

RISK MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE

Engaging young people in policymaking and other initiatives requires a robust risk management framework to safeguard participants, protect staff, and ensure the success of the engagement. Below is a detailed framework to address some of the specific risks associated with working with young participants.

Keep in mind this is a guide only. Refer to your department's risk management framework.

1. IDENTIFY AND CATEGORISE RISKS

Assess risks in different areas to understand potential challenges:

Physical risks:

- Risks related to in-person events (e.g. injuries, transportation accidents).
- Accessibility challenges for participants.

Emotional and psychological risks:

- Discussing sensitive topics may cause distress (e.g. mental health, trauma).
- Managing group dynamics to prevent exclusion, or bullying (if the engagement is across multiple encounters).

Safeguarding and legal risks:

- Risks related to the involvement of under-18s, including the need for Working with Children Checks.
- Ensuring parental/guardian consent and compliance with child protection laws.

Reputational risks:

- Negative experiences can impact the organisation's credibility and discourage future youth engagement.
- Participants may share negative feedback on social media if they feel mistreated or undervalued.

Operational and compliance risks:

- Failing to adhere to legal or ethical standards for youth involvement.
- Lack of proper training or supervision for staff interacting with young people.

2. ASSESS RISK LEVELS

Use a risk assessment matrix to categorise risks by likelihood (from rare to almost certain) and impact (insignificant to catastrophic). Prioritise the risks by addressing high-likelihood and high-impact risks first.

Provide a risk rating for the **content** using the table below.

	LIKELIHOOD				
IMPACT	Rare	Unlikely	Possible	Likely	Almost certain
Catastrophic	moderate	moderate	high	critical	critical
Major	low	moderate	moderate	high	critical
Moderate	low	moderate	moderate	moderate	high
Minor	very low	low	moderate	moderate	moderate
Insignificant	very low	very low	low	low	moderate

○ 1. Very low ○ 2. Low ○ 3. Moderate ○ 4. High ○ 5. Critical

3. DEVELOP RISK MITIGATION STRATEGIES

Physical risks:

- Ensure venues are safe and accessible to all participants.
- Provide transport options and have emergency plans in place for in-person events.
- Share site maps and directions to the venue for in-person events.
- Encourage participants to join from a comfortable place and in a place they feel safe for online events.

Emotional and psychological risks:

- Train facilitators to recognise signs of distress and provide support resources (e.g., mental health services).
- Offer safe spaces for participants to step away if discussions become overwhelming.

Safeguarding and legal risks:

- Ensure all staff undergo Working with Children Checks and safeguarding training.
- Use written parental consent forms and clearly outline participation expectations and support measures.
- Have a designated safeguarding officer available during engagement activities.

Reputational risks:

- Set clear expectations with participants about the engagement process and outcomes.
- Regularly seek feedback from participants to address concerns early.
- Monitor public communications (e.g., social media) and address issues proactively.

Operational and compliance risks:

- Ensure staff have training in youth engagement frameworks and ethical standards (e.g., [Ethical Research Involving Children – ERIC](#)).
 - Document all processes, including consent and feedback mechanisms, to ensure compliance with relevant policies.
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4. MONITOR AND REVIEW RISKS

Continuously monitor risks throughout the engagement process to address issues as they arise:

- Check-in meetings: Hold regular check-ins with participants and staff to identify emerging risks. The Office for Youth does this with members of the Youth Advisory Groups.
 - Feedback loops: Collect feedback from young participants after key activities and use it to improve future sessions (See Guide 7).
 - Incident reporting: Establish a system for reporting and addressing safeguarding or operational incidents quickly.
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5. CONTINGENCY PLANNING AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT

Life likes to throw unexpected challenges into the mix. It's important to be prepared for unforeseen risks or emergencies. You can mitigate unknown risks by:

- Collecting emergency contact details for all participants and staff.
- Developing and communicating procedures for managing incidents such as medical emergencies or safeguarding breaches.
- Preparing a plan to manage public relations if a reputational issue arises.

6. DOCUMENTATION AND REPORTING

It's important to document all your actions and processes. Remember to:

- Keep copies of consent forms and safeguarding policies.
 - Maintain records of staff training in youth engagement and safeguarding.
 - Document and file any incidents and required actions.
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7. ASSIGN RESPONSIBILITIES

If no one is responsible, then no one is accountable. Make sure you have key responsibilities assigned to support staff in understanding their responsibilities. Roles you may consider include:

- Team Leaders, to oversee the implementation of risk management strategies.
- A Safeguarding Officer, to make sure the engagement is compliant with child protection policies (some departments may refer to this role as a Child Safety Officer).
- Facilitators, who directly interact with young people, monitor group dynamics and respond to emotional risks.
- Engagement Officers, who are responsible for liaising with stakeholders, young people and youth organisations. They may also work with your internal communications teams to draft materials for social media, newsletters, etc.

These roles may be shared by multiple people, and there may be more roles that we have not described that are specific to your context. Reach out to the Office for Youth for additional guidance.