

FORWARD



A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Meaningful child and youth participation in philanthropy can be a powerful catalyst for increased impact and transformation at multiple levels, from the individual to the systemic. Funders increasingly recognize that child and youth participation (CYP) is not only a child's right and a powerful tool for shifting power to the communities most affected, but also contributes to better strategic outcomes, even for programs that don't appear to address children and youth.

Even so, many funders still shy away from implementing meaningful participation across their work. Some don't understand its value, while others don't know where to start. Some raise important questions about safeguarding, compensation, and what's meaningful. Others lack an understanding of the different ways children and youth can be engaged in a philanthropic organization's work. Still others recognize that this work is challenging, and are afraid to get it wrong, given the high stakes of working with young people, particularly in vulnerable or marginalized groups.

Despite the many excellent resources available for nonprofits and development agencies addressing child and youth participation, few resources exist that address the unique, practical needs of funders. This guide aims to fill that gap.

Co-created by an amazing group of young leaders, and with the guidance of an advisory committee and the ECFG Child and Youth Participation working group, this toolkit is the first of its kind to offer support and guidance on the substantive "how-to" of CYP - tailored specifically to funders and philanthropic organizations. It looks at the full spectrum of CYP, including organizational structure, strategy development, grantmaking, MEL, and governance.

Whether you're just getting started or are a seasoned pro, we hope this toolkit will support your work as you:

- **Build your foundational understanding of meaningful CYP:** See [Section 2](#), which reviews key findings and insights from the desk review, KIIs, and youth participants.

- **Work to convince your leadership or board of the value of meaningful CYP:** See [page 13](#) for an overview of the evidence supporting the power and value of youth participation.
- **Get started or look to improve current practice:** See [Section 3](#) for a new funder-focused model, practical guidance, case studies, and resources on budgeting, compensation and safeguarding, care, and wellbeing. [Section 4](#) dives deeper into the practical considerations for different types of participation across a philanthropic organization.
- **Engage your wider team:** [Section 5](#) offers practical activities and reflection questions for engaging your colleagues in designing your approach.

This toolkit would not have been possible without the contributions of the authors, ECFG members and partners, and ECFG staff, but I want to highlight particularly the incredible insights of the many youth leaders that came together to influence its creation. In the true spirit of participation, I now hand the mic to them (the true experts here) to reflect on their experiences in philanthropy, the creation of this Toolkit, and what they want funders to hear...

A MESSAGE FROM THE YOUTH CO-CREATION GROUP

Young people are highly affected by social injustices and gender inequality. We also lead change and challenge cultural norms and structural power at the grassroots level. Yet, too often, our experience is that, even when funders engage in CYP, it is most often symbolic and tokenistic rather than meaningful and truly impactful.

Inequitable power dynamics exist between philanthropic organizations and the young people they seek to help, particularly in the Global South. While many organizations create youth groups, they then tell the groups what to do, which makes their very existence irrelevant.

The Toolkit's recommendation that funders examine their resistance to holding political stances resonates deeply with us. In a world marked by histories of colonialism, imperialism, sexism, and other -isms, neutrality is

fundamentally problematic. The implicit character of neutrality vis-a-vis explicit oppression ultimately creates environments where inequity and injustice are able to dwell outside of the realm of accountability; neutrality and silence become part of the problem.

The toolkit's recommendation that funders work with children and young people to co-create an ideal funding relationship is one that redistributes power and demonstrates trust and respect for the agency of young people. In allowing children and young people to design a relational hierarchy and power structure that benefits both parties, the infantilizing hierarchy that exists within the philanthropic space that positions us as passive recipients of aid, as opposed to free agents with the remit to create our own power dynamics, is redressed.

While this toolkit is a compelling entry point and best practice to increase child and youth participation across the philanthropic life cycle, the guidelines are not exhaustive. They should be adapted to country contexts and needs. When following the advice in this document, funders should understand and pay close attention to the various contexts in terms of children and youth inclusion, diversity, and participation. It is critical to recognize that the tools and mechanisms that will work in one place might need adjustments to achieve similar results in another. Context matters.

To young people: Here is your evidence. Use this Toolkit to advocate for change. It is our hope that young people will own this toolkit and its recommendations and take action to get commitments from funders in their respective countries.

To funders: Trust us - not just as young people with important perspectives, but as experts in our fields. Consider our value - not only in terms of participatory grantmaking, but from strategy development through evaluation, and in your governance and leadership structures. Work with us to achieve our shared goals.

In Solidarity,

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