

## WHEN AND WHEN NOT TO DO PARTICIPATION

It is important to recognize that while participation can be critical in many circumstances and situations, it is not always the right choice. Some of the reasons when participation does not make sense can include the following:

### EXAMPLES OF EXTERNAL FACTORS:

- If a community feels overwhelmed, exhausted, has other priorities, and does not have the time to work closely with you.
- When constituencies you are working with are directly impacted by a crisis or humanitarian emergency; while participation may be possible, it may not be the right time. It is important to be led by them.

### EXAMPLES OF INTERNAL FACTORS:

- You do not have adequate capacity or resources to implement a participatory process well.
- You do not have buy-in or commitment from the leadership, which means there is a risk of the decisions made by children and young people not being respected.
- You do not have the time to ensure a meaningful process.

To better navigate if participation makes sense for you, where possible, open a conversation with the children and young people you are working with and understand their needs, capacity, interest and expectations around participating in your work. [Sections 3 - 5](#) of this Toolkit include activities, tips, and recommendations to ascertain your readiness, determine the appropriateness of participation, and learn how to build a practical approach.

## WHY CHILD AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION?

*“100% of organizations who are supporting child and youth participation would recommend it to other organizations.” -Philanthropy European Association (Philea).<sup>18</sup>*

Meaningful child and youth participation can be a powerful and invaluable catalyst for change and impact at multiple levels. Not only is it children and young people’s human right to participate in decisions that affect their lives,<sup>16</sup> but it also contributes to better outcomes. Whether you start small or big, you will see the positive impact. It clearly improves grant-making and contributes to a more equitable and impactful funding landscape.<sup>17</sup> The outcomes are also evident from the individual, personal level for children and young people (confidence, civic education, and self-esteem) to the strengthening of child- and youth-led groups, intergenerational movements, and the creation of more democratic societies. The impact can be seen even when children and young people are engaged on issues that might not traditionally be considered to be child or youth-related: *“It’s not a case of ‘you’re youth and you only do youth projects’. They’re involved in all of our projects which we’ve found has been very*

*beneficial as they bring a different thought to some of the programs or think about how youth respond,”* shared one public funder.

From a philanthropic perspective, meaningful participation and co-ownership not only leads to more impactful grant-making programs, but it transforms funders’ attitudes and practices, breaks down patriarchal and colonial structures and shifts power within the broader funding landscape. From a feminist perspective, by analyzing the impact of participatory approaches on children and young people, starting with the impact on them, their organizations and their communities, we can see just how political participation really is. The impact starts at the individual, or personal, level with them as political actors and ripples to their groups, communities and broader society.

## OUTCOME

Positive impact on the individual

- Improved confidence, empathy, self-esteem, skills in collaboration, and civic education.<sup>19</sup>

Strength and resourcing of child- and youth-led groups and organizations

- Provides access to more funding opportunities with stronger networks and a deeper understanding of the funding ecosystem.
- Builds skills and capacities in the group members, e.g., new monitoring and evaluation skills when involved in participatory monitoring and evaluation.<sup>22</sup>

Stronger communities

- Improves the quality of the work of organizations and their relevance to the communities they seek to support. They are more in tune with their community by actively sharing power.<sup>24</sup>
- Creates more skilled researchers within a community.<sup>25</sup>
- In times of crisis, participatory processes provide space for shared collective problem solving, community, and solidarity.
- Contributes to intergenerational collaboration.

Stronger movements and more democratic societies<sup>28</sup>

- Strengthens children and young people's broader commitment to and understanding of democracy by encouraging democratic processes like voting and consensus building.<sup>27</sup>
- Leads to concrete policy change, e.g., via child/youth-led influencing strategies
- Builds solidarity and room for coalition/movement building by bringing grantees together.

## EVIDENCE

- The Sillerman Centre, [From Beneficiary to Active Agent How Youth-Led Grantmaking Benefits Young People, Their Communities, and the Philanthropic Sector](#).
- ChildFund Australia, [The Role of Child and Youth Participation in Development Effectiveness](#).<sup>20</sup>

*"It is really empowering for young children to hear that their voice matters. It's not something that's often gathered in research. We want to know the best way to design a play experience and we tell children, you're the expert on play. And they love that."*  
-Researcher from a large corporate children's foundation interviewed for this research.<sup>21</sup>

- MamaCash, [New Perspectives, New Solutions: Funding Organising Led by Girls and Young Women](#).

*"After participating in the proposal evaluation process, youth committee members noted that they were better able to see shortcomings in their own projects, became more sensitive to diversity issues, and felt their own dignity and usefulness as they not only gave advice, but their advice was heard."*<sup>23</sup>

- ChildFund Australia, [The Role of Child and Youth Participation in Development Effectiveness](#).
- Devi Leiper O'Malley and Ruby Johnson, [A young feminist new order: an exploration of why young feminists organise the way they do](#).

*"Groups review each other's proposals, making groups more aware of other initiatives and strategies that may complement their work. This contributes to their overall awareness of larger networks and potential movements they can join – which are important resources for their work beyond funding."*<sup>26</sup>

- Annie E Casey, [A framework for effectively partnering with young people](#).
- Global Resilience Fund, [Weathering the Storm](#).
- Joining Forces - ChildFund, Plan International, Save the Children, SOS, Terre des Hommes, and World Vision, [A second revolution: 30 years of child rights and the unfinished agenda](#).
- The Sillerman Centre, [From Beneficiary to Active Agent How Youth-Led Grantmaking Benefits Young People, Their Communities, and the Philanthropic Sector](#).

*"The result we have seen is that [our youth philanthropists] go on to college, [and] most of them in their first year, in their college get involved in community service . . . and then, because they have been doing it so long it comes full circle, then they pick jobs that have service and philanthropy as a part of the mission of the organization."*<sup>29</sup>

## OUTCOME

A more just and fair funding ecosystem

## BENEFITS

- Creates a ripple effect among funders by building curiosity and intrigue and sparking practice change (participatory grant-making).
- Contributes to more credible and authentic funder practices.
- Improves the diverse distribution of resources.

## EVIDENCE

- Devi Leiper O'Malley and Ruby Johnson, [A young feminist new order: an exploration of why young feminists organise the way they do](#).
- Global Resilience Fund, [Weathering the Storm](#).
- Stanford Social Innovation Review, [How Listening to Constituents Can Lead to Systems Change](#).

*"The process of building feedback mechanisms created more equitable practices across organizations and advocacy efforts. The impetus to seek stakeholder input in one area triggered an instinct to do so in others."*<sup>31</sup>

Better funding practices and impact<sup>30</sup>

- Leads to better decisions, policies, and grant-making strategies.
- Creates a ripple effect across the organization.
- Surface the 'why' rather than just the 'what'.
- Allows funders to discover nascent groups they would otherwise not have been able to find (participatory grant-making).
- Improves the quality of data and its interpretation, accessibility, recruitment of participants, credibility of research, and communication of findings; therefore enhancing its influence and impact (participatory research).

- Global Resilience Fund, [Weathering the Storm](#).
- The Sillerman Centre, [From Beneficiary to Active Agent How Youth-Led Grantmaking Benefits Young People, Their Communities, and the Philanthropic Sector](#).
- Safer Young Lives Research, [Our Voices Programme - participatory action research](#).

*"We had a programme about online safety tied to a police department. And the police department representative said, 'It's very easy to navigate, so many people are open and talking.' And it took one of our youth council members to say, 'You may think it's really easy, but you don't understand that I was raised not to talk to the police. You can have all the helpline resources; I would never call you.' So we were like, 'Ok what should we add to the programme or what would help you cross that barrier.' And if they were not in that conversation, I think we all would have continued to think that the programme was perfect and ready to go if we hadn't had that youth voice." -USA Public Funder we interviewed for this research*

More trust-based, equitable relationship between funders and young people

- Builds greater collective understanding and co-ownership.
- Builds trusting and equitable relationships.
- Helps to dismantle funder-grantee power relations through power sharing.

- CIVICUS, [Resourcing Youth-led Groups and Movements](#).
- Youth Do It, [Investing in Youth Impact Toolkit](#).
- Elevate Children Funders Group, [Shifting the Field](#).

*"Definitions such as efficiency, effectiveness, and impact have traditionally been defined by donors and monitoring and evaluation experts in ways that do not necessarily fit in with children and youth organizing. Thus, it becomes difficult for their groups to showcase the real importance of their work."*<sup>32</sup>