ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN OPEN GOVERNMENT

A communication guide

OECD

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Introduction

Open government strategies and initiatives aim to support democracy and inclusive growth. They are an important tool to increase transparency, accountability and integrity, whilst building stronger relationships between government and citizens allowing them to participate in policy-making. As the OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government underlines, open government and stakeholder participation initiatives should include specific efforts "dedicated to reaching out to the most relevant, vulnerable, underrepresented, or marginalised groups in society". Although youth are a highly heterogeneous group with different backgrounds, skills and capacities, they often find it more difficult than other segments in society to make their voices heard. Youth can be considered as one of the groups that requires specific efforts.

Public communication is an essential tool to promote an open government culture (OECD, 2016 and OECD, 2018b). The OECD Recommendation calls upon adherents to "actively communicate on open government strategies and initiatives, as well as on their outputs, outcomes and impacts, in order to ensure that they are well-known within and outside government, to favour their uptake, as well as to stimulate stakeholder buy-in". Accordingly, tailored efforts to inform and communicate with youth are needed to promote an open government culture and include youth as active actors in open government strategies and initiatives.

Why is it important that governments put youth audiences at the heart of their open government strategy and initiatives?

What are the benefits of doing so?

Harnessing the demographic dividend

Public information and communication efforts which are tailored to the media habits of young people can result in an increasing uptake of opportunities to get involved and ultimately strengthen the legitimacy of political decisions and increase trust in government officials. This is not only important in countries in which a significant share of the total population can be considered "youth", such as in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, but also more globally as young people have expressed their discontent with the existing mechanisms to raise their concerns and influence the decision-making process. A large young population can be an asset for governments, by providing an active workforce that can drive economic growth and productivity and bring greater innovation to the economy. On the other hand, this 'demographic dividend' is strongly dependent on sufficient economic opportunity being available. The youth population also represents an important share of voters, and can play an active part in shaping the political and social life. Yet in many countries youth populations also express a frustration with political systems. Ensuring the active engagement of young men and women in advancing the open government agenda is therefore essential to mitigate the risks of political, economic and social marginalisation, and to assume agency in shaping their lives, societies and economies. Considering youth in open government communication efforts is thus a crucial element.

Encouraging innovation and economic development

Active and engaged young people can be a source of government innovation and improved service. By encouraging youth to participate in open government initiatives, governments can create positive impact on a personal level and with regard to the overall development of societies and economies. For instance, governments can encourage the development of new, innovative industries and initiatives whilst young people can provide governments with fresh ideas and approaches and ensure that policy outcomes are responsive to the concerns of young people.

Building active citizenship

Engaging young people in open government initiatives can result in an increasing understanding and interest among young people in civic and political affairs and foster active citizenship: young people feel that they are actively involved in decision-making and that their concerns are taken seriously by government officials. This can contribute to social wellbeing at an individual level, by building self-esteem and a sense of empowerment, and bring about important benefits for societies such as an increased awareness for common challenges and a joint commitment to identify solutions that work in the long run. Ultimately, it also benefits society as a whole by reinforcing positive civic behaviour: participation in civil society and politics, staying informed on politics, and voting or encouraging young people to run for official positions in elections. Engaging people at a young age builds strong citizens: membership of youth groups and voluntary organisations correlates with future political engagement and builds trust and transparency between generations and between citizens and their government.

Shaping the online debate

Understanding how young people use technology and reflect their use of traditional and new media into tailored communication strategies plays a central role for governments seeking to efficiently inform, communicate and engage with them. Technology and in particular social media has become an important part in young people's everyday life. Indeed, in OECD countries in 2016, over 95% of 16-24 year-olds used the Internet (OECD, 2017), while almost 90% of 16-24 year-olds internet users in EU member states use social networks in 2017 (European Commission, 2018). 53% of 18-24 year olds use social media as a gateway to news, compared to 33% accessing them directly, according to a study in selected countries (Reuters Institute, 2018). Yet, technology is not used to the same extend to interact with the government and participate. In 2013, only 40% of young Europeans interact online with the public administration while only 18% use social media to engage in civic and political life (Mickoleit, 2014). There is thus a need and potential to extend the use of the online debate to engage and communicate with youth.

This guide to public communication with youth within the framework of open government strategies and initiatives will provide ideas and approaches how to effectively communicate with youth in order to engage them in open government reforms, drawing on recent research and case studies from across the OECD member countries. It is addressed to public communicators.

Knowing youth audiences

Developing a successful strategy for communicating with youth audiences: who are they, what do they want and how do they perceive their relationship with government, political life and civil society?

When considering communicating with youth audiences, it is essential to remember that "Youth" is not a homogeneous category: it includes a diverse array of people with different backgrounds, expectations and needs. Developing a communication strategy targeting youth must therefore take into account the various subcategories of citizens it is targeting.

However, this does not mean that youth audiences cannot be engaged collectively. In fact, there are certain issues that are of particular relevance and concern to all young people, such as education and training, social inclusion and diversity, and economic opportunity housing, health and mobility. Youth are also more vulnerable to global challenges including the long-term impact of climate change, raising inequality and high public debt and have shown determination to mobilise others in order to raise awareness among policy makers and civil society. Young people have acknowledged the critical role played by public governance in this regard. The My World 2015 survey had 'good governance and effective institutions' ranked 4th on the list of priorities by 16-30 year olds (Farrow, 2016). It can therefore be assumed that young people are likely to be interested in open government strategies and initiatives and the benefits that they can offer, especially if they are connected to other issues that matter most to them.

1. Understanding how youth engage in the political debate

While on the surface it can appear to be the case that young people are less politically engaged than previous generations – being less likely to vote, for example, or to join political parties – research shows that younger generations often favour new forms and channels to engage politically.

Research in the UK, for example, has revealed that young people are no less committed to political processes than their parents' generation; however, they perceive a lack of genuine opportunities to take part in political life and feel alienated from formal public institutions (Henn & Foard, 2014).

Box 1**.**1**. In practice: Understanding youth engagement today**

- **Identify the issues driving youth engagement through informal / online channels (brand boycotts, campaigns on particular issues, calls to action…)**

- **Acknowledge how and why young people feel alienated from official institutions (average age of politicians, accessibility of information…)**

- **Audit of departments and institutions to understand how policymakers currently address youth issues and communicate impact**

Instead, political engagement has shifted to alternative realms: activist movements and protests or boycotts are still powerful channels for political expression, while the online sharing of views and information allows young people to express their views and formulate demands for action and change outside of official structures and oversight.

A shift from formal political engagement to informal or online engagement can reflect a sense on the part of young people that government and its institutions are run by professional elites who have little sense of or interest in the concerns of the youth. Low voter turnout and membership in political organisations can indicate a belief that such actions do not truly allow people to influence processes and affect outcomes. Such beliefs can be particularly prevalent amongst those communities that are often marginalised by political processes – migrants, minorities, low-income families and people lacking basic education. These changing means and areas of engagement need to be taken into account when designing communication strategies.

Box 1**.**2**. In practice: Inclusive Communication**

- **Carry out surveys of existing youth engagement channels (youth groups, youth councils, internship programmes, etc.) and determine demographic profile of each programme**

- **Identify gaps in current engagement efforts: regional, age, gender, socio-economic background**

- **Identify existing civil society organisations working in these areas missing from current communication strategies**

- **Ensure that all government communications strategies are monitored for inclusivity**

2. Considering socio-economic and demographic factors

Given the diversity of people contained within the 'youth' group, governments designing communications strategies must ensure an appropriate range of voices are heard and concerns are addressed. Policies and programmes should therefore not merely target elite young people, who are the most likely to be already engaged in the political process, for example as members of youth associations, NGOs or political parties.

Relevant factors to consider include gender balance, racial and ethnic diversity, and socio-economic background. Research has demonstrated that young people are particularly affected by social inequality and that opportunity or lack thereof at an early stage in life can have significant and long-lasting effects on their trajectory in life, with early barriers to education and community engagement contributing to increasing marginalisation and isolation over the lifetime (OECD, 2018a and Augsberger, 2018).

Box 1.3. Guidelines on cross-cultural Communication

- **Be open to different values, perceptions and behaviours.**

- **Recognise that culture is not homogenous and is shaped by class, ethnicity, family, gender, religion, political beliefs, age and migration experience.**

- **Learn about other cultural and ethnic groups by showing interest and asking questions.**

- **Not make assumptions about culture or language. Each young person is an individual, with individual circumstances. Do not stereotype according to race, gender, dress or sexuality.**

- **Use correct pronunciation of a young person's name and ask if not sure.**

- **Avoid judgements or assumptions about English language proficiency.**

- **Use an interpreter when necessary and learn about the language needs of a particular cultural or ethnic group.**

- **Employ a range of communication strategies including professional interpreters, translated material and displaying posters that reflect diversity."**

Source: **www.cmy.net.au/sites/default/files/publication-documents/Culturally%20Competent%20Youth%20Work2011**

Consequently, it is essential to ensure that youth communication strategies do not reinforce socio-economic marginalisation by only targeting existing elites, such as high performers at prestigious schools. Conversely, programmes that focus on marginalised groups only, can also exclude the many young people in the middle. Youth communication strategies must consider this demographic in its full complexity and diversity, rather than as a single unit with common concerns, needs and expectations.

Youth communications strategies must also consider the many factors that could hinder youth participation. Such barriers to participation could include macro factors, such as negative stereotyping, absence of mechanisms and institutions amplifying youth's voices, national or regional traditions of political behaviour and structures such as centralisation, social factors, such as family background, education and membership in youth movements, psychological factors, such as personal motivations and beliefs, and demographic factors, such as gender, ethnicity and socioeconomic background (Bee & Kaya, 2017). Strategies that operate through closed social networks can also shut out important voices and exacerbate inequality.

3. Encouraging a two-way conversation

Research demonstrates that young people increasingly consider that there is no single source of information they prefer to turn to for political news and views. Moreover, young people are no longer content to merely receive information from official authorities, media outlets and opinion leaders but increasingly expect to play a role in producing or sharing it (Wells, 2014).

In parallel, networks of trust for young people tend to be based on perceived relevance and reliability, as opposed to the authority or legitimacy derived from holding a particular position or identity. As such, a successful approach to engage large numbers of young people is to adopt a more networked, digital approach to communications that expects young people to participate actively.

"Young people are no longer content to merely receive information from official authorities, media outlets and opinion leaders but increasingly expect to play a role in producing or sharing it..."

Civil society organisations often hold strong relationships with young people from which government can learn in terms of managing their interaction and relationship with youth. Governments can therefore look to existing frameworks for youth communication to identify potential channels for engagement.

4. Choosing the right location for communication

There are multiple ways to access young people and it is important to incorporate as many of these as possible into a youth communication strategy to reflect the diversity of ways in which young people engage with their communities. These locations of communication include schools and universities, youth groups, neighbourhoods, sports and other leisure clubs, voluntary associations, and religious groups.

Young people also increasingly experience life through online communities: social media networks, forums, games and activist movements shape young people's sense of identity and purpose in powerful ways, as 95% of 16-24 year-olds in OECD countries used the Internet in 2016 (OECD, 2017).

It is important that communication strategies include both face-to-face and online communications activities. While online communication enables governments to reach a large audience and drive participation amongst both broad-based and targeted groups, it does not build long-term relationships of trust and cooperation in the same way that in-person activities do. It is also harder to monitor the impact of online programmes on young people's lives (e.g. tracking whether individual participants continue to engage or change their behaviour as a result of a programme or initiative). It must also be borne in mind that not all youth are online or prefer to use this channel for communication with government.

"Social media networks, forums, games and activist movements shape young people's sense of identity and purpose."

2

Reaching youth audiences

How can governments develop effective and appropriate approaches and messages to reach youth audiences? How can they draw on both traditional and new communications channels?

A communications strategy for effective youth engagement on open government reform may share similarities with communications strategies for wider audiences. However, it must be tailored to take into account the specific interests of youth audiences, as well as the most effective channels to reach them, and the tone and style to adopt to ensure that messages resonate and inspire action and engagement. While there will always be occasions when a government seeks merely to communicate using one-way channels, without a call to action (for example, when announcing appointments or the results of a vote), where possible communications activities should be accompanied by activities designed to increase two-way communication and youth engagement, which refers to, according to the OECD Recommendation on Open Government providing "the opportunity and the necessary resources to collaborate during all phases of the policy-cycle and in the service design and delivery". This will help to build strong, long-term relationships with young citizens, and ensure that the principles of transparency, participation and inclusivity are at the heart of activities.

1. Principles for youth communication

Treat them as equals

The first stage of a youth communication strategy must be based on the principle that young citizens are active change agents with a valid voice on public policy issues.

Indeed, young people already play an active role in society: they are leading protests, are entrepreneurs, artists, thinkers and influencers. Failing to take this premise into such as by treating young people as lacking the necessary experience, knowledge or seriousness will be counter-productive and unlikely to produce the desired outcomes and encouraging young people to be active citizens committed to open government, and ensuring that government initiatives reflect their needs and concerns.

Figure 2.1. Principles for youth communication

Communicate as early as possible	Be clear and transparent about the reason for communication	Detail the scope of interaction	Explain the expected outcome	Create a conversational approach	Give instant feedback about the impact
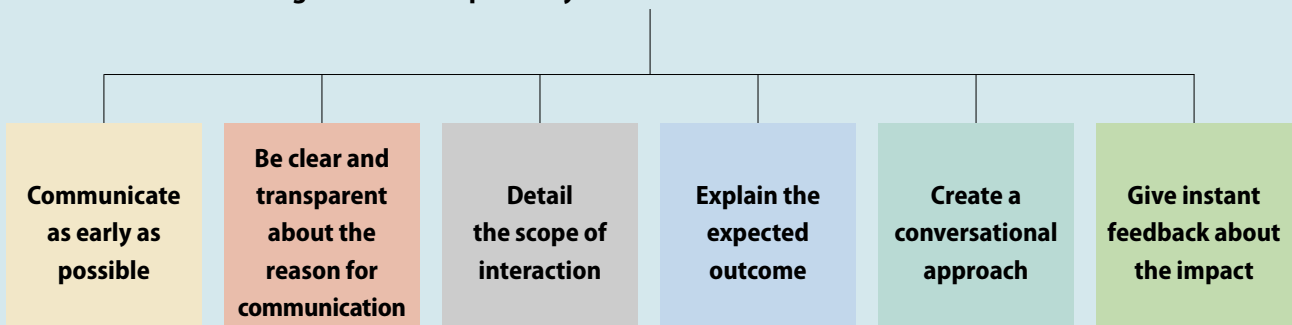
Box 2.1. **Key ingredients of effective communication**

- **Simple, clean, uncluttered advertising**
- **Honest and straightforward in approach**
- **Not patronising, condescending, or authoritarian**
- **Simple language**
- **Brief and to the point**
- **The use of music as a key element**
- **Use images, colour, strong visuals**
- **People and situations with whom they can identify**

Source: Australian Government, Office for Youth, 2009

Empower, entertain and allow for interaction

Research shows that young people are keen to engage in apolitical and community-related issues (especially local issues) and social action (e.g.: volunteering, human rights, environment, etc.). Taking this into consideration, youth communication strategies within the framework of open government strategies and initiatives should therefore distinguish themselves from traditional government communications and focus on specific topics that are directly relevant to youth or tie them with broader topics of direct interest to them

Content must be personally relevant and 'real' and allow them to identify with and relate to the message. It should be easily and quickly accessible and presented in a friendly, fun and creative way. Communication should have something to offer in terms of entertainment, personal gain, or an opportunity to connect and communicate with others.

Finally, young people are used to instantaneous communication and results and want to see immediate effect. Instant feedback is therefore important even though it may be challenging in the context of government reforms which often require time and multiple channels of approval.

Box 2.2. **Learning from non-governmental youth engagement experts**

- **Create non-judgemental 'safe spaces' (both online and face-to-face) where young people feel comfortable sharing opinions and ideas freely**
- **Clear guidelines on how information will be used and with whom and how it will be shared**
- **Empower young people to make decisions and lead on their own projects, rather than just following instructions from adults**
- **Focus on local / community issues and projects but with clear links to national / international agenda (e.g. environment, women's rights, health and wellbeing)**

"Treating young people as lacking the necessary experience, knowledge or seriousness will be counter-productive and unlikely to produce the desired outcomes."

2. **Methods, messages and tone for youth communications**

Traditional approaches to communicating institutional news and agendas remain relevant in the era of open government but should be accompanied by new methods to reach young audiences.

A traditional style of communication often includes that a communicator transmits information to an audience which is expected to accept and follow instructions. Examples of this would be press releases and statements that merely inform ("This is what we have done and what we are going to do.") or provide straightforward calls to action ("Attend this meeting," or "Tell your representative you support this measure."). The only source of information is the communicator itself.

Prioritising a participative approach

The new style of communication can be understood as one designed to create a sense of empowerment, agency and individual meaning.

In this model, the communicator provides opportunities for its audience to share and collaborate in the production of knowledge and policy. Communication may therefore take the form of calls for input ("*Please share your opinions on this aspect of our work.*") and calls for action that ("*Tell us what your community is doing about this*," or "*What would you like your representative to do about this issue?*"). Information comes from a variety of sources, for example by including links to data from unaffiliated organisations.

Government communications strategies for open government strategies and initiatives will therefore be most effective in engaging young audiences if they reflect these new methods of communications.

In any case, open government strategies and initiatives provide a well-suited subject for more innovative and engaging forms of communication since participation is a cornerstone of open government reform. Open government strategies and initiatives can therefore provide governments with a pilot project of experimenting with a more empowering and individualised form of communication, one that values participation and feedback and encourages citizens to play an active role in the process of creating knowledge and practice.

Box 2.3. **Best Practice**

- **Ensure that, where appropriate every piece of communications (press release, blog post, social media post) includes a clear call for input or action: hashtags can be used to facilitate tracking of engagement**

- **Ensure that communications staff monitor conversations to identify and de-escalate any areas of concern quickly (for example, abusive comments or sharing of false stories)**

- **Ensure that future communications reflect the impact of contributions received (for example, highlighting success stories shared by participants, highlighting examples where input has been used to shape the direction of a policy or initiative)**
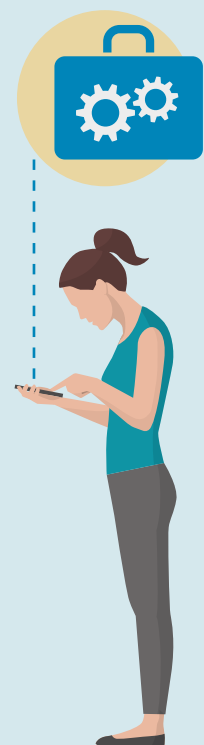
Beware of tone and style

When governments identify appropriate ways to communicate with young people, striking the right tone and style is important.

Studies have shown the importance of targeting messages depending on factors such as age group, level of education, interests, language (Shanahan & Elliott, 2009).

Young people are quick to refuse messaging that is condescending ("*The government knows more than you on this subject*") or which adopts an authoritarian tone ("*The government knows what is best for you on this subject*"). Likewise inappropriate use of slang can be counterproductive and deter young people from sharing and engaging with content. However, overly formal language and the use of jargon and acronyms can also be alienating; colloquial and everyday expressions are best for building interest and creating trust. Where multiple languages are in use in a country (including dialects), considerations should be given to issuing communications in each language to avoid stigmatising those who prefer to communicate in one language. Likewise, multiple social media channels can be created so that young people can engage with the version in their preferred language.

The most appropriate tone to adopt is one that is simple, honest and easy to identify with. Communications should not be out-of-touch with the everyday concerns of young people. Communication should reflect the kind of relationship that the state is trying to build with its young citizens and focus on long-term behaviour and engagement, rather than short-term outcomes. Indeed, the most effective way for governments to engage young people through communications is usually by avoiding overtly partisan content and focusing more on engaging around social or policy issues in a way that does not promote the agenda of a particular political party or faction. Similarly, the tone should be respectful and focus on positive, aspirational and empowering messages.

Influencing the influencers

Communication should not be aimed at children and young people only, but also at their parents, teachers and other key influencers. Key sources of influence include parents and friends, the internet, music, the media and celebrities and idols. These groups need to be taken into consideration when developing communication campaigns targeting youth.

Using third party voices

Identifying suitable third parties to communicate and endorse messages can be a powerful way of engaging young people: sportspeople, artists and entrepreneurs can all be powerful advocates on relevant issues, and are more likely to be trusted by young people. This can also include youth movements, civil society groups and community organisations.

"The channels for youth communication need to be tailored to the specific needs and behaviours of young people."

3. Channels for youth communications

There are multiple ways of communicating with young people in order to inform and engage them in open government strategies and initiatives.

'Traditional' forms of communications that governments frequently use to communicate with citizens – e.g.: press releases, press conferences, websites and media appearances – are one form of reaching young people but presumably not the most effective to actively engage them.

Instead, the channels for youth communication need to be tailored to the specific needs and behaviours of young people. These include: official structures such as youth councils, which use youth representatives to represent young people's perspectives to policymakers; collaborative projects where young people and adults work together to run projects or make decisions; deliberative programmes, which seek to bring together a wide range of youth representing diverse backgrounds in order to debate a particular issue or influence a particular policy; digital participation, whereby young people are engaged around online tools and platforms, such as polls, data exchanges and online campaigns; and activism, whereby young people take part in campaigning groups or protest movements in attempts to influence outcomes, either formally or informally.

Activism is least likely to be relevant to government communications, although governments may adopt some of the methods and approaches of activist movements in order to encourage young people to actively play a role in their society and community.

"All activities must ensure regular participation in order to both deliver genuine long-term impact and build the skills of the participants."

Table 2.1. Channels for youth communications

Channel	Advantages	Challenges
Youth councils	Effective at building active citizenship and creating long-term relationships; high-quality input driven by long-term commitment to participate	Limited reach (especially to vulnerable youth); requires significant commitment in time and resources
Collaborative projects	Effective in providing young people with useful skills and experiences; successful models can be rolled out more widely	Require long-term commitment of adult partners; can be difficult to extend beyond the community level
Deliberative projects	Particularly effective in building trust / engagement with marginalised groups; can be used to solicit quality engagement on a particular issue within a set timeframe	Require trusted civil society partners to manage; need to ensure sufficient time is built in to project for effective engagement
Digital participation	Effective at reaching a large and diverse audience; quick to deploy; requires less financial outlay	Requires active monitoring to prevent conversations going off track; more challenging to monitor long-term impact and engagement
Activism	Effective in building a sense of shared identity among participants; builds awareness quickly of important issues	Can be hijacked by loudest voices; resistant to control by official channels

While these channels are the most widely used to communicate with young people, it is important to note that none of these various channels for communication is inherently more suited to communicate with youth or more likely to deliver effective results in isolation. Instead, a mix of communications channels should be used, with efforts made across each channel to ensure that programmes are inclusive, sustainable, empowering and focused towards specific and long-term goals.

Youth communication activities should also be built on youth-centric practice. This means that programmes incorporate representation (a diverse and inclusive membership), leadership (empowering youth to take ownership of activities, with appropriate guidance and training where required), initiative (allowing young people to change the direction of planned programmes) and decision-making (empowering youth people to take meaningful actions) (Augsberger, 2018). All activities must ensure regular participation in order to both deliver genuine long-term impact and build the skills of the participants.

It is advisable for governments to test the ground by running pilot programmes, to ensure that sufficient resources are available to deliver, monitor and react to young people's feedback. Moreover, a focus on pilot programmes allows governments to ensure that there are sufficient partners on board to reach out to a maximum number of young people.

Fostering active youth participation in practice

Comment les gouvernements font-ils en sorte que les jeunes citoyens s'engagent activement dans les stratégies et initiatives du gouvernement ouvert au travers de la communication ?

This section will focus on the most effective ways of communicating with young people on the subject of open government strategies and initiatives, focusing in particular on those channels that facilitate two-way communication between government and young citizens.

1. One-way channels for communication

While the majority of this report focuses on delivering effective two-way communication fostering engagement, there will still be occasions when a government seeks simply to communicate using one-way channels. This could include, for example, sharing information about particular programmes, reforms, projects or events.

Table 3.1. One-way channels for communication

Channel for communications	Uses	Recommendations
Website	Repository of data (names and contact details, forms for download, announcements, etc.) Dedicated websites for projects or programmes with resources, links, news and updates, opportunity to submit comments/feedback	Dynamic and engaging visual presentation, incorporating links to social media channels, video clips, photos, etc. Must be kept updated to ensure users bookmark and return on regular basis
Press releases	Targeted at media outlets and blogs followed by young people; can also be sent directly to youth associations Announcements of new programmes, competitions and events, results of previous programmes, new appointments, etc.	Ensure that media team has a database targeted at youth media (radio stations, TV shows, blogs, youth magazines, community media) Press releases can also be shared via websites and social media channels, to maximise reach
Reports	Detailed commentary and feedback on particular programmes, initiatives or topics Can be produced in partnership with civil society organisations, youth associations, academic institutions, etc.	Available for download via social media channels and website Print copies can be sent directly to youth associations, NGOs, etc.
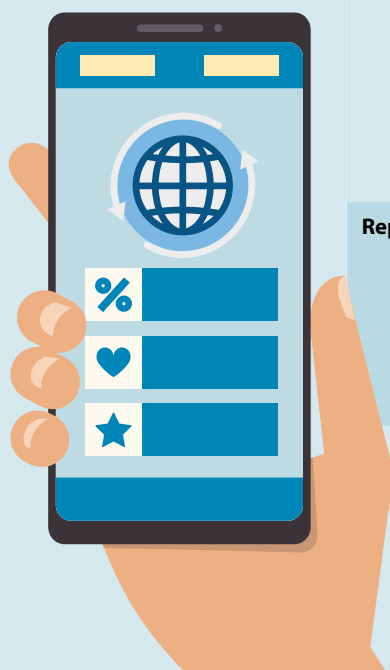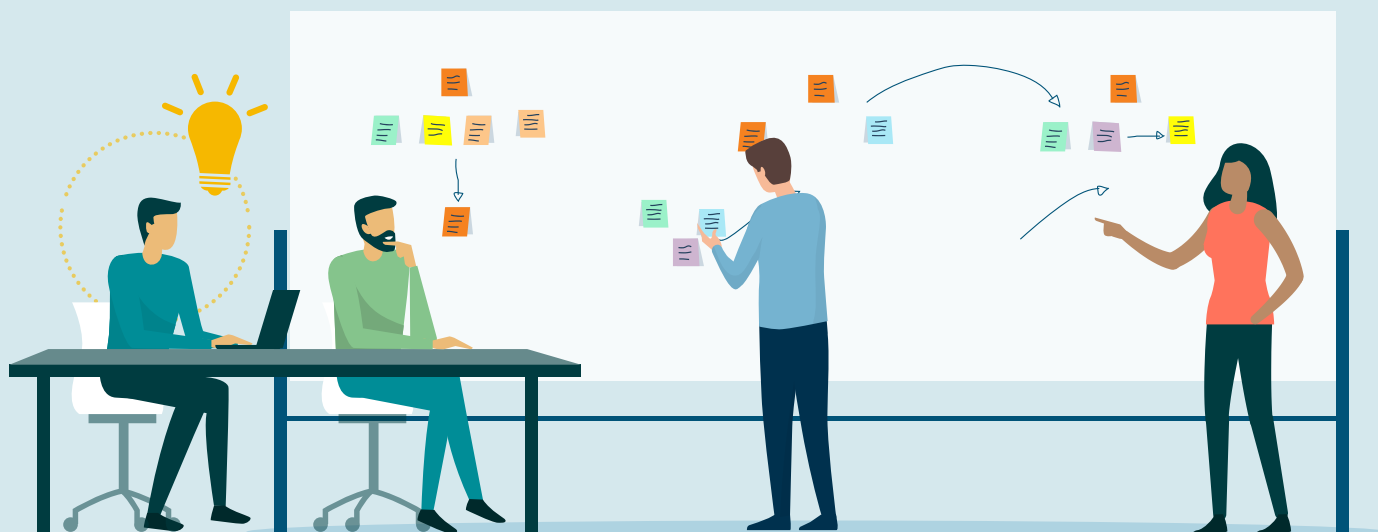
"Youth councils encourage young people to play an active role in their communities and teach vital skills that support wider economic development..."

2. Youth Councils and other formal structures

Youth councils are representative bodies that elect or appoint a group of young people to discuss and advise policymakers on particular issues. They generally operate at a local level, for example through schools or municipal councils, and prioritise local issues, such as youth services and programmes, educational issues, and health and wellbeing. They also exist at national level and supranational (e.g. European Youth Forum) to advise on specific policy issues, run campaigns and raise awareness and lobby for desired policy outcomes.

Youth councils and similar formal structures offer governments a traditional channel through which policy makers can interact with organised youth and take their concerns into account. Youth councils encourage young people to play an active role in their communities and teach vital skills that support wider economic development, such as communications skills, planning and project management, and advocacy. They can also strengthen intergenerational ties by encouraging collaboration between young people and adults towards shared goals. As such, they are an important element of a communications approach and can also function as an intermediary to communicate with the youth they represent. Communication must be seen as continuous, rather than a one-off or occasional activity. It should also consider youth council members as full citizens – not future citizens in training.

However, research into the practice of youth councils highlights some of the challenges which must be taken into account when choosing locations for youth communication: they can be perceived by young people as restrictive representing only a fraction of youth (Taft & Gordon, 2013).

Thus, in addition to communicating through youth councils, governments should consider non-governmental youth groups and grassroots organisations which can be perceived as more democratic and as offering greater scope for youth input. Non-governmental groups are also considered to offer greater diversity of participation, and can therefore be a lever to reach a wider variety of youth.

Schools can also play a role in governments' communications about open government strategies and initiatives and foster active citizenship among youth. Researchers have identified the close links between citizenship and education and have stressed the importance of civic and citizenship education as considered as "Youth literacy" by the OECD. It ensures that youth have the needed knowledge to participate in public life and exercise their democratic rights and duties (OECD, 2018c). This means that educational programmes within schools should not only focus on formal teaching opportunities – such as adding information about open government strategies and initiatives to official curricula – but also on ways of encouraging students to actively experience the principles they are studying. This could involve, for example, coursework modules that are based on developing community projects that make use of open data, the creation of school councils that put open government principles into place in their own operation, or presentations from external organisations with opportunities for students to volunteer on projects (Keating & Janmaat, 2015).

3. Collaborative and deliberative projects

Collaborative and deliberative projects involve young people and adult facilitators, such as civil society organisations or government researchers, working together to run a specific project or discuss a particular issue. They often take the form of workshops or conferences, which are generally preceded by an educational phase to ensure that participants are fully informed, and succeeded by a follow-up phase to demonstrate to participants the impact their involvement has had. They can be used as part of a government communications programme to focus on particular themes or projects in the area of open government, such as understanding the impact of a particular policy, or identifying potential improvements to the delivery of a particular service.
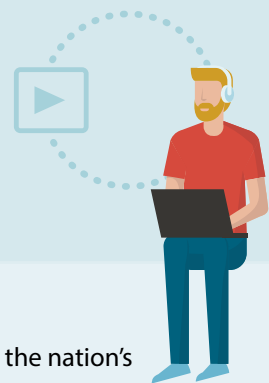
Box 3.1. **Case study: The Young People's Constitution (Iceland)**

In 2010, the Icelandic government appointed a Constitutional Council to work on revising the nation's constitution. In order to ensure that young people's voices were heard as part of this process, the Icelandic Children's Ombudsman, UNICEF Iceland and the City of Reykjavik launched a programme to gather young people's input on the constitution.

The programme, the Young People's Constitution, used the country's existing network of youth councils and strong tradition of youth participation to bring young people together to work on this project. As part of this recruitment process, a concerted effort was made to ensure balanced and inclusive representation, including input from immigrant communities.

In order to ensure that the young participants were fully informed of the issues, an educational phase was built in at the beginning of the participation process: videos and other tools were developed and screened and shared in schools and workshops.

As a result of the Young People's Constitution meetings and workshops, a report with recommendations was put forward to the Constitutional Council; this included a recommendation that the new constitution should include an article specifically supporting children and young people's participation in the political process. The Council was impressed with the quality of youth engagement and recommendations and incorporated the article on youth participation in its recommended constitution.

Source: **http://stjornlogungafolksins.is**

They can enable governments to recruit a more diverse group of young people and can be particularly effective in building positive relationships with more marginalised groups of young people, who may not feel comfortable taking part in formal structures such as youth councils and who may have limited access to digital tools for online engagement (Liebenberg, 2017).

Such projects rely on youth and government officials with the necessary skills and ability to build up reciprocal trust, often in collaboration with civil society groups.

Before launching such programmes, governments should carry out an initial research phase to ensure that the proposed projects reflect a genuine need on the part of the targeted group and that sufficient capacities exist to run the project effectively

Projects should then be structured in a way to ensure that youth participation is meaningful; young people must feel comfortable collaborating with facilitators, such as government agents, academic researchers or representatives of civil society organisations, and reassured that their views will be heard and taken seriously. This can be achieved by working through trusted community partners who are used to working closely with young people and who are conscious of the importance of gathering quality feedback and ensuring sustained participation and engagement. Such projects should also contain educational elements and provide ongoing training and support to participants. In order to ensure these projects are successful, it is particularly important to ensure clear, transparent and timely feedback to enable participants to understand why they are being asked to participate and the impact that their contributions have for the decision-making process. This could include a commitment to invite participants to launch events, acknowledging their contribution in published reports, a regularly updated section on project websites with news and updates, follow-up meetings in the weeks or months after the project has concluded to share results and findings, or asking participants to share their experiences with or act as mentors for participants in future projects

Finally, studies across a range of countries demonstrate the importance of framing youth-adult programmes in terms of partnerships; the adults should not participate merely in order to facilitate youth engagement but should instead work closely with the young citizens on shared goals and with shared responsibilities (Zeldin, 2017).

Participatory projects enable young people to take ownership of a project and adjust it in the direction that they feel is important. This kind of dynamic not only helps marginalised young people to build skills and relationships, it also builds trust between these communities and authorities, and provides governments with valuable insight into targeting particular groups in society more effectively.

4. Social and digital engagement

Digital communication tools can be powerful means for reaching a large number of young people, gathering input on youth-relevant issues and for building a more participatory political culture.

In fact, social media and digital engagement offer a counterargument to the idea that contemporary youth are less engaged politically than previous generations: campaigns, protests and boycotts frequently spread quickly via social networks such as Twitter or Facebook and blogs and have proven to be effective in channelling activity towards specific outcomes, such as boycotts.

Research shows that online engagement is often dominated by alternative forms of networks, ones shaped less by traditional social ties (such as neighbourhood or school) and more by alternative affiliations created and nurtured online (e.g. identities and beliefs). This form of engagement is often led by young people who can be described as 'networked young citizens' (Loader, 2014). These networked young citizens are less focused on traditional norms of citizenship based on voting, community volunteering and membership of political groups. Instead they seek to find new ways to make their voices heard via horizontal networks that are more individualised and less hierarchical. These alternative forms of political engagement should be understood as an equally valid form of political participation.

However, it must be noted that questions of inequality and inclusivity are at play in digital networks. Social media encourage exclusive as much as inclusive approaches. Importantly, access to online tools and networks is itself distributed unevenly, with rural areas, for example, often having poor internet provision, while access to computers and smartphones also reflects broader socio-economic patterns of income inequality. Moreover, social media is particularly vulnerable to manipulation, for example through the distribution of disinformation or sharing of hate speech. For these reasons, it should only be used where there are sufficient dedicated personnel available to monitor conversations and identify and de-escalate areas of concern, for example by asking social media platforms to remove offensive or misleading content. Indeed, government campaigns can also be used to raise awareness of these very issues, educate young people in how to identify disinformation, and inform users of reporting tools available to flag hate speech.

"Networked young citizens seek to find new ways to make their voices heard via horizontal networks that are more individualised and less hierarchical."

However, social media can nonetheless be seen as a potential way of mitigating political inequality; it can help to engage marginalised groups that would not easily be reached through formal programmes, and can also provide a safer way for people to comment and participate without the risk of stigmatisation, for example through the provision of anonymous reporting tools on online platforms.

Social media

Facebook is widely used by youth as a forum to exchange information, express personal identities and values, and mobilise peers. Research suggests that for some young people consider Facebook as a form of political engagement in itself – not just as a channel that directs them towards forms of offline participation (Vromen, 2016).

Twitter offers a similar forum for political engagement and comment, and has become a powerful channel for political engagement, for example through the sharing of stories and experiences connected to trending hashtags. Other social media channels, such as YouTube and Instagram, are less widely used for political engagement, although it is increasingly common for young people to follow YouTube commentators and such 'vloggers' can be highly influential amongst youth audiences, albeit with a focus on more lifestyle-centred content (fashion, health and fitness, video gaming, etc.).

"It is increasingly common for young people to follow YouTube commentators and such 'vloggers' can be highly influential."
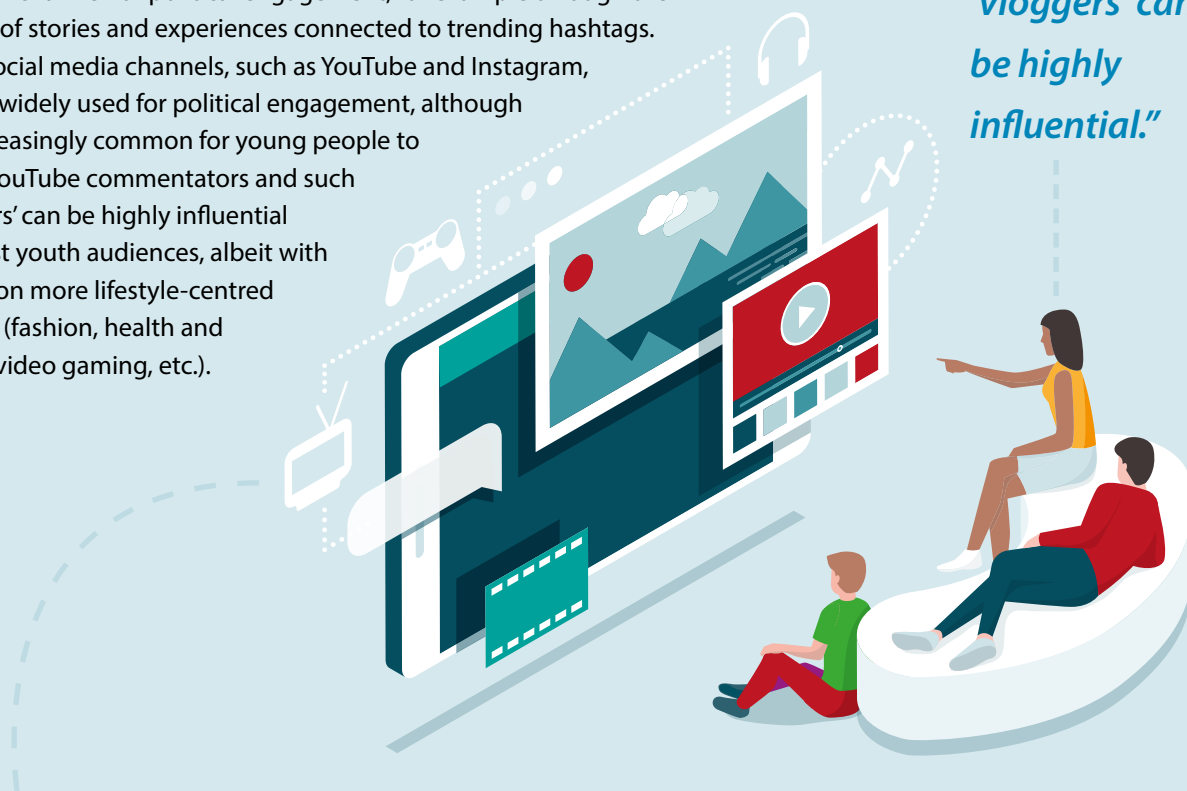
Box 3.2. **Case study: Leaders Today (Canada)**

Canada has launched a programme to develop the country's first youth policy. The project is centred around a dedicated interactive platform (youthaction.ca) as well as regular in-person meetings.

In order to promote this programme widely, the government has created dedicated social media channels to promote the youth policy project and to encourage engagement. This includes Facebook, Instagram and Twitter channels, in both English and French.

A series of hashtags (#CdaYouthAction, #LeadersToday) are used to tie conversations together and to identify relevant content for sharing. All content is designed to be shareable and inspiring, for example through the use of short video testimonials and engaging graphics.

Source: https://www.facebook.com/LeadersToday/

Social media is also an important source of news for young people and plays a symbolic role in creating networks of solidarity amongst young people via the liking or sharing of particular posts. As such, it can offer a way to help communicate and spread messages about the importance of open government strategies and initiatives and about the various policies underway that engage young people. However, many young people are also somewhat ambivalent about the role of Facebook and Twitter and may be wary of overt political engagement online, particularly given concerns about privacy and the sharing of private data by companies such as Facebook. The social importance of Facebook's network can also lead young people to limit their posting or sharing of content that they fear may offend or alienate their network; official government messages and communications may well often fall into this category.

Given these dynamics, while social media may be useful for the sharing of government messaging about open government reforms, it is currently no major tool for direct engagement. However, youth councils and the kinds of collaborative and deliberative projects outlined above may well choose to use Facebook pages as a way of sharing information with members and promoting their activities. Indeed, encouraging young people involved in open government projects to use social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter to promote their activities can be particularly effective in spreading credible messaging about reform programmes. Such user-generated content is considered more legitimate and inspirational than official messaging, and also allows young people to create their own stories and to feel that they are playing an active role in public life.

The challenge for government institutions in adapting to these new ways of communicating, however, is that there are greater constraints in terms of the formulation of messages and use of channels: while controversy can be effective in helping campaign-groups spread their message widely, governments cannot risk being associated with potentially offensive material and must retain overall control of the campaigns and actions they are promoting.

Online tools and platforms
Looking beyond social media, online tools and platforms can offer a forum for communication that engage young people around particular themes or debates. Examples include platforms set up to solicit young people's opinions or experiences on using government services, or their perceptions of the work done by particular institutions. Online platforms can also be used as a way of sharing information and encouraging young people to use this information in particular ways, for example providing open data and offering young people the opportunity to propose ways they would use this data to help their local community, with the best suggestions receiving funding.

Such online platforms can be an effective way of rapidly increasing the number of engaged citizens but can also run the risk of being dominated by a relatively small number of highly engaged participants.

Research on such platforms in Australia confirm these trends as many people signing up initially do not contribute, leaving a small circle of users to influence the process (Liu, 2017). For this reason, online platforms must be designed in ways that prioritise inclusivity, actively tackle potential barriers to participation and provide incentives for long-term engagement.

It should be clear to young people from the beginning of the process what impact they can have and how their input will be used. Such transparency around contributions can also help to reduce potential conflicts of interest, such as the domination of the process by particular groups (e.g. members of a particular campaign group). It is also important to ensure that, where polling is used, it is not open to manipulation, for example by implementing measures to ensure participants can only vote once.
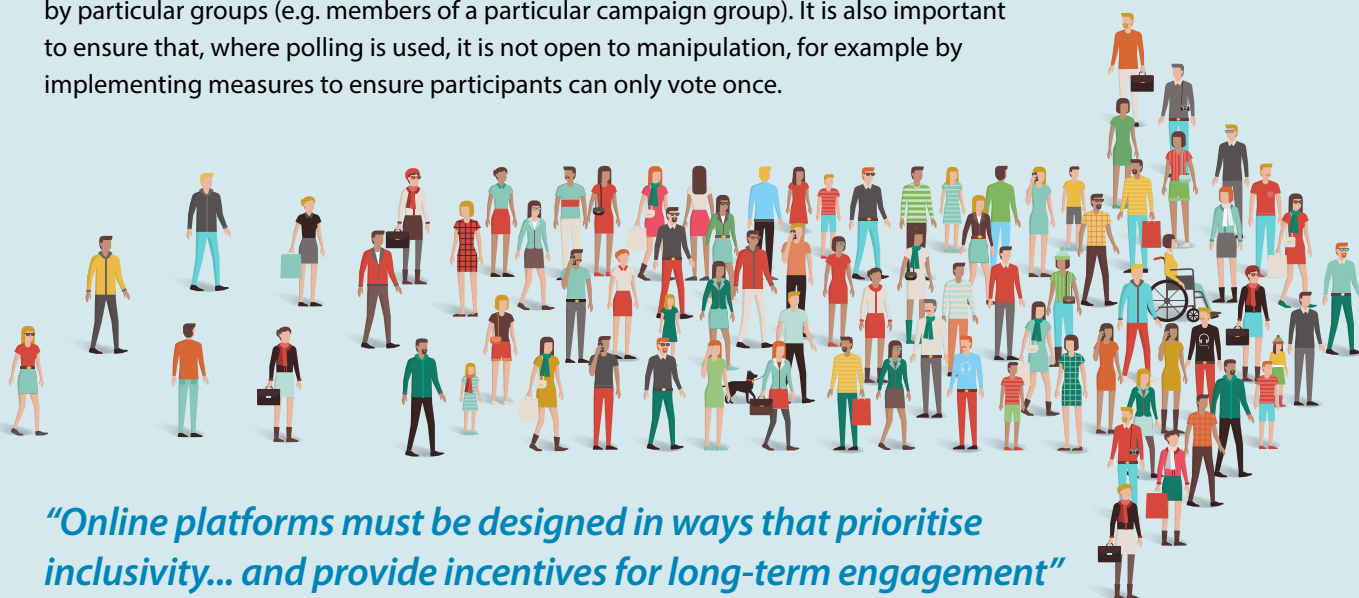
"Online platforms must be designed in ways that prioritise inclusivity... and provide incentives for long-term engagement"

Box 3.3. **Ich mache Politik (Germany)**

The German Federal Youth Council launched the Ich mache Politik platform in 2013 to increase young people's engagement in policy-making. The objective was to provide a transparent, accessible and engaging digital platform for the exchange of information, ideas, opinions and feedback on policy areas of relevance to youth citizens.

An online tool enabled young Germans to contribute to policy decisions affecting young people, such as education or the transition from school to working life. The platform provided expert analyses, which users could study, discuss and offer opinions about. In order to ensure that young people felt listened to, and to enable them to clearly see the impact their input was having, the project also included feedback and follow-up information on previous decisions.

The project offered different ways of participating: users could either sign up as individuals, or as part of a group, such as a school class or a youth association. By offering these different options for participation, the programme was able to provide flexibility and engage with existing channels and groups. The project was structured around phases of participation, each focused on a particular topic. Each round lasted around three months, ensuring that there was sufficient time built into the process for young people to inform themselves, discuss the issues, and decide on their preferred outcome.

Source: **https://tool.ichmache-politik.de**

Box 3.4. **YouthMetre (European Union)**

The European Union launched its digital project YouthMetre in 2017 as part of its efforts to use open data to drive youth participation in policy advocacy. An online platform provides an accessible and engaging way to visualise data; a dashboard provides indicators for all EU member states on a range of measures, including social inclusion, health and wellbeing, volunteering and political participation, and cultural engagement.

YouthMetre also features a bank of case studies of best practice, providing users with information on successful models, including initiatives to increase youth participation in civil society, or raise awareness of social issues. The case studies and data indicators used reflect the results of the EU Youth Preference survey, which asked young people to rank the issues the most relevant to them.

The project aims to reduce the perceived gap between young people across Europe and the formal EU institutions. In addition to the flagship online platform, there is also a programme of training available for youth workers on how to use the tool effectively, as well as resources for policymakers to help them identify better approaches to youth engagement and assess youth policy contributions effectively. The online elements are thus fully integrated with a wider programme of youth engagement.

Source: **http://youthmetre.eu**

When designing online platforms and tools for the communication of open government strategies and initiatives, or when using social media channels to share information, it is important to recognise that such 'innovative' and digital methods are not in themselves sufficient for effective engagement (Crowley & Moxon, 2017).

Traditional communications indicators are still important: for example, rather than focusing on the number of posts or retweets of a particular message, the priority should be on communicating the importance of the ideas expressed in the social media posts, and the increased understanding of these ideas.

Online platforms should also still consider youth communication as a process, rather than an occasional event; the review of approaches and incorporation of new methodologies is essential, as is monitoring of engagement levels to ensure that communication is inclusive and widespread.

It should also be recognised that if engagement with government communications is dependent on access to digital tools, then barriers for participation continue to remain for more marginalised and disadvantaged youth. This can potentially be countered through the active incorporation of offline groups as facilitators for digital access, such as schools and youth groups.

Finally, innovative digital tools should not be created merely as new ways of communicating with young people, but always to improve it: lessons learned from digital communications channels (such as the importance of a particular topic or message) can be fed back in to traditional channels, and vice versa.

5. Events and hackathons

This report has emphasised the importance of ensuring that youth communication activities support sustained engagement over time. However, there is still a place for one-off events, provided they are structured around long-term policy goals and reflect wider strategy and messaging frameworks. One example of an event that can be used to drive youth engagement in the area of open government is the civic hackathon (Johnson & Robinson, 2014). These are competitive events that encourage developers, entrepreneurs, students and associations to use open data in new and innovative ways, for example by creating apps based on government datasets. While not exclusively targeted at young people, they can be particularly successful in engaging university students, recent graduates and young professionals, who may feel too close to adulthood to participate in programmes that are explicitly targeted at youth.

Civic hackathons can be a powerful tool for governments to demonstrate their commitment to transparency and open government, while also supporting the development of an entrepreneurial and innovative climate and a way of encouraging young people to participate directly in improving their government.

When designing an event such as a civic hackathon, governments must ensure that the data they provide supports meaningful participation, for example datasets on employment, education or social inclusion that is likely to encourage young people to take part by showing a clear link to their everyday lives. Events should also be structured around clear outcomes and support the development of solutions to genuine problems that affect citizens. Mechanisms must be incorporated to track who is participating and measure the impact of the project, such as the number of apps developed, their use post-event, and the coverage of the event and awareness raised of the wider issues.

"Civic hackathons can be a powerful tool for governments to demonstrate their commitment to transparency and open government."

Box 3.5. **Canadian Open Data Experience (CODE)**

The Canadian Open Data Experience (CODE) was an initiative launched by the Government of Canada to encourage the use of open data: a series of 48-hour competitive civic hackathon were held offering developers, students and other open data users the chance to compete for a financial prize awarded to the best app developed during the contest.

Apps were developed using datasets provided by the Canadian Government on areas such as average housing costs, processing times for residency applications and fuel consumption ratings. In 2014, the winning app – NewRoots – was designed to help people identify potential new neighbourhoods that best matched their needs, such as housing costs and availability, employment opportunity, and social diversity.

The hackathon was successful in encouraging government departments to contribute datasets to the platform, in attracting widespread participation from across the country (in addition to a high level of international interest), and in supporting innovation and entrepreneurship, with multiple successful apps launched as a result of the contest.

Source: **https://open.canada.ca/en/code-2014-event**

Conclusion

Ensuring that young people are actively engaged in open government strategies and initiatives is fundamental in building active citizenship and in creating programmes that fully reflect the needs and concerns of youth. Fostering this climate of engagement and participation is dependent upon the creation and implementation of an effective and tailored communications.

This report has outlined a number of recommendations for the successful delivery of public communications with youth around open government strategies and initiatives. The most important of these are:

Communications initiatives should reflect long-term goals and strategy and be designed to be effective over the long term. Communications should avoid partisan messaging and electioneering and focus instead on policy areas of concern to young people.

Programmes should have specific, targeted policy goals beyond simply 'improving the engagement of young people': instead, projects should be structured to achieve realistic outcomes, such as increasing the influence of young people within a particular institution; increasing youth access rates to a particular online tool or platform; or encouraging the use of particular open datasets by youth groups and young citizens.

Communications targeted at young people need to use a range of tools and channels and incorporate both more 'traditional' methods, such as youth councils and face-to-face workshops, as well as newer and digital forms of communication, such as online tools and social networking.

The use of innovative and new communications tools and channels such as online platforms and social media should be used where they provide better ways of achieving a particular communications objective, such as increasing the participation base or raising broad awareness of a particular goal or programme, and not simply because digital communications are seen as more appropriate for young people.

Young people should not be treated as 'citizens in training' but should feel that they have an important voice in discussions, that their concerns are being taken seriously, and that their input is being put to good use. Adults should act as partners and commit to working with young people towards shared goals, rather than guiding the process to their own ends.

The successful rollout of government communications on open government strategies and initiatives will be strengthened by the collaboration of third parties, such as civil society organisations, which have existing relationships of trust with young people and credibility on youth issues.

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