ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE ACROSS SECTORS

A Practical Guide for Amplifying the Positive Impact of Youth-led and Youth-Serving Democracy, Rights, and Governance Programs

CEPPS
Strengthening Democracy Through Partnership

USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE
Engaging Young People Across Sectors

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Toolkit

Despite constituting more than half of the global population, young people continue to be underrepresented in decision-making processes. Efforts to establish sustainable gains in development and grow young people’s decision-making power must consider their civic and political participation. Leveraging strategic partnerships across sectors and designing youth-focused, cross-sectoral programs can create opportunities for meaningful engagement and improved democratic outcomes. When diverse stakeholders, such as international organizations, national and local civil society organizations (CSOs), and young people working in sectors outside of the democracy, rights, and governance (DRG) space align their efforts, they can amplify the positive impact of their initiatives.

_Engaging Young People Across Sectors_ is a resource for youth development practitioners and young leaders as they design and implement programs and initiatives that support young people to gain political knowledge and assume leadership roles within locally-led development processes across key development sectors. The toolkit draws lessons learned from a number of United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-funded programs in Europe, Nigeria, Ukraine, and the Pacific Islands, as well as the expertise of young leaders from around the world. This resource aims to enhance young people and development practitioners’ understanding of the importance of linking DRG programming with other sectors and effective cross-sectoral approaches in achieving long-term, sustainable change.

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**Sector** is defined as an economic or political subdivision of society. Sectors mentioned in this toolkit include education, technology, media, business, healthcare, and peace and security.

**Cross-sectoral** is defined as working across two or more sectors in one activity. For instance, a program would be considered cross-sectoral if it included a voter registration drive that is linked to filing for unemployment benefits or vaccination appointments.
What are Cross-Sectoral Programs and Why are They Important?

Young people around the world are at a critical juncture as they inherit an array of complex challenges, including environmental degradation, growing social and economic inequality, and decreasing levels of public security. At the same time, their socio-economic opportunities are increasingly limited and they must contend with entrenched leaders who are tightly holding the reins of power. In response, young people are finding creative ways to express their dissatisfaction with the status quo and demanding a more just, equitable, and sustainable future.

Informal youth political participation is on the rise; young people are increasingly taking action on issues they care about and leading efforts to foster positive change such as, collective action on issues such as economic inequality, corruption, and gender discrimination. However, the space for youth participation in decision-making remains limited and there are few formal opportunities or resources for young people to design or take part in programs or initiatives that engage multiple sectors.
Cross-sectoral programs integrate USAID approaches to *locally-led development* and youth-driven *systems change*. Both approaches envision local actors, including young people, as leaders who are essential for fostering sustainable results across development and human rights work. Cross-sectoral programs also engage local actors to address the root causes of social challenges, which are often intertwined with and impacted by politics. For example, in order to address challenges related to COVID-19, community leaders need to not only consult healthcare experts to determine what safety measures are most effective, but they also need to engage government officials to create policies that ensure safety measures are followed. When young people in particular have opportunities to explore the connection between, for example, health inequalities and political participation, along with the flexibility and resources to act, they are able to design and implement initiatives that leverage expertise and political entry points across sectors.

**Locally led development** is the process in which local actors – individuals, communities, networks, organizations, private entities, and governments – set their own agendas, develop solutions, and bring the capacity, leadership, and resources to make those solutions a reality.

**Systems change** is defined as adjustments or transformations in the policies, practices, power dynamics, and mindsets that underlie societal issues.

**Positive Youth Development (PYD)** engages youth along with their families, communities, and/or governments so that youth are empowered to reach their full potential. PYD approaches build skills, assets, and competencies; foster healthy relationships; strengthen the enabling environment for youth participation; and transform systems.

Informed by *positive youth development (PYD)* principles, cross-sectoral approaches also address some of the barriers to youth exclusion from decision-making by helping young people understand and address power dynamics and intergenerational relationships in their work. For instance, by collaborating with stakeholders in the government, education, and media sectors, youth implementers will better understand the different types of power in their community, how that power is used across sectors to maintain the status quo, and as a result, how to influence power dynamics to create positive change.
CEPPS Youth Democracy, Rights, and Governance Cross-Sectoral Initiative

Funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) under the Global Elections and Political Transitions (GEPT) program, CEPPS established the Youth DRG Cross-Sectoral Initiative (CSI) to examine the intersections between DRG programs and initiatives in other youth development sectors, bringing together a global cohort of practitioners, young leaders, and donors from across disciplines. The CEPPS Youth DRG CSI has acted as a knowledge-sharing forum dedicated to helping youth development practitioners and young leaders across sectors explore opportunities and share promising practices that advance the political participation, representation, power, and leadership of young people in decision-making positions and processes.

During the first phase of the initiative, CEPPS coordinated virtual learning events gathering practitioners, donors, and young leaders to explore the challenge of collaborating across sectors and opportunities to connect young people’s political participation with improved development outcomes. CEPPS held four events to examine the intersection of youth-focused DRG programs and the following themes: Youth, Peace, and Security; Health and Humanitarian Responses; and Engaging Families and Communities using social and behavior change (SBC) approaches.

To promote a diversity of perspectives, CEPPS invited young leaders and practitioners to share first-hand accounts of cross-sectoral programs that included examples of youth leadership and increased political knowledge and participation. The first phase concluded with a final report summarizing key cross-sectoral challenges and recommendations identified over the course of the initiative. Following this phase, a survey of young leaders and practitioners who participated in the initiative expressed the need for practical guidance and case examples that illustrate how to integrate cross-sectoral approaches into youth development programs. This toolkit is one effort by CEPPS to respond to this expressed need.
Toolkit Development Methodology

Through a review of CEPPS youth programs, the CEPPS DRG CSI identified several initiatives with cross-sectoral approaches and components. The programs and countries selected include:

- The European Democracy Youth Network (EDYN);
- Nigeria:
  - Support for Electoral Reform Project;
  - Youth Policy Agendas in Ekiti, Kaduna, and Osun;
- Ukraine:
  - #WhyWeVote;
  - Democracy: From Theory to Practice;
- The Pacific Islands:
  - Youth Leadership Training School; and
  - Support for University of South Pacific Student Association.

CEPPS selected programs and countries based on the following criteria:

- The program is USAID-funded;
- Evidence of a cross-sectoral component that fosters meaningful cross-sector engagement, such as civil society or political partnerships with stakeholders from different sectors;
- Evidence of the ability to advance or scale the program’s cross-sectoral impact;
- Development of youth agency stated in the program theory of change (ToC) and/or as evidenced during program implementation;
- Development of an enabling environment stated in the program ToC and/or as evidenced during program implementation; and
- The program provided opportunities for meaningful youth civic and political engagement.
To develop the case studies, CEPPS reviewed youth success stories, internal program reports, public media, and conducted semi-structured interviews with the CEPPSteams that implemented the intervention. CEPPS also facilitated several discussion sessions with the DRG CSI Youth Advisory Group (YAG) to review the case studies and identify strengths, gaps and opportunities to guide the development of cross-sectoral toolkit.

Using the findings distilled from the focus group discussions, CEPPS identified strategies and promising practices for working across sectors that are effective for increasing youth political participation and leadership. CEPPS also consulted members of the Generation Democracy Network to ensure that the recommendations in the toolkit are practical and actionable. Promising practices identified include:

- Integrate technical skill building, specifically political skill, into all programs.
- Provide space to develop soft skills that are transferable across sectors.
- Foster opportunities for young people to develop solutions to issues across sectors.
- Include collaboration between DRG actors and actors from multiple sectors.
CASE STUDIES

The European Democracy Youth Network (EDYN)

Nigeria

Ukraine

The Pacific Islands
The European Democracy Youth Network (EDYN)

The European Democracy Youth Network (EDYN) launched in 2018 as a coalition of more than 230 young leaders from 22 countries in Central and Eastern Europe, who are committed to promoting political and civic engagement in their communities. EDYN provides its members with resources, both financial and non-financial, to support initiatives aimed at tackling the most pressing problems being faced by young people today. These initiatives often require engagement across sectors to address the root cause of complex challenges. For example, to contain the spread of COVID-19 at the onset of the pandemic, CEPPS supported the EDYN Ukraine country chapter to help local councils distribute supplies to the elderly.

EDYN members have the opportunity to apply for funding through the network’s Membership Engagement Fund (MEF) small grants mechanism. To prioritize youth-led interventions, each MEF proposal is designed by EDYN members and selected by a committee composed of CEPPS/IRI and CEPPS/NDI staff, as well as the EDYN Leadership Council. Projects proposed under the MEF mechanism must seek to address one of the following objectives:

- Support youth representation and leadership in civic and political processes;
- Promote the expertise of young leaders in EDYN member countries;
- Increase interest among young people in EDYN member countries to engage in the democratic process; and/or
- Promote heightened interconnectedness and lower barriers to communication among young people in EDYN member countries.

Promising Practices: The case study demonstrates the importance of providing resources and funding for youth-led initiatives, as well as creating opportunities for young people to learn and apply political skills.

Sectors Highlighted: Education and Media.
MEF Program Example: “Youth and Europe” Debate Tournament

In November 2020, the EDYN Albania chapter designed and launched “Youth and Europe,” a national debate tournament between young people from different cities and backgrounds in Albania. Funded under the MEF mechanism, the program was aimed at engaging college students in meaningful, informed political discourse on critical social issues, increasing youth political participation, and creating new entry point for civic engagement.

The EDYN Albania chapter selected 48 young people to participate in the program. The participants were not members of the EDYN network at the time of the program, which was an intentional choice by the program implementers to raise the visibility of EDYN on college campuses in Albania. Ahead of four debate rounds, the selected participants underwent a training curriculum designed to hone their interpersonal and technical debate skills in preparation for the competition.
Using a survey, young people across university campuses chose the issues that were debated. Debate topics covered issues that young people care about from across sectors, including:

- Euthanasia must be legalized;
- Young people should be part of the decision-making process;
- Gender equality must be guaranteed by law;
- The state must provide jobs for all recent graduates;
- The state should invest 10 percent of the budget for technological developments;
- Media censorship is justifiable;
- Equal pay for women and men must be guaranteed by law; and
- European integration is crucial for Albania.

EDYN divided the participants into 16 groups of three members each. On December 8, the final two teams competed in the last round of the debate, during a live television production of “A Show” with Albanian journalist Adi Krasta. The winning team included three students from the Faculty of Political Sciences, who debated the drivers and solutions to youth unemployment, opportunities for youth leadership in politics, and European Union (EU) integration. Following the debate program, participants indicated a better understanding of the intersection between issues they care about and the influence of politics, specifically which political actors and processes have decision-making power.
Support for Electoral Reform Project

In 2020, CEPPS/IFES partnered with a youth-focused civil society organization in Nigeria, Kimpact Development Initiative (KDI), in implementing the “Nigeria Election Violence Report” (NEVR) project to monitor and track conflict ahead of the off-season elections in Edo and Ondo states. KDI substantially improved and strengthened the NEVR project’s impact in monitoring, raising awareness, and advocating for change around issues of electoral violence. Their approach included proactive, consistent engagement with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), National Peace Committee (NPC), and other key stakeholders, including local community leaders and traditional rulers. Engagement included sharing of useful data with the INEC to inform security planning and the dissemination of reports and fact sheets, which supported pre-election conflict mitigation and candidates’ signing of the Peace Accord in both Edo and Ondo states. With technical assistance from CEPPS/IFES, KDI also substantially expanded NEVR’s tracking of violence against women in elections.

KDI’s engagement with local peace structures enhanced community outreach and local ownership of the peace process. For example, KDI’s engagement with the Oba (traditional leader) of Benin through its collaboration with INEC and the NPC led to a de-escalation of violence and tension on Election Day. KDI’s partnership with these diverse leaders and community structures led to the adoption of community-wide solutions to mitigate violence on Election Day.

Promising Practices: The case studies demonstrate the importance of creating opportunities for young people to analyze issues across sectors and design solutions that incorporate political participation and political actors.

Sectors Highlighted: Media, technology, and peace and security.
KDI also utilized social media engagement for disseminating peace messages. In an initiative that connected a youth, peace, and security focus with women, peace, and security considerations, KDI used videos to raise awareness about electoral violence against women, including the “We Can Do Better” campaign on social media. One such video highlighted societal barriers that discourage women’s political participation, promoted women’s participation in the electoral process, and encouraged viewers to shun violence against women in elections. The video was widely shared across social media and with electoral stakeholders. Additional informative social media messages distributed by KDI, including anti-violence messaging aired through television and radio advertisements, contributed to an effective conflict mitigation and peace education campaign. KDI also leveraged technology to collect electoral violence monitoring data more quickly and effectively through their mobile app, VTrack. The mobile app helped with monitors’ reporting efforts and reduced the time needed to review and verify incident reports.

Youth Policy Agendas in Ekiti, Kaduna and Osun

In 2019, CEPPS/NDI carried out a series of training events on organizing, advocacy, and policy development for three partners: New Generation Girls and Women Development Initiative (NIGAWD); One Project Afrika (OPA); and KDI in Ekiti, Kaduna, and Osun states. The training was implemented as part of the USAID-funded Electoral Empowerment of Civil Society Program (EECSP).

CEPPS/NDI trained partners on different forms of advocacy and collective action, including strategies for building power, identifying and maintaining relationships with allies, message development, and social media skills. Throughout the training, participants learned about the importance of consulting young people working across sectors, such as education, health, and agriculture, to ensure that a diverse set of priorities would be reflected in their initiatives. Participants also gained knowledge about which political actors and institutions have decision-making power at the state-level and increased their understanding of how to influence the budgetary process with factual and compelling data.
Utilizing the skills and knowledge gained, each partner organization created a youth policy agenda and designed a complementary advocacy campaign in Ekiti, Kaduna, and Osun. Each campaign sought to address the political and socio-economic needs of young people in the state and convince key political actors to adopt their policy recommendations. Prior to the development of each policy agenda, each organization consulted young people using questionnaires that were administered to better understand young people’s priorities. Each youth agenda included critical priorities, such as education, health, agriculture, employment and entrepreneurship, peace and security, and poverty reduction. The youth agendas also included recommendations for line items to be included in the 2020 state budget.

Throughout the implementation of these advocacy campaigns, each partner mobilized and organized young people to advocate for change and to call for implementation of the policy agenda in their respective states. NIGAWD, OPA, and KDI held regular media roundtables with a cohort of journalists who reported on the progress of the advocacy campaigns. Each partner held policy town halls and dialogues with state-based youth organizations, senior government officials, entrepreneurs, and CSOs to discuss the recommendations in the policy agenda and gain public support. Each partner met regularly with various stakeholders across sectors including the ministries of health, commerce and industry, budget and planning, education, and agriculture to encourage government ministries, departments, and agencies to uphold their budget commitments.

The youth policy agenda process and advocacy campaigns placed young people, including young women, in visible leadership positions and helped them build relationships with civic and political actors in each state. Young people were able to influence the budget process and better understand how the policy process and the budget process can have real implications on the issues they care about most. A post-program evaluation found that the youth policy agendas and the advocacy campaigns responded to the particular priorities and needs of young people in each state and that young people were involved in every step of the process. In Kaduna, three of KYA’s recommendations in ministry budgets included construction of ramps at primary school buildings; refurbishment of warehouses for young entrepreneurs; and relocation incentives for health workers. Three recommendations from the Osun Youth Agenda (OYA) were also included in budgets, including creating youth innovation hubs; youth-friendly health centers; and farm settlements.
#WhyWeVote

A 2019 IRI poll, conducted with support from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), demonstrated that young people were less likely to vote in the upcoming elections than older Ukrainians. In response, under the USAID GEPT mechanism, CEPPS/IRI facilitated a video competition to mobilize a new generation of voters ahead of the 2020 local elections. As part of this program, CEPPS/IRI conducted weekly seminars for over 100 candidates, campaign team members, and young civic activists throughout Ukraine on how to create effective videos for advocacy. After the training, these activists were then invited to film their own creative get-out-the-vote (GOTV) videos and submit to the #WhyWeVote (ЧомуМиГолосуємо) video competition. With their videos, these activists urged voters to take the elections seriously, not to neglect their right to vote, and to make their choice to define their future.

CEPPS/IRI received over 60 submissions to the video competition and the 15 finalists were shared on IRI Ukraine’s social media, as well as on the mediachange platform where the videos’ popularity attracted notice from Ukrainian public television networks. As a result, twenty-two broadcasters from ten oblasts shared the videos during their programming, which reached over three million viewers. The significance of social media and internet campaigning has gained new importance in Ukraine as candidates continue to campaign virtually in the context of COVID-19. Therefore, CEPPS/IRI found that training and engaging young people with applicable skills such as video editing, messaging, and persuasion helped young people to motivate their peers to vote in Ukraine’s 2020 local elections.

Promising Practices: The case studies demonstrate the importance of technical skill building, such as creating effective videos for advocacy, and implementing skill building courses that have experiential elements. In both, students had the opportunity to apply their skills through community-based action projects.

Sectors Highlighted: Education and Media

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1 An oblast refers to one of Ukraine’s 24 primary administrative units.
Democracy: From Theory to Practice

Since 2018, over 5,000 students from 39 universities and colleges throughout Ukraine have completed CEPPS/IFES’ semester-long, university-level civic education course, “Democracy: from Theory to Practice.” The course is tailored for Ukraine and designed to foster students’ democratic values and attitudes while equipping them with the knowledge and skills that are essential for effective and informed citizenship in the digital age. Students are introduced to fundamental concepts of democratic citizenship, systems of government, civic participation, and human rights, while deepening soft and hard skills through an interactive teaching methodology and student action projects. Course alumni demonstrate a desire to be active citizens and a sense of efficacy that they can play a role in moving their democracies forward.

The university course was designed to actively facilitate a supportive and safe environment for students and educators by providing them with a space to comfortably share their diverse opinions and experiences, as well as to collaborate on action projects. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the course was digitized and offered on a virtual platform to foster further engagement during school closures. The multimedia platform is designed to engage students using a variety of formats, including video lectures, infographics, animated videos, and podcasts.

During the last component of the course, the student action project, students identify an issue in society that they recognize as a challenge, research and analyze their selected issue, and then conduct a project. Issues addressed by student action projects range from gender equality, minority rights, media literacy, and the use of digital technologies, amongst others.

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2 The “Democracy: from Theory to Practice” course was developed with the support of USAID, Global Affairs Canada (GAC), and United Kingdom (UK) Aid. It is based on CEPPS/IFES’ global civic education methodology, Strengthening Engagement through Education for Democracy (SEED), which has been applied in Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and Bangladesh.
Students developed relationships with their teachers and community partners who supported the action projects, which resulted in more community members recognizing that young people are crucial to advancing democracy. Participants also made connections with peers before, during, and after the course that led to future collaboration and long-term programmatic success.
Pacific Islands

Youth Leadership Training School

With support from CEPPS/IRI, the Solomon Islands National Council of Women (SINCW) encouraged youth empowerment through its Youth Leadership Training Schools (YLTS), which targeted young people from Western, Malaita, Guadalcanal, and Choiseul Provinces. Participants came from a variety of backgrounds, including individuals representing church youth organizations, community-based youth organizations, the Western Provincial Youth Council, the Youth Caucus, and the Provincial Government. The objective of the training series was to support the inclusion of youth in local governance through soft skills-building and knowledge sharing activities. In particular, the training modules included team-building activities that focused on leadership development, including transformational, authentic, servant, and team leadership.

Promising Practices: The case studies demonstrate the importance of political leadership training and opportunities to work with their peers and others on issues that matter most to them. Participants also engaged diverse communities, such as young people with disabilities, which can set important precedents for youth participation.

Sectors Highlighted: Media, Education, and Business.
By empowering young people with leadership skills, they are able to amplify the impact of locally-led initiatives. Therefore, participants were encouraged throughout the YLTS to reflect on their learning and how the training applied to their existing work as youth leaders. For example, Cynthia Soöfi Grace Agofi, a young woman from West Kwaio in Malaita Province, Solomon Islands, was a participant at CEPPS/IRI’s YLTS and applied the lessons learned to improve the local economy. Prior to participating in YLTS, Cynthia said she felt like she had no understanding about types of leadership and how to most effectively lead the Waneagu Sulanasina Youth Network (WSYN), award committee she founded to improve the meaningful engagement and participation of youth in the socio-economy of West Kwaio. In fact, she found WSYN particularly challenging to lead, given its size and diversity. Since attending CEPPS/IRI’s YLTS, Cynthia has changed her attitude toward her role and has found a new confidence to lead the network, which she directly attributes to participating in the YLTS. With the confidence and leadership skills acquired through the program, Cynthia was able to expand WSYN to include over 1,200 people from across communities and religious groups.
Support for University of South Pacific Student Association (USPSA)

To engage young people in the Pacific Islands as decision-makers and active members of their communities, CEPPS/IFES partnered with the University of South Pacific Student Association (USPSA) as part of its “Good Citizenship” initiative to promote the basic tenets of citizen responsibility and democratic solidarity during the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of its support to USPSA, CEPPS/IFES launched the “Advocacy for Inclusive COVID-19 Response and Recovery” webinar series which provided knowledge and skills-building sessions to assist students in developing a Policy Platform for Pacific Youth and advocacy plans based on the identified areas in the policy platform. Coming from different backgrounds, degrees, and communities themselves, the students identified a variety of priorities to address in the policy platform, such as supporting the rights of young people with disabilities, improving education, and youth political involvement in raising awareness around COVID-19.

As part of the webinar series, CEPPS/IFES shared examples of digital advocacy and how the policy platform tool can be used to advocate for youth engagement in decision-making processes during COVID-19. CEPPS/IFES held a variety of sessions to support students to develop and implement their advocacy plans such as group consultation webinar sessions, bi-weekly virtual webinar sessions, and one-on-one mentoring calls; CEPPS/IFES provided budgetary support to student leaders implementing their advocacy plans organized around the platform’s three priority areas. Continuing the student-led advocacy efforts in line with the policy platform, student leaders conducted webinars, events, and discussions in the lead-up to International Youth Day on August 12, 2021.

To address the priority area of improving education, the students engaged various stakeholders, such as the government and higher education institutions. In these efforts, USPSA students advocated for national and elected leaders to increase and diversify funding and resource support to make education more accessible; examine and revise education curriculum for relevance and diversity in content and delivery; and prioritize attracting, training, and retaining teachers. To address the priority area of supporting the rights of young people with disabilities, USPSA students leveraged social media advocacy to raise awareness for their cause in addition to Zoom webinar discussions.
Student leaders created a Facebook group, "Count Me in: Disability Advocates," and a Facebook page, "Count Me In." In line with the priority area of youth political participation, student leaders from Fiji, Nauru, and Solomon Islands held youth-led discussions focused on young people and their roles within democracy. Speakers at the various events included prominent advocates for youth participation such as a professor from the University of the South Pacific, a member of the Fijian Parliament, the Chair of the Pacific Islands Association of Non-Governmental Organizations, the Assistant Director of the Nauru Youth Affairs Department, and the Chair of Malaita Provincial Youth Council - Solomon Islands.
CEPPS collaborated with young leaders to analyze these case studies and distill promising practices that help young people gain political knowledge and assume leadership roles within locally-led development processes. The promising practices include:

- Integrate technical skill building, specifically political skills, into all programs;
- Provide space to develop soft skills that are transferable across sectors;
- Foster opportunities for young people to develop solutions to issues across sectors; and
- Include collaboration between DRG actors and actors from multiple sectors.

In this section of the toolkit, each promising practice is broken down into actionable steps to include in the design and implementation of programs.
Integrate Technical Skill Building, Specifically Political Skills, Into All Programs

Without key political knowledge and skills, such as understanding power, organizing, and engaging in civil discourse, it will be increasingly difficult for young people to assume leadership roles within locally-led development efforts. To encourage young people from outside of the DRG community to engage in programs that promote civic and political participation, youth development practitioners and young leaders should design programs that integrate introductory or refresher political skills training at the onset of programming. This practice ensures participants from diverse sectors with different skill levels are able to meaningfully engage in the activity, even if they, for example, lack debate experience or a background in advocacy.

Including technical training opportunities at the beginning of programs also helps to ensure a more inclusive and equitable experience for all young people. For example, young people hold diverse backgrounds and experiences which impact the type and frequency of opportunities to participate in trainings or other technical political skills-building activities. This practice also creates a diverse group of program participants, which provides young people with the opportunity to engage people with differing opinions and expertise, which can create a more robust and cross-sectoral learning experience during the training program.

When seeking participants from diverse backgrounds to take part in your activity, make sure you are clear about the baseline technical skills you expect the individual to have to meaningfully engage in the program. Often people will not take the time to apply for a program if they think that they are under qualified to participate. For example, if you are providing skills training at the onset of your program, be clear about this component in order to assure applicants that they will be able to meaningfully participate in the activity, even if they do not already have a specific skill set.
Case Study Examples: EDYN and Ukraine

The EDYN Albania chapter selected 48 candidates to participate in a “Youth in Europe” debate program. The selected participants underwent a training curriculum designed to hone their technical debate skills in preparation for the competition.

As part of the #WhyWeVote program in Ukraine, CEPPS/IRI conducted weekly seminars for over 100 candidates, campaign team members, and young civic activists throughout Ukraine on how to create effective videos for advocacy.

Make Sure the Lessons Stick

In addition to offering training at the beginning of a program, it is necessary to provide follow-up training opportunities or check-ins to evaluate participant’s knowledge and their understanding of the program concepts. Gathering participant feedback can help refine and influence program adjustments and activity implementation. As such, it is critical to find opportunities throughout the program for young people to engage in monitoring, evaluation, and learning processes. Additionally, the social and political context often changes throughout the life of a program. Training should be tailored based on what young people need in order to achieve their goals within the evolving space.

One of the most concrete ways to help young people develop political know-how is through taking action, identifying lessons, reflecting on the experiences, and adjusting each step of the way. Young people who engaged in reviewing the case studies emphasized the importance of including experiential learning – like opportunities for volunteer activities or internships – in technical skill-building programs. “Learning-by-doing” provides young people with real-world opportunities to practice what they are learning with guidance and mentorship.
Identifying Participants Across Sectors

One of the most challenging aspects of engagement across sectors is knowing where to start. Here are some ideas to identify participants for your program outside of your current sector and network:

1. **Map** the environment in which you are working. For example, when designing programs, you should think about who your allies are and if there are any existing networks that have an interest or mission statement that aligns with your efforts.

2. Leverage existing relationships with organizations and networks to help build cross-sectoral partnerships. For example, does a current partner have connections in the health sector or at a social enterprise?

3. If recruiting young people for a specific opportunity, broadly advertise the opportunity online. The internet allows you to amplify your reach and discover new applicant pools outside of your current network. A couple of ways to do that include:
   - **Posting on Facebook and other social media.** Posts should always encourage further sharing of the opportunity through a call to action.
   - **Post on relevant youth-focused websites, such as YouthLEAD, as an event or funding opportunity.** Note: only members have access to this feature (but you can become a member for free).

4. Directly reach out to organizations across sectors to discuss your activity or to get recommendations for candidates. “Cold calls,” to possible partners can be fruitful. Make sure that you present your request as having value in a respectful, professional way.

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Find Out More:

...About Developing Trainings

- **Training Material Development Guide**
- **Online Monster Manual**
- **How-To: Preparing Sessions Using ADIDS**
- **Library of Facilitation Techniques**
- **Overview and Definition of Experiential Learning**

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3 Making a “cold call” means calling, emailing, or otherwise contacting someone you have not connected with before.
Provide Space to Develop Soft Skills that are Transferable Across Sectors

Many young people face barriers to participation across sectors, such as being thought of as less capable or knowledgeable, which limits their ability to build leadership skills and contributes to their exclusion from decision-making. When designing a program or activity, incorporating modules to build soft skills can promote better development outcomes for young people of diverse identities and backgrounds.

Soft skills are unique because they are transferable across development sectors, as well as in social and professional settings, and therefore can be a key tool for young people to gain the capacity, network, and motivation to assume leadership roles within locally-led development processes. For example, if a participant learns communication skills in a get-out-the-vote (GOTV) focused training course, those skills can be used to promote better health policies in a town hall meeting or discuss youth employment programs on local news, among other examples.

There are many soft skills that could be incorporated into programs to amplify the impact of youth contributions across sectors. In 2016, USAID analyzed the soft skills most likely to increase the odds of youth success across all key workforce outcomes, which included: self-control, positive self-concept, social skills, communication, and higher order thinking skills. Similarly, young people in the CEPPS YAG found developing the following soft skills to be important:

- Collaboration
- Teamwork
- Conflict Resolution
- Creativity and Innovation
- Communication
- Active Listening
- Time Management
- Empathy and Emotional Intelligence
- Collaboration
- Teamwork
- Conflict Resolution
- Creativity and Innovation
Ways to Develop Soft Skills

Be intentional about which skills you want to acquire and what is within your reach to improve. The CEPPS YAG suggested ideas below on how they gained soft skills that were beneficial for them implementing cross-sectoral programs:

- Engage in opportunities like model parliaments and model UN where you have to speak publicly and negotiate with other people.
- Communication and coordination can be learned through organizing community-based programs.
- Observe people with the skills you would like to acquire, such as watching YouTube Ted Talks to learn about public speaking.
- Engaging with a network like Generation Democracy or EDYN helps young people learn best practices and share lessons learned, enhancing individuals' communication and active listening skills.
- One of the best ways to learn soft skills is informal education through engaging in different projects, seminars and conferences.

It is important to remember that soft skills develop over time, so be patient yet consistent in your efforts as you develop them.

Find Out More: ...About Soft Skills

- Investigating Soft Skills Program Features with a Gender Lens
- Key “Soft Skills” That Foster Youth Workforce Success: Toward A Consensus Across Fields
- What Works in Soft Skills Development for Youth Employment?
Often the issues young people care most about are not siloed within a single sector. For example, the root causes of health inequity may be ineffective health systems and services, lack of accessible transportation, or heavy pollution, all of which are impacted or regulated by governance. Youth-focused cross-sectoral programs help young people identify the linkages between DRG and other sectors.

Examples of opportunities that can be included in DRG programs that provide space for young people to develop solutions to issues in other sectors include:

- **Provide opportunities for small grant funding.** Small grant funding can be an opportunity for young implementers to work with, as well as reach out to youth and adult stakeholders across sectors. The funding mechanism should be designed to have a flexible scope of work so applicants can include innovative techniques to engage with stakeholders outside of the traditional civil society and political spheres.

- **Include a range of topics to focus on that span across sectors within a DRG program.** When designing activities, consider including a diverse set of topics for participants to analyze through both a cross-sector and DRG lens.
Case Study Examples: Nigeria, EDYN, and Ukraine

Youth in Nigeria collaborated with stakeholders around a diverse set of issues, including education, health, agriculture, employment, entrepreneurship, peace and security, and poverty reduction. Their efforts included engaging different ministries, such as the Ministries of Health, Commerce and Industry, Budget and Planning, Education, and Agriculture.

EDYN members have the opportunity to apply for funding through the MEF small grants mechanism. Using a MEF grant, EDYN’s Albania chapter’s “Youth in Europe” debate program was able to peak the interests of debaters and debate-watchers with diverse, cross-sectoral interests by including a wide range of topics related to the different sectors like the media, the economy, and technology.

CEPPS/IFES’s “Democracy: From Theory to Practice” course in Ukraine has been implemented across 39 different institutions and includes students from diverse educational backgrounds and disciplines. Students’ unique experiences and perspectives not only enrich classroom discussion but are also reflected in students’ action projects, in which students design and implement initiatives that address different community issues. Project topics have ranged from the environment to animal rights to voter education, and all increase students’ civic engagement around issues they care about and mobilize community actors to support students’ efforts.
Understanding what Young People Care About

To be able to include elements in programming that develop solutions to issues young people care about, you first need to understand what those issues are. There are numerous ways to better understand the issues young people care about; however, the cross-cutting element in all methodologies is to intentionally seek and innovate new ways to engage youth in a way that meets them where they are. In doing so, it is essential to avoid tokenism, which is the superficial – albeit sometimes well-intentioned – involvement of young people in activities or assessments without empowering them as decision-makers. Ways that young people have suggested to engage themselves and their peers to better understand youth priorities include:

Reaching a few people.
Ask young people to participate in a storytelling exercise so you have a better understanding of what shaped their perspective and actions. Appreciate inquiry methods are a way to do this.

Reaching more people.
Facilitate focus group discussions with young people from different backgrounds. Focus groups allow participants to build on other people’s ideas and feedback.

Reaching a lot of people.
Leverage social media and features like polling on Facebook, which can be a useful tool to get a topline perspective of what young people care about.
Whatever method you choose, it is important to remember that young people face different problems and have unique needs depending on who they are, where they are in the world, or even their situation within a particular community. For example, not everyone has access to a stable internet connection and therefore using social media or hosting a virtual focus group to listen to young people in hard-to-access locations may not be the most effective mechanism for collecting feedback. Thinking through solutions to reach diverse members of your target audience will benefit your programs. For example, related to concerns about a stable internet connection in advanced and emerging economies alike, young people are quickly adopting the use of smartphones. Therefore, you could consider using SMS technology to reach your target audience instead of a higher bandwidth option.

Find Out More:

...About Reaching and Communicating with your Target Audience

- Story Guide: Building Bridges Using Narrative Techniques
- Case Studies and Stories of Change
- How to Design an SMS Outreach Strategy in Youth Employment Programs
- Focus Group Discussions
- The Power of Social Media Polls: The Drill-Down on 3 Platforms + 5 General Best Practices

Include Collaboration with Actors from Multiple Sectors

Traditional approaches to youth development are often designed and implemented using narrowly defined objectives and outcomes. Improving youth development outcomes across sectors and addressing systemic inequality and exclusion requires working beyond silos to understand and respond to increasingly complex democratic challenges.
A Note on Working in the Education Sector

Collaborating with student committees and clubs, as well as engaging in curriculum development, can be helpful to instill democratic and human rights-based values in young people. If you are interested in engaging with the education sector, it is important to start establishing partnerships with the appropriate people, such as the Ministry of Education, ahead of a program’s kickoff to gain access to schools and pupils.

Young people reported that, in some contexts, there is an ambiguous process for engagement with key stakeholders in the education sector that can be navigated by forming trusting, information-sharing relationships. Additionally, those key stakeholders may have differing political ideologies or interests that can be a barrier to your ability to work with schools. In this case, a tactic that has proven successful is to demonstrate the value of engagement with young people in school settings.

If all of these tactics prove unsuccessful, it may make sense to engage young people outside of the formal school system, while leveraging both formal and informal communication mechanisms to let students know about opportunities for learning about and participating in civic and political engagement outside of the classroom.
Case Study Example: Pacific Islands

As participants in the CEPPS/IFES’ “Advocacy for Inclusive COVID-19 Response and Recovery” webinar series in the Pacific Islands, students draw on their diverse experiences and perspectives to influence and develop a policy platform around three priority areas: education, disability rights, and youth participation. Government officials, elected and community leaders, and prominent advocates from across sectors attended the virtual student-led events.

Consider Amplifying Your Message through Media

Media has a considerable influence on youth perceptions of politics and civil society, therefore leveraging media platforms in a strategic and intentional way can increase the impact of DRG programs. As noted in phase one of the Youth DRG CSI, sharing positive stories about the contribution of young people after the completion of programs in the media challenges negative perceptions, demonstrates the value of youth engagement, and establishes greater buy-in for follow-on initiatives. Moreover, the importance of traditional media, such as television and radio, can reach more diverse youth audiences. For example, radio continues to be an effective way to share messages with people in rural areas.
Practitioners should also make the best use of online platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Tik Tok, among other tools, which can be an important way to amplify DRG program messages. Additionally, social media has added benefits for amplifying the impact of programs, including, in some contexts, acting as a platform where young people can make their voices heard in an open and candid manner. The instantaneous nature of social media also allows people to participate in civic and political processes, including people who may face additional barriers to doing so in-person, such as young people with disabilities.

In order to equip young people with the skills to effectively engage on social media, training in successful tactics, such as digital storytelling through videos and photo campaigns, is a key component that should be considered to support DRG program implementation.

Case Study Examples: Ukraine and Nigeria

In Ukraine, CEPPS/IRI found that training and engaging young people with applicable skills such as video editing, messaging, and persuasion helped young people to advocate for Ukrainian citizens to participate in upcoming local elections.

In Nigeria, under the CEPPS/IFES program, KDI produced short videos around the “We Can Do Better” campaign on social media. One video highlighted societal barriers that discourage women’s political participation, promoted women’s participation in the electoral process, and encouraged viewers to turn away from violence against women in elections. The video was widely shared across social media and with electoral stakeholders. This and other informative social media messages deployed by KDI contributed to driving an effective peace education effort.

Find Out More: …About the Education and Media Sectors

- How Business and Education Can Help Gen Z Reframe the Future
- Digital Civic Engagement by Young People
- Using Social Media to Change Norms and Behaviors at Scale
What’s Next

This toolkit can and should be adapted as new promising practices are discovered and the ones outlined in this toolkit are further tested. Using the lessons learned from the process of developing this toolkit and the information uncovered, CEPPS will continue to design and implement programs and initiatives that help young people gain political knowledge and assume leadership roles within locally-led development processes under the USAID Democratic Elections and Political Processes (DEPP) Leader with Associates Award. Through DEPP, CEPPS will continue supporting the establishment and consolidation of inclusive and accountable democracies that engage diverse subsets of young people and with stakeholders across sectors to advance freedom, dignity, and development.