



FUTURE PROOF
PARKS



Working with Young People

AN INTRODUCTION



Working with Young Volunteers: An Introduction



About Future Proof Parks

Future Proof Parks is a programme run in a partnership between **Groundwork, Fields in Trust** and **National Youth Agency**. This National Lottery Heritage Funded programme – part of the £10m 'Kick the Dust' initiative – aims to get more young people interested and involved in preserving their local park and greenspace heritage.

As a result of the programme young people across the UK will learn more about their local historic park heritage and be encouraged to join their local 'friends of' park groups and volunteer to preserve the local spaces that matter to the communities they live in.

The project is also working with 'friends of' park groups to give them the tools, encouragement, and support to get more local young people involved in their work and to see the benefits of cross-generational working.

Working with Young People: An Introduction

We all share a passion for the environment and making our local community spaces more inclusive but how do young people fit into the picture? Whether you are just starting out or you already work with young people, through this guide we will share insight into deepening youth engagement toward active involvements and provide a few tools and exercise you can use to sustain participation.

Why work with young people?

Young people are one of a number of groups that generally have low levels of influence over decisions that affect them, despite having strong opinions and relevant experiences that could be invaluable to decision-makers. Too often, the responsibility for decision making sits with adults in positions of power whilst young people are most affected by changes to local green and open spaces. If we truly want to empower our community to become active citizens, then the earlier recognise the value of listening to and working with young people, the better.

Encouraging youth social action leads to a 'double benefit': for community causes and for the personal development of young people. Our guides will explore how to engage young people in environmental social action in variety of ways – let's get started!

About this Guide

For the purposes of this guide, we are referring to young people aged primarily between 14 and 24 years. It is between these ages that people begin to form their social and political identities and develop a desire to positively influence the world around them. We know getting young people involved in volunteering from a young age is vital as is the need for quality in youth engagement, to encourage volunteering as a life-long habit. You can find out more about working with young children outdoors from the Home Nations Play Associationsⁱ whilst these guides will focus on engaging teenagers and young adults.

This short guide is designed to introduce you to working with young people in green spaces. This leads on to our more in-depth How-To-Guides which look at six key areas:

1. Including young people in your organisation
2. Working with local youth-facing organisations
3. Recruiting young volunteers
4. Empowering young volunteers
5. Safeguarding young people
6. Fundraising with young people

1. Including Young People in Your Organisation

Firstly, it is important to consider why you want to engage young people in your organisation, and to assess what this means for your organisation in practice. This will help you to plan your activities accordingly and will help you to decide how much support you may need.

Getting to know the needs and aspirations of all community members is vital to sustainable community development. Although making community projects inclusive is not easy, the rewards far outstrip the challenges. Understanding barriers faced by young people in your area can really help you to understand the needs of your community, and how to support young volunteers.

Utilising the skills and enthusiasm of young people can lead to all kinds of community benefits, including access to their social networks of peers and family, a boost to volunteer numbers and capacity, greater impact for your project and increased sustainability of your organisation.

Top tips and tools:

- 1. Make sure you are inclusive** Dedicating resource to ensuring your organisation truly represents the community you serve will go a long way to maximising the impact of your work.
- 2. Take things one step at a time** Don't try to rush things – take some time to plan thoroughly, and don't be afraid to ask for help and guidance from other organisations.
- 3. Consult, consult, consult!** By gathering opinions of young people when you are developing your approach, you can ensure you're on track to success...and don't stop there! Keep engaging young people, gathering opinions and feedback throughout – and keep it meaningful. You'll truly begin to empower young people if you can show them the real impact they're having in their community.



Find out more:

See our How-To Guide on '[Including Young People in Your Organisation](#)', which contains self-assessment and consultation activities to get you started.

2. Working with Local Youth-facing Organisations

Collaboration and partnership are core values which are central to the development of community projects, as long as there is a focus is on win-win arrangements.

Different youth-facing organisations – schools, youth clubs, local authorities, local public bodies, charity organisations – are like to be resource constrained but all will share a passion of wanting to create opportunities for the young people they serve. If you have discovered you share this passion too, then you are half-way to a fruitful partnership!

There are also several national organisations who will be keen to support you in addition to Groundwork. These include National Youth Agency, UK Youth, National Citizens Service, Duke of Edinburgh, Girl Guiding and Scouts.

Top tips and tools:

- **Know Your Youth Organisations!** Get to know more about the organisations you are approaching – they will have quite different approaches to working with young people and levels of flexibility within that. Find out whether they are part of any current initiatives and whether there is a key contact for these initiatives or partnership events to attend.
- **Understand What Your Organisation Brings To The Table!** Develop a clear idea of what your group has to offer potential partners – ideally some skills or knowledge – and how this will make a difference to young people they work with.
- **Don't Give Up!** When approaching the organisations, be persistent and patient with receptionists and other gatekeepers, finding out who the key contact might be and how to best contact them.
- **Make a Plan!** Make sure you have a well-rehearsed session plan and proposal linked to the type of activities the organisation does, ready to share with your new contacts. Include what you need from them to do to help you engage with young people. It is also good to show you know the basics of safeguarding young people, by including a brief risk assessment within your plans.



Find out more:

See our How to Guide on '[Working with Local Youth-Facing Organisations](#)', for more detail about different types of organisations and how to plan a session for young people.

3. Recruiting and engaging young volunteers

Communication is central to the success of any project, yet different groups will use different methods of communication. A communications and recruitment plan tailored to young people is key to keeping volunteers engaged.

We know young people are interested in taking part in social action, and many see raising awareness through online networks as important as offline action they take in their communities. By brushing up on social media skills and offline engagement skills, you can embrace the ability of young people to build networks and drive campaigns online and offline.

Top tips and tools:

- **Recruit through Referral** Use existing projects with young people and work with partner organisations to recruit young people to your project – it is often more effective to start your engagement through a trusted adult or organisation.
- **Communication, Communication, Communication!** Develop a communications and recruitment plan – including role descriptions, events and key messages to promote your organisation. Emphasise benefits of CV building, social time and confidence building, introducing environmental and community benefits later.
- **Provide variety** Tailor engagement methods and drop-in activities to different participant characteristics (particularly age and gender).
- **Two ears, one voice!** Listen to and respond respectfully to young people, what activities they would like to do and why – develop the mutual benefits of working together and work towards a deeper engagement with volunteers.



Find out more:

See our How to Guide on '[Recruiting & Engaging Young People](#)' for tips on designing a recruitment cycle and connecting with young people via social media.

4. Empowering Young Volunteers

By working with the values of community development and individual empowerment, you will be able to deepen engagement of young volunteers and empower young members of your group. It will take time and patience to refine your approach to working with partners and young people but you will soon find what works well for everyone and pattern of participation activities you can use year upon year.

Being open and transparent about your own capacity to develop volunteers is important, although this should improve as you engage with more volunteers. Work with regular volunteers to find ways of them taking responsibility for empowering other young people, through youth-led projects, peer mentoring initiatives, and helping you to evaluate your approach.

Making the leap between engagement and empowerment will require working with young people, as partners, to run your organisation or change local services according to their needs. Providing young people with the information, skills and experience of making a vital change will enable them to become active citizens and to see the benefits of community development.

Top tips and tools:

- **Training Well and Often** Good training for volunteers and mentoring certain individuals will ensure retention and deepen participation. Create progression opportunities with other organisations and within your organisation i.e., at committee or trustee levels.
- **Reward and recognise individuals** Showing volunteers the impact of their work through recognition goes a long way enables them to see the individual and community benefits of volunteering. Rewards can vary from factoring in social time to get to know each other, passing on a very useful skill, or making time to say thank you.
- **Quality control** Involving young people in the monitoring and evaluation of your approach and shaping projects for future participants will deepen their involvement. Giving capable individuals' responsibility for leading a project or spending budget will also develop their confidence and skills to take up long-term role in your organisation.



Find out more:

See our How to Guide on '[Empowering Young Volunteers](#)' for information on supporting keen individuals or groups of young people and finding out more about the services that young people need.

5. Safeguarding young people

Safeguarding is a term which is broader than 'child protection' and relates to the action taken to promote the welfare of children and vulnerable adults and protect them from harm. Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

All organisations, including charities, are expected to comply with the government inter-agency statutory guidance 'Working Together to Safeguard Children', 'unless exceptional circumstances arise'.

Safeguarding is defined in Working Together to Safeguard Children (2013) as:

- protecting children from maltreatment
- preventing impairment of children's health and development
- ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care
- taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes

The Basics of Safeguarding for community groups includes:

- Ensuring one or more senior people in your organisation has a dedicated responsibility for safeguarding and is appointed 'Designated Safeguarding Officer'.
- Ensure the Designated Safeguarding Officer and a Deputy Safeguarding Officer have had training from an external agency and have completed a Disclosure & Barring Services (DBS) checks.
- Develop the relevant policies and procedures for safeguarding.
- Ensure all members of your organisation coming into contact with young people know the policies and procedures around safeguarding.
- Ensure relevant volunteers working with young people have undergone a DBS check - checks for volunteers are free but will incur an administration charge from the umbrella body you choose to use.

Useful links

Government Guidance www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-children-and-young-people/
NSPCC guidance and toolkits for safeguarding - www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/safeguarding/
Disclosure & Barring Service www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service



Find out more:

See our How to Guide on '[Safeguarding Young people](#)' for information on why safeguarding matters to voluntary community groups; and understanding good practice in safeguarding when working with young people.

6. Fundraising With Young People

The key to reaching a fundraising target is a clear campaign, targeted at local people and using different forms of media. When combined with more traditional fundraising tactics such as community events, digital fundraising could secure the funds needed for you to sustain your activities and extend your reach in the wider community at the same time!

We know young people are interested in taking part in social action, such as volunteering or campaigning, and are looking to gain new skills and confidence by joining community groups. What better way to boost their skills, confidence and contribution to the community than including young people in your fundraising campaign? There are mutual benefits of learning how to fundraise with young people, utilising the skills of 'digital natives' whilst young people learn essential skills of budgeting and financial management from group members.

Top Tips and Tools:

Organising a successful fundraiser will take time and intensive work for around 3-6 months, warming up existing partners and building a database of new supporters.

- You need a simple project idea with, snappy title, broad appeal and sense of urgency – i.e. the funding is going to increase the impact your organisation can make on people's lives in the community!
- Assess whether your group has capacity and skills to take on an intensive online and offline campaign – you will need a project manager, networker, social media whizz, videographer, content creator, budget/finance/rewards coordinator, events coordinator.
- Rewards for people who give is typical in the world of fundraising. Your rewards can be handmade or part of your existing service, tailored to different donation amounts and audiences.
- Create content for your fundraising campaign way in advance of your launch – case studies of the impact you have already made; pictures of your existing projects and ideas for the future; a video explaining your organisation and fundraising aims; key messages for different audiences.



Find out more:

See our [Crowdfunding Toolkit and Guide to 'Fundraising with Young People'](#) for information on how to run a mixed online and offline fundraising campaigns and for links to traditional sources of funding.

REFERENCES

- i **Play England** www.playengland.org.uk
- Play Board Northern Ireland** www.playboard.org
- Play Scotland** www.playscotland.org
- Play Wales** www.playwales.org.uk

FUTURE PROOF PARKS



Engaging young people through
volunteering to preserve and celebrate
their local heritage parks and green spaces

OTHER RESOURCES IN THIS SERIES

[Including young people in your organisation](#)

[Working with local youth-facing organisations](#)

[Recruiting young volunteers](#)

[Empowering young volunteers](#)

[Safeguarding young people](#)

[Crowdfunding Toolkit](#)

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