against". The person's name.

Other places to go, "so they can apply and not feel like doing the process of searching over and over again". Where the idea goes next, but only if it really goes somewhere.

Plain, warm words, and nothing that sounds "fake and almost like they're taking the mick". Nobody gets "best of luck". Young people help write it and choose whether to deliver it.

TOOL 4 - THE YES MESSAGE

Same care as the no. What happens next, when, and who: when the money arrives (up front, not in arrears); the date of the first check-in; the name of the person who will come and see it; what we will ask at the end (your answer to question 3); and the date you will hear from us if anything changes.

A yes comes with a call, not just an email.

The young people also want to know why they got a yes, so they know what to keep doing.

TOOL 5 - THE COMMUNICATION COMMITMENT, ONE PAGE FOR YOUR WEBSITE

We promise	In practice
Published dates	• Applications open [date], close [date]. • Decisions made by [date]. • Everyone hears by [date]. • Money paid by [date].
A maximum wait	• An acknowledgement the moment you apply. • A decision within [one week / no more than two months]. • If that changes, we tell you the day it changes, and why.
A named person	[Name], [phone], [email]. We reply within [X] working days - a time we agreed with young people and will keep.
A reason with every answer	Every yes and every no comes with why, what would change it, and where else to try.
Who decides	Young people's decision is [binding / a recommendation / X% of the score]. The only people who can change it are [names/roles], on these grounds [legal, safeguarding, money], and they will tell you in writing within a week if they do.
Everything in the open	The criteria, the weighting, how much money there is and where it went are published here before the round opens and updated after it closes.
A report back	By [date] we publish a plain page on what the money did, and invite everyone who took part to see it.

TOOL 6 - THE ADULT BRIEFING, ONE PAGE FOR EVERY ADULT WHO JOINS

Your role is	To make it easy for young people to decide well: bring the information early, explain the words, do the checks before the panel, hold the money, write down what the young people decided and what happened to it.
Your role isn't	To lead the conversation, to score last and loudest, to re-weight afterwards, or to quietly keep the final say while calling it youth-led.
The adult rule	Adults don't lead the conversation. They ask before they tell, make it easy to say "I don't understand", and never make a young person feel less competent for asking.

Questions, not answers	"What would you need to decide this?" "What does that word mean to you?" "What would you tell the applicant?" If you have expertise the room needs - the law, the audit trail - say what the constraint is and let the room design around it.
A test to give yourself	Timi: "Do they always have to come back to me for the next step? Is their input only ever advisory?" Isla: "Can they say 'I don't understand this' to me without it costing them anything?" If the honest answers are yes and no, you are a boss today, not a coach.
Hard decisions	Never put on young people by default. Young people who want to be part of them can be, with training and support, and can step back at any point.
If you override	Say so, say why, in writing, within a week; put it on the register.
Training	If you have not worked with young people before, ask for the training. The youth organisations in your area do this every day. Expect to be challenged, and to challenge: a facilitator's job includes saying "is that actually true?" when a view in the room needs it (section 2.5).

TOOL 7 - THE IMPACT REVIEW CLAUSE

A standard condition in every grant agreement or contract, in plain words: "By [date] you will tell the young people who decided this grant what it did - in person, on video or on a page they can read - and you will invite them to see it.

If something changes or can't be done, you tell them before the date, not after." Newcastle's youth panel does the monitoring visits; Cardiff's young panellists read the end-of-project reports; both are models.

TOOL 8 - THE PAY AND TIME GUIDE

The expectation is payment for young people's time and expertise, in line with DCMS's youth voice guidance.

Ask each young person how they want to be paid; cash or bank transfer is usually preferred; vouchers, accreditation or work experience are alternatives to offer, not to impose.

Expenses up front where needed.

For 16 to 25 year olds, say plainly that payment can affect benefits and that vouchers count as earnings unless HMRC has agreed otherwise, and help them tell the DWP.

Who	What they pay or offer
Islington Giving, Young Grant Makers (16-24)	£14.80 an hour, London Living Wage, for two or more hours a week on a five-month contract

Who	What they pay or offer
Camden Giving, resident and young people's panels (16+)	London Living Wage plus 10% for all time including training; childcare and access costs; £150 a session for former panellists who come back as advisers
Lambeth, Young Inspectors (11-15)	£13.15 an hour
The National Lottery Community Fund, Youth Voice Advisers in the UK Portfolio Team	£22 an hour, up to ten hours a month; a three-part induction; all expenses paid, including travel and food
UKRI, public partners	£27.50 an hour for short tasks; £82.50 a half day; £165 a day; vouchers not cash under 14
Stockport, Young Inspectors	£50 voucher and a certificate
Youth Scotland; Newcastle Youth Fund	Accredited award (Dynamic Youth Award); residential, training and social events
Participation People, this project	Paid sessions for the young people who designed this toolkit £21.70 / hour plus 12.07% bundled holiday pay; and £20 vouchers for 30 minute interviews sent within 24 hours of the interview.

If you can't pay: say so before anyone signs up, offer what you can, and never call it volunteering when it is work.

Budget the staff time: a 5% administration allowance was not enough when England tried it nationally; Camden Giving's school panels cost just under £100 per young person per session before staff time.

Pace: no more than six weeks from pre-meeting to decision; no more than two months from application to answer; no more than forty applications in one sitting; nothing in exam weeks.

TOOL 9 - THE MODEL DECISION HELPER

The three questions from section 4 -

One: how much money and is it yours to delegate

Two: how many young people and can you reach them

Three: how much risk will the people above you tolerate - and then two more.

Four: what will keep this going next year - a percentage rule, an annual date, a named owner?

Five: what is the sentence (tool 12), and would a young person believe it?

If you can't answer four and five, you are not ready to open the round, whichever example you picked.

TOOL 10 - THE REVIEW-AND-LEARN CHECKLIST

From the young people's pre-mortem. For stage 6, and for the day a round goes wrong.

1. Did we have scrutiny and governance in place before the fund went live: who signs off, who checks, who can stop it?
2. Did we keep applicants informed after they applied - status, timeline, outcome - or did we go quiet?
3. Did we have a formal feedback loop, and did decision makers slow down and treat young people's views as valid?
4. Did we stay on top of the organisations we funded and check in on their progress?
5. Did we give young people running projects training on looking after their wellbeing, and support when they needed it?
6. Did we keep going, or did we leave it to run its course?
7. Did we have another way to reach young people when the first one failed?
8. Did the money go where it was meant to, and would we have known if it hadn't? The young people's pre-mortem put it more bluntly: "did anyone go on holiday with it?" (Scrutiny, again.)
9. When it went wrong, who told the young people, and when? The answer should be: the named person, before anyone else hears, with a reason, what happens next and a date.

TOOL 11 - THE PRE-MORTEM

Before the round opens, get the young people and the adults in a room and say:

"It's six months from now. Our youth-led funding round has gone badly wrong and it's in the local news. What happened?"

Everyone writes one failure. Cluster them. For the top four, write "we should have…". Then do those things.

The young people who designed this toolkit produced the checklist above in eight minutes; yours will be different, and that is the point.

TOOL 12 - THE ONE SENTENCE

Write it, publish it, never change it afterwards

"Young people's decision is [binding / a recommendation / X% of the score]. The only people who can change it are [roles], on these grounds: [legal, safeguarding, money]. If they do, they will tell the young people in writing within a week, and it will be published on the register."

Two ends of the spectrum, both honest: the Gannochy Trust ("delegated responsibility from the Board of Trustees for assessing applications and approving funding of up to £100,000 per year") and the Co-op Foundation ("final decisions will be ratified by the Board based on the recommendations of the Steering Group"). The failure is not either of these; it is not saying.

TOOL 13 - THE WHO-TOOK-PART CHECK

At stage 1 you said who the fund was for and who you hoped to reach.

At stage 8, publish who actually took part - as panellists, voters and applicants - against that, in plain numbers, and say what you will do differently.

North Ayrshire shares the money equally where turnout is unrepresentative; the Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon vote found 8 to 15 year olds were the biggest group and 16 to 24 year olds were 5.6%. The young people's worry was "not all young people will have an equal say". This is how you find out whether it came true. This tool helps you be accountable for who was and wasn't in the room - making sure this is tracked and measured to prevent bias and unfair decision making.

TOOL 14 - PANEL TERMS OF REFERENCE, THE SHORT VERSION

One page:

- Who is on the panel and how they were chosen
- How new members join
- How long they serve; what they are paid
- What they decide (the sentence)
- What the adults do (the checks, the money, the written answer)
- How conflicts of interest are handled (if you know an applicant, say so and sit that one out)
- How the panel reviews itself (stage 6)
- Who to talk to if it isn't working.

The Foundation for Young Australians publishes a good one if you want a template to start from.

TOOL 15 - THE POWER BAROMETER

Not every decision needs young people in it, and young people are the first to say so; they are tired of being asked the same open-ended questions by every council and department.

Before the round, the adults and the young people each mark every stage, and the big decisions (the size of the pot, the criteria, who can apply, who decides, who says no), on the same line:

1. Adults decide, and explain why.
2. Adults decide; young people shape how it is done and how it is said.
3. Decided together, with a published weighting.
4. Young people decide; adults do the checks and hold the money.
5. Young people decide and hold the money.

Then compare.

Where the two marks are far apart, that is the conversation to have before you start, not after.

Where everyone agrees adults should decide - a clinical commissioning choice, say - write that into the sentence and move on; an honest 1 is more youth-led than a pretend 4.

Expect young people to mark some stages higher than you do: the young people who designed this pushed back on being kept out of giving bad news. Camden Giving's experience is that the thing adults are actually nervous about is rarely the power; it is safeguarding (section 2.5). Separate the two before you decide.

TOOL 16 - JARGON BINGO

What it is for

A ten-minute game that finds the words in your documents that young people don't know, before those words cost you an applicant or a panellist.

Use it at the first meeting of a new panel, before you publish an application form or criteria, and with your own staff.

The young people who tested it knew most of the words and still asked for it to be used: "I know all of them, but they are unnecessary and alienate young people and make them feel inferior." (Isla)

How to run it

Put ten words from your own documents on a card - the ten below are a start. Everyone marks the ones they don't know or would have to look up; most marks wins. Then, together, write the plain version of each word on the card.

Those plain versions go into your documents in place of the jargon, with the technical word in brackets once if you must.

If a word gets no marks from young people and plenty from adults, you have learned something too.

The starting card: stakeholder · outcomes · commissioning · deliverables · governance · eligibility · procurement · co-production · evaluation framework · KPI. The young people's plain versions are in section 9.

7. WHEN IT GOES WRONG

A short, honest chapter for the moment a round stalls, is overturned, runs out of money or loses its young people.

Yash described it: a project going well, frequent meetings, and then, with no communication, it "just died down". The young people put it another way: "funding never stays - you have a project and then all of a sudden you get told, never mind, no more money."

None of this is rare. Here is what to do.

When...	Do this
A round stalls	Tell the young people the same day, by a named person, with the reason and the new date. Not the local paper, not a line on a website. If there is no new date, say that too.
An adult decision overrides a young people's decision	Write it down: what the young people decided, what changed, who changed it, why, and what happens next. Give it to the young people within a week. Put it on the register (section 11). Then ask whether the sentence (tool 12) was true.
The money runs out	Say so before it does. Say what happens to the applications in the pipeline and to the young people on the panel. Say whether it comes back and when, and if you don't know, say that.
A funded project collapses	Check in before it is too late; the young people's checklist asks whether you stayed on top of the organisations you funded. Support the young people involved; don't blame them. Tell the panel what happened and what you learned.
Young people drift away	Ask why before you recruit replacements. Pace, pay and purpose are the usual answers. Youth Scotland recruited five against a target of twenty and found a three-month unpaid commitment with a residential was the reason.
The fund is restructured out of existence	This happened in Warrington, where the youth panel for resource decisions disappeared when the youth service moved into another department. The protection is in advance: a percentage rule, an annual calendar, a named owner, and a decision someone has to actively reverse. If it is too late, tell the young people, and say who decided.
A panel's views are discriminatory	This is the switch you use before any money is on the table. If training shows a panel will not award grants in an anti-discriminatory way, they do not award grants, and you say why. Most of the time skilled facilitation gets there without it (section 2.5).

When...	Do this
A funder or partner prescribes so much there is nothing left to decide	The pot, the themes, the eligible organisations and the outcomes are all fixed, and young people are choosing between near-identical options. Say what is actually open for decision in the sentence (tool 12). If the honest answer is nothing, don't call it youth-led.
Something embarrassing happens	Two real ones: a youth grant that paid for two young people's holiday; taxis to sessions that cost £278,000 in a year. Both were failures of adult scrutiny, not of young people. The pre-mortem (tool 11) exists so you find these before your local newspaper does.

What you should hear from us - for the young person

If anything on this page happens, you hear it from a named person, on the day, with a reason and what happens next.

You hear what happens to you, to your pay, and to the applications you were deciding. If an adult changed something you decided, you see it in writing within a week.

If you hear it first from somewhere else, that is a failure of this toolkit's own rules, and you can say so.

8. KEEPING IT GOING

The young people who tested this draft said it was "too short term - not enough about what happens after a long period of time", and that there was "not enough on what adults should be doing to sustain youth voice and participation". This chapter is the answer. It is about year two, not week eight.

Build it to survive you

Most youth-led funds end not because they fail but because the person who ran them leaves, the budget line is merged, or the youth service moves departments. The protections are boring and they work: a percentage of a standing budget rather than a one-off pot; a date in the annual calendar; a named owner with a named deputy; a decision recorded by a cabinet, board or committee that someone would have to actively reverse.

Southwark's 10% has survived because it is a cabinet decision. Warrington's panel did not survive a restructure because it was a practice, not a rule.

Budget the capacity, and name the team

The organisations that have kept this going longest say the same thing: the wish to have young people embedded runs ahead of the time it takes.

The National Lottery Community Fund found that what made its Youth Voice Advisers hold after two years was a designated team with clear roles, time set aside to build relationships, colleagues at every level willing to remove barriers, and more internal communication than anyone expected.

BBC Children in Need's London panel worked because Camden Giving, a partner with the experience and the resource to hold the relationships with young people, ran it with them.

If you are not a youth organisation, partnering with one is not a shortcut; it is the model.

Refresh the room, don't replace it

A panel that has had the same members for three years has stopped being open. Set terms (one or two rounds), publish how new young people join every year, and reserve places each time for young people new to funding and for those the fund is meant to reach. Then build the ladder: former panellists come back as advisers, facilitators and, in time, staff. Islington and Camden Giving's former panellists now run sessions; Leaders Unlocked recruited 65% of its staff through its own projects. The ladder is what "coaches, not bosses" looks like over years rather than meetings.

Let the last round shape the next. The thematic priorities for the next round should come from what the last round changed, and from the people who decided it. Camden Giving's alumni - everyone who has ever made a grant with them, several hundred people - now set the strategy for the fund and do the community research that shapes future rounds. At a smaller scale: the stage 6 review with young people produces the stage 1 brief for next year.

Notice when energy drops, and ask why. Attendance falling, the same three people talking, applications drying up. Each has a usual cause: pace (sessions too long or too far apart), pay (late, or in vouchers nobody asked for), purpose (the decisions have quietly become advisory). Ask the young people before you change anything, then change the model if you need to - a panel can become a vote, a vote can add a panel - as long as the five tests still pass and the sentence in tool 12 is rewritten and republished.

Keep the receipts. The simplest sustaining habit is the one this toolkit was built with: after every round, publish what young people said, what you did with it, and what you couldn't do and why. A fund that can show that trail for three years is very hard to cut quietly.

> **What you can ask for - for the young person**
>
> You can ask what happens next year, and whether the fund is a rule or a habit. You can ask how new people join, and how you can come back as an adviser. You can ask to see last year's receipts: what young people said, what changed, what didn't. If nobody can show you, the fund is one restructure away from disappearing, and you can say so.

9. JARGON JAR

The rule for this toolkit and for anything you publish: plain word first, the technical word in brackets once, then the plain word only. The young people named jargon as a barrier at every stage, and we're clear it is not about not understanding: "I know most of these words, I just think they're so pointless to use" (Yash). "Use young-people-friendly words, not corpo buzzwords" (Kaiden). One council officer told us: "don't use the term participatory budgeting with young people." Start here.

The plain versions below are the young people's own, written in their jargon jar. Where a word had two versions, both are given.

The word	What it means, in young people's words
Aired	When you say something and get no response. Kaiden's word. The thing this toolkit stops.
Stakeholder	Anyone affected by or connected to this. The people who would use it. Includes you.
Outcomes	The result. What we want to happen when we do this. Not the same as what you did (outputs).
Outputs	The things you did or made. Not the same as what changed.
Commissioning	Deciding what a service should do and who is going to give it out, and paying someone to do it.
Deliverables	The list of things you will do with the funding.
Governance	The ways you will make decisions, who makes them, and how you will know if things are on track. Who manages this and makes sure young people are actually heard.
Eligibility	Who can and can't apply. Who we want to use this.
Procurement	The rules for how a council buys things, including services for young people. What happens when someone tries to deliver it.
Co-production	Working with young people from the start, not just consultation. How all young people are able to take part and share their voice.
Evaluation framework	A list of things you can measure to know if the project is working well or not. How we review what the good and bad are.
KPI	Key performance indicator. Something we can measure to track progress. How do we measure the benefits.
Impact	What is different for people because of what you did.
Legacy	What is still there, still working, after the money has gone.
Policy	The written rules an organisation says it follows.

The word	What it means, in young people's words
Safeguarding	Keeping children and young people safe from harm, and knowing what to do if you are worried about someone. An adult job, done before the panel.
Culture	The way things are actually done around here, whatever the policy says.
Logic model / theory of change	A diagram or story of how what you do is supposed to lead to what changes. Ask for the one-paragraph version.
Restructure	When an organisation changes who does what, which often means things get lost.
Repurpose	Spending money on something different from what it was first meant for.
OKR	Objectives and key results. A target and the numbers that show you are getting there.
Pre-mortem	Imagining it has already gone wrong, so you can stop it going wrong. Tool 11.
Specification (spec)	The written description of what a service has to do. Young people can help write it.
Tender / bid	An organisation's offer to run the service, sent in response to the specification.
Grant	Money given for a purpose, which you don't pay back.
Criteria	The questions you are judged against. Should be published before you apply.
Weighting	How much each criterion, or each person's score, counts. If nobody will tell you, ask why.
Match funding	Money you have to find from somewhere else before this fund will pay. A barrier for young people; ask whether it is needed.
Retrospective funding	Paying for something that has already happened. Most funds won't.
In-kind	Help that isn't money: a room, a minibus, someone's time.
Due diligence	The checks an organisation does before giving money - that you are who you say you are and the money is safe. An adult job, done before the panel.
Conflict of interest	When you know, or are part of, an organisation that is applying. Say so and sit that one out.
Delegated authority	When the people at the top formally hand a decision to someone else - for example, a young people's panel - in writing.
Ratify	When a board or council formally approves a decision someone else made. Fine, as long as everyone knows it is a step, not a re-decision.

The word	What it means, in young people's words
Scrutiny	A committee or group whose job is to check what was done and ask what changed.
Ring-fenced	Money that can only be spent on one thing.
Monitoring	Checking that a funded project is doing what it said. Young people can do it.
Participatory budgeting	Lots of people voting on how a pot of money is spent. Call it "the vote" or "you decide".
Real Living Wage	An hourly rate, set independently, that is enough to live on. What the best organisations pay young panellists.
Trauma-informed	Working in a way that expects some young people in the room to have been through hard things, and plans for it.
Anti-discriminatory practice	Noticing and challenging prejudice - racism, misogyny, homophobia, ableism - in the room and in the decisions, including young people's.

10. STORIES

Show, not tell. The young people's own stories come first; then short case studies of each example, as proof the toolkit describes things that have actually been done.

IN YOUNG PEOPLE'S WORDS

Stage	Story
1 - getting involved	TJ (Newcastle, via StreetGames) joined the city council's youth panel through his boxing gym, after "being in the wrong crowds at school". Someone approached him, then came "a mini mock interview", which he treated as a job interview and has drawn on in every interview since. His tip for a young person joining a panel for the first time: "Get up, get out and go do it. If you don't, you'll never know what it would be like."
2 - preparing	Isla went to a Q&A event for something she applied for and "found it really helpful to get a better understanding of what I was applying for, hear from other young people who had done it before me, and meet some of the staff."
3 - applying	Yash chose the ten-page form over the two-minute video, because you can do a form in bits and a video "you have to do it all in one shot, and it's so awkward because you're showing your face." Kaiden: "if they make me do a video, if I'm not feeling it, I give up."
5 - deciding	Megan (Young Manchester) read the panel-member pages as if she were a young person and found them "really empowering - to know what you can expect and to have something to hold the adults running the panel accountable to." Then she audited her own organisation's process against them, live.
5 - deciding	TJ on how his panel decided: "There was no 'he's wrong because I think this'. It was: that's your point, let's all sit together, put those points together and see if it's really feasible. It was like a mini debate class." His tip for adults setting one up: "Listen to your audience. Listen, observe. And just take your time."
6 - when it goes wrong	Yash: a project "going really well", frequent meetings, then "with no communication, things just died down. Because we weren't told anything and we weren't given any resources to work on our own, it just kind of went."
7 - hearing back	Abigail: "You're receiving these emails, but what's going wrong? Because obviously you're trying to apply." Isla, the other way round: "I have applied for things in the past and not got them, but the rejection emails have had other related current opportunities in them."
8 - what changed	After the money went out, TJ's panel visited every project it had funded. "That was the seal on the deal. We went down and we were like, yeah, we've made the right decision." He is also honest that he was not paid - gift cards, incentives and the experience, which he values more: "not because I've been paid for it, but because it's out of my own will". This toolkit's view is in section 2.3: make the experience as rich as his, and pay as well, never instead.

Stage	Story
Still to come	Short films from the young people who designed this toolkit, and from young people on panels in Camden, Manchester and Liverpool, with consent.

LOCAL CASE STUDIES

Example	Case study
Youth grant panel - Frome	A town council with no youth service gave eight Year 8 pupils from four schools £10,000 and the job of designing how to give it away. They wrote the form, eight criteria and the scoring, interviewed six applicants and funded six projects at £500 to £2,000. The council ratified their decision in February 2026 and recruits a new panel every autumn. Proof it works with almost no infrastructure, and with 12 year olds.
Youth grant panel - Gannochy Trust	A funder board in Perth and Kinross gave twelve young people aged 14 to 25 written delegated authority to approve up to £100,000 a year: four meetings a year, decision letters within three weeks. Panellists recruited through youth work partners and care-experienced services. £112,000 to 22 grants in the first year.
Youth grant panel - Camden Giving	Camden's place-based funder puts its grant decisions in the hands of residents and young people. Its panels decide three-year grants of up to £30,000 for youth groups in Camden. Panellists are paid London Living Wage plus 10% for every hour including training; trustees sign off the process, not the outcome, and have never overturned a panel decision. Last academic year the model ran in schools and youth clubs - three groups at Haverstock School, a session at Acland Burghley School and two youth clubs, 106 children and young people in all - starting with "what is a charity? Is £2,000 a lot of money?" before any application was read. Everyone who has made a grant joins an alumni group that now shapes the fund's strategy.

Example	Case study
Youth grant panel - BBC Children in Need with Camden Giving	A national funder's first local participatory grant-making fund. From January 2025, ten young Londoners recruited through referral partners (London's Giving members, Greenwich Youth Justice Service) met monthly for a year and decided BBC Children in Need's London grants of £45,000 and under, with staff adding context on due diligence, risk and the wider portfolio; the funder scores it 4 out of 5 on the power scale. Each young person was paid London Living Wage for three hours' reading and a three-hour panel every month, after three face-to-face training sessions. What they would do differently: agree at the start who facilitates; be ready for disagreements between young people; and avoid pauses - an unplanned three-to-four-month gap while internal grant systems changed was filled with project visits, but energy dipped because it was not what had been promised. The first cohort had nobody from East London, where applications are heaviest, and no disabled young people; the second cohort, now started, has both. Internally, attitudes to participatory grant-making have shifted, and the panel's conversations now inform the funder's local priorities for London. "Work in partnership with others. We could not have done this without the support of another organisation." (Laura Sidwell, Impact Manager)
Participatory budgeting - North Ayrshire	Every year since 2020, thousands of young people aged 8 to 25 vote on youth projects - 4,131 voters and 12,393 votes in 2022 - online through Young Scot, in school and at youth centres, with a helpline for anyone without a device. A youth steering group replaced the adult shortlisting group. Where turnout is unrepresentative, the money is shared equally. The officer's advice: take young people on the journey, plan five months ahead, show the results.
Participatory budgeting - Choose for Cheetham	In Manchester in 2025, over 100 young people aged 8 to 18 voted at a market-stall event on more than £200,000 for youth activities; the 21 applicant organisations scored each other too; the youth vote counted 60%. The evaluation is honest: too many projects for one event, few older teens, applicants stressed by being bidders and judges at once.
Delegated budget - Southwark	A cabinet decision put 10% of the £1.15 million Positive Futures for Young People Fund directly in young people's hands, with the Youth Parliament on the panel for the rest. When money was left unallocated, the young people's share went up. A percentage rule, by a decision that has to be actively reversed.
Delegated budget - Salford's £1	Youth centres collect £1 or 50p from young people at Friday open-access sessions, bank it, and the young people decide what it buys. Those who can't afford it are let off. Small, entirely youth-held, and a reminder that the model does not need a grant programme to exist.

Example	Case study
Youth-informed commissioning - Liverpool	In February 2026 the city council put £70,000 of public health money in front of a youth panel. They had seen the applications in advance, challenged the presenters, and had direct power to fund in full, reduce or reject. Eight projects funded. The money came from public health; the decision came from young people.
Youth-informed commissioning - Gloucestershire	Six to eight trained young people scored tenders for three contracts with their own eight questions, weighted at 15% of the evaluation. Three projects the adult panel had rejected were funded on the young people's scores. An adult panellist: "the young people came up with questions and observations that were thought provoking, and very relevant."
Young advisers inside the funder - The National Lottery Community Fund	Not a panel but a role. Since a six-month pilot that began in August 2024, Youth Voice Advisers have worked inside the Fund's UK Portfolio team, paid £22 an hour for up to ten hours a month, with a three-part induction and all expenses paid. They contribute to recommendations, create and deliver training, and advise on youth voice applications; eight are now in post, and four new advisers are co-creating a role within our environment funding. Recruitment is open, through blogs, social media and sector partners. The honest lesson: the wish to have young people embedded in the organisation runs ahead of the time and capacity it takes, and a designated team with clear roles is what made it hold. "Being transparent with young people about what their role is and is not. Starting on clear grounds." (Verity Caiger, UK Portfolio Manager)
When it goes wrong - Warrington and Devon	Warrington's youth panel for resource decisions no longer exists since the youth service moved into Early Help; young people are consulted now. Devon launched a £160,000 youth fund with the Youth Council on the panel and paused applications within months because the administration outran the team. Neither is a story about young people failing.

11. THE REGISTER: WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE ASKED FOR, AND WHAT HAPPENED TO IT

This toolkit asks local areas to publish what young people said, what was done with it, and what couldn't be done and why. So it does the same thing itself. This page shows openly what the young people who designed it asked for that is not in the toolkit as they said it, and why, in Participation People's usual form: You said · We did · We couldn't because · What's next. Nothing here was closed until the young people said it was. The full tracker, with every one of the 130-plus things they asked for, is available from Participation People.

The Decision Delta, 8 October 2026

Workshop 1: 78 things asked for are in the toolkit as said; 6 in with changed wording or in a different place; 1 couldn't be done; 1 still open.

Workshop 2: 14 in as said; 6 in with changed wording, all checked by the young people; 1 couldn't be done live and was recovered another way; 3 still open.

Workshop 3 (testing the full draft): 21 in as said or kept as asked; 3 in with changed wording; 1 still open and the young people's to decide; nothing we couldn't do.

Protected: the young people named three parts of this toolkit that must survive stakeholder testing untouched: adults as coaches, not bosses; the feedback loop and keeping the promise of it; and the communication commitment. If a stakeholder asks to change any of them, the change is logged, not made, and goes back to the young people.

#	Entry
01	**You said:** young people should be able to deliver the difficult "no" themselves, if they choose. **We did:** the toolkit says young people can, with training and support, and can step back at any point (section 2.2). **We couldn't because:** the legal responsibility for a funding decision has to sit with the organisation holding the money, so it cannot be put on a young person by default. **What's next:** closed. The young people checked the wording twice: "should be given as an option but not mandatory."
02	**You said:** the fifth principle might be three principles, not one. **We did:** kept it as one principle, written in three sentences, as the young people voted. **We couldn't because:** not applicable. **What's next:** closed.
03	**You said:** don't let it drag out - make pace a principle; and say who a fund is for and what happens to your application. **We did:** pace sits in section 2.3 with maximum times; clarity sits in the communication commitment; both appear on every stage page. **We couldn't because:** the young people decided five principles is enough to remember and these are things to check at every stage rather than state once. **What's next:** closed - the young people voted "folded in".
04	**You said:** "adults speak last in small groups." **We did:** put it in as a rule, then took it out after the young people said it separates adults from young people. Replaced with the adult rule in section 2.2. **We couldn't because:** not applicable - this is a change they asked for. **What's next:** closed - wording confirmed by the young people.

#	Entry
05	**You said:** the young person's door should include "I want to apply". **We did:** the applicant's journey sits in the adults' door, built from the young people's storyboards, with the young person's view in the "what you can ask for" boxes. **We couldn't because:** DCMS asked that the toolkit stays guidance for the adults who set up funds, not an applicant's guide. **What's next:** the young people tested the applicant's journey as first-time applicants and rated it green. Closed.
06	**You said:** a named person should reply within one working day. **We did:** kept a published, agreed reply time as a protected promise, and changed the number to one each area sets with young people - we suggest two working days, never more than a week. **We couldn't because:** adults with experience of very small charities said one working day is not deliverable for an organisation with two staff, and a promise that will be broken is worse than a longer one that is kept. **What's next:** still open. The young people decide at the final review on 14 October whether this change dilutes a protected recommendation.
07	**You said:** not enough on the long term, impact and sustaining youth voice (raised when testing the draft). **We did:** added section 8, Keeping it going; strengthened stage 8. **What's next:** closed, for the young people to check.
08	**You said:** too much text, not enough graphics. **We did:** cut the draft by about a third for this version; the designed version adds a one-page visual summary per door, the journey map as a graphic, and an easy-read summary. **What's next:** done. The one-page summaries for both doors, the journey map, the four model cards and a fifth for building your own are in this version, and the easy read guide is published alongside it.
09	**You said:** fund UK Youth Parliament (Kaiden). **We did:** nothing. **We couldn't because:** outside what this project is for. **What's next:** closed. Sorry Kaiden.
10	**You said:** adults as coaches, not bosses, is one of the three parts that must not be watered down. **We did:** when DCMS asked for more nuance about young people wanting to be treated as full members of the team, we left the adult rule and your words unchanged and added a paragraph alongside, with evidence from TJ and The National Lottery Community Fund. **We couldn't because:** the rule is yours to change, not a stakeholder's. **What's next:** you decide on 14 October whether the new paragraph stays.

12. WHO MADE THIS

Twelve young people aged 14 to 18 from across the UK designed this toolkit over three online workshops in September and October 2026, three of them new to funding on purpose: [names, as each person chooses to be credited]. They mapped the funding journey from their own experience, agreed the five principles, gave every section a Keep, Change or Cut verdict, built the application, ran the pre-mortem, wrote the "no" they would want to get, and then tested the whole draft in role - as a council officer, a small charity, a first-time applicant and a panel member - before anyone else saw it. Their words are the ones in quotation marks.

An adult design group tested it against what actually happens in councils, funders and youth organisations: Leila Bousbaa, Kayleigh Wainwright and Eliana Kessler (Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport); Megan Powell (Young Manchester); Lucy Banks (Libraries Rising); Keji Okeowo (HUDL Youth Development Agency); with input from Camden Giving (Natasha Friend and Danie Jourdanl), The National Lottery Community Fund (Verity Caiger), BBC Children in Need (Laura Sidwell and Abi Carter), Youth Focus North West, Manchester City Council, Shared Future CIC and the organisations who answered the call-out for examples; and TJ McKie, who sat on Newcastle City Council's youth panel and talked to us through StreetGames.

Participation People facilitated and wrote it: Moontahar (lead facilitator), Antonia Dixey, Em Priest, Collette and the Young Leaders. Participation People is a youth engagement agency that helps organisations work alongside young people to design better services, strengthen relationships and create meaningful change. Playful in practice, serious about solutions.

HOW IT WAS BUILT, SO YOU CAN TRUST IT

Workshop 1 mapped the eight-stage journey from the young people's own experience, agreed five principles and named what the toolkit must make impossible. Participation People drafted a structure from that, DCMS signed off the structure, and in Workshop 2 the young people challenged it: every section got a verdict, nothing was cut, eight things were changed, and they built the application and the pre-mortem. In Workshop 3 they tested the whole draft as its users would, scored a standard rejection letter, wrote the jargon jar, and named the three recommendations that must survive stakeholder testing. After every session they received a decision receipt: what you said, what we did, what's still open. A discovery and evidence review read more than 60 primary sources, and a call-out brought in real documents from councils that have done this. The register in section 11 is the honest count of how much of what young people asked for made it in as they said it.

HOW TO DO THE SAME THING LOCALLY

If you have read this far, you are most of the way there. You don't need three workshops or a research team. You need a room, a pot of money of any size, the young people the fund is for - including some who have never done this before - and the willingness to show them your draft and let them say "that's not what we meant". Start at stage 1. Pay them if you can, and be honest with them if you can't. Give them the receipt. Then tell us what happened: this is a living toolkit, and the next version will be better for your example. The adult rule in section 2.2 is a good place to start.

Funded by UK Government



Participation People

Written and designed by Participation People, a youth voice champion which helps organisations work alongside young people to design better services, strengthen relationships and create meaningful change with young people, not on their behalf.

Playful in practice, serious about solutions. participationpeople.com

APPENDIX - WHERE THE EXAMPLES COME FROM

Every named example in this toolkit is from a published source or a document shared with Participation People, read in full in October 2026. The full evidence review (100 sources) is available from Participation People.

1. Gannochy Trust Youth Panel Fund - gannochytrust.org.uk
2. Frome Town Council Youth Participatory Panel - decision for ratification, February 2026 - frometowncouncil.gov.uk
3. Islington Giving Young Grant Makers - islingtongiving.org.uk
4. Camden Giving and London Funders, Participatory Grant-Making Toolkit - londonsgiving.org.uk
5. Natasha Friend, Camden Giving, on young panellists and AI (Charity Times, April 2026) - charitytimes.com
6. The Blagrave Trust, Challenge and Change update (January 2023) - blagravetrust.org
7. The Listening Fund, Sharing Power with Young People (2022) - thelisteningfund.org
8. Co-op Foundation, Young Gamechangers Fund FAQ - coopfoundation.org.uk
9. Youth Scotland, Young Grantmakers in Glasgow - evaluation (2022) - youthscotland.org.uk
10. Manchester City Council, Youth, Play and Participation grants (panel training, framework and scoring sheet shared by Youth Focus North West, September 2026) - manchester.gov.uk
11. Youth Focus North West, brief on North West local funding programmes involving young people (Salford, Halton, Liverpool, Warrington, Lancashire), September 2026
12. Newcastle Youth Fund - newcastle.gov.uk
13. Dorset Council Youth Fund - dorsetcouncil.gov.uk
14. Cardiff Youth-Led Grants (C3SC) - c3sc.org.uk
15. Southwark Council, Positive Futures for Young People Fund - decision of 19 July 2021 - moderngov.southwark.gov.uk
16. North Ayrshire Council, Young People's Participatory Budgeting results (2022) and officer account (Democratic Society) - northayrshire.community
17. Shared Future CIC, Choose for Cheetham evaluation (May 2025) - sharedfuturecic.org.uk
18. Derry City and Strabane youth participatory budgeting (Participedia) - participedia.net
19. Scottish Government, Evaluation of participatory budgeting activity in Scotland 2016-2018 - gov.scot
20. PB Scotland, South Lanarkshire - 5% of Pupil Equity Funding through PB - pbscotland.scot
21. NFER for DCSF, Outcomes of the Youth Opportunity Fund and Youth Capital Fund (2008) - nfer.ac.uk
22. Devon County Council, Places To Go, Things To Do Youth Fund - devon.gov.uk
23. Liverpool Express, Local youth projects chosen to receive share of £500k council funding (February 2026) - liverpoolexpress.co.uk

24. Participation Works / NCB, How to involve children and young people in commissioning (2012) - Gloucestershire - chilypep.org.uk

25. City of Wolverhampton Council, HAF Specification 2025 - wvca.org.uk

26. Lambeth Council, Young Inspectors - SEND Local Offer report (2024) - lambeth.gov.uk

27. Camden Council, Young Inspectors report to committee (January 2025) - camden.moderngov.co.uk

28. Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council, Tak£500+ evaluation (2023) - armaghbanbridgecraigavon.gov.uk

29. The National Lottery Community Fund, From decision-making to culture change (January 2026) - tnlcommunityfund.org.uk

30. Ofsted, An evaluation of approaches to commissioning young people's services (2011) - gov.uk

31. Foundation for Young Australians, Youth Grants Panel terms of reference - fya.org.au

32. DCMS, Youth Matters: your National Youth Strategy (December 2025) - gov.uk

33. DCMS, Youth voice in policymaking (revised January 2026) - gov.uk

34. UKRI, Guidance on payment for public partners (2026) - ukri.org

35. Disability Rights UK, Service user involvement and payments: how they affect benefits (2026) - disabilityrightsuk.org

36. Ceredigion County Council, Rhoi dy Farn ballot and youth work grants (2025) - ceredigion.gov.uk

37. Interview with Natasha Friend (Director) and Daniel (Head of Grant Programmes), Camden Giving, 5 October 2026, with written corrections from Camden Giving, 8 October 2026. Transcript held by Participation People.

38. Laura Sidwell (Impact Manager) and Abi Carter (Participation and Engagement Manager), BBC Children in Need, written response to the call-out, 9 October 2026.

39. Verity Caiger (UK Portfolio Manager), The National Lottery Community Fund, written response to the call-out, October 2026.

40. Interview with TJ McKie, former member of Newcastle City Council's youth panel, via StreetGames, October 2026. Recording held by Participation People.