



Principles and Practices of Youth Engagement for Political Parties

A practical guide on how political parties can engage civic-minded youth and create genuine partnerships



Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Context	6
Part 1. Connect — Meet Youth Where They Are	9
Case Study: Guatemala’s “Juventudes”	10
Part 2. Build — Creating Youth-Centric Parties	12
Case Study: Lessons in Mentorship — The Sabaa Party in Lebanon	13
Part 3. Serve — Youth-Centric Policies and Platforms	14
Case Study: Youth-Created Platforms from the Green Party of New Zealand	15
Part 4. Guide — Support Young Activists in Career Planning and Leadership Development	16
Case Study: “Shamers and Famers” the case of the Not Too Young To Run Campaign in Nigeria	17
Appendix 1: Connect	18
Template 1a: Youth Assessment of General Population	18
Template 1b: Youth Digital Access	19
Template 1c: Youth Party Membership – Diversity Assessment	19
Template 1d: Youth Engagement – Party Youth Outreach Assessment	20
Template 1e: Suggestions for Better Connections	22
Appendix 2: Build	23
Template 2: Party Youth Assessment	23
Appendix 3: Serve	24
Template 3: Youth-Inclusive Policy Development	24
Appendix 4: Guide	25
Template 4a: Goal Setting	25
Template 4b: Understanding Options	26
Template 4c: Matching Skills	27
Template 4d: Career Road Map	28
Template 4e: Encourage	28
Bibliography	29

About NDI

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization that responds to the aspirations of people around the world to live in democratic societies that recognize and promote basic human rights. Since its founding in 1983, NDI and its local partners have worked to support and strengthen democratic institutions and practices by strengthening political parties, civic organizations and parliaments; safeguarding elections; and promoting citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. NDI has worked with youth in more than 120 programs worldwide, across all geographic regions, to support them in playing a more active role in building strong and vibrant democratic societies.

Acknowledgments

This report was written by Ryan Keenan, with support from Rachel E. Mims and Makala Forster. NDI would also like to thank the following contributors: Aaron Azelton, Birgitta Ohlsson, and Sef Ashiagbor. NDI would also like to thank the following NDI offices for their collaboration on the case studies highlighted throughout: Guatemala, Lebanon, North Macedonia, and Ukraine.

The development of this publication was made possible through a grant from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

Introduction

Today's youth activists are rejecting political parties at an alarming rate. Disillusioned by parties perceived to be elitist and out of touch, and empowered by social media platforms that provide the space to develop a brand and connect with allies, young people are engaging in politics directly and independently, such as through organizing social movements. This type of organizing allows activists to directly push for change and bypasses the traditional "paying of dues" consistent with membership in political parties. To meet young people where they are, parties must adapt their perceptions and engagement strategies toward youth in a way that rebuilds trust and empowers young activists.

From youth-led political parties emerging from the "rubbish" protests in Lebanon, to Latin American student activists in Chile and Guatemala organizing in support of communities experiencing marginalization, to social media influencers in Spain and Ireland reshaping policy debates, and Nigerian youth "shaming and faming" politicians to reduce the eligibility age of elected officials, young activists of diverse backgrounds and identities¹ around the globe are rewriting the rules of political activism.

Rejecting traditional institutions like political parties, today's youth activists engage in politics independently and directly through movement-based organizing. Empowered by social media platforms that allow individuals with access to a phone and the internet to build a personal brand and connect with like-minded groups and individuals, young leaders are pressuring lawmakers on legislation, organizing awareness campaigns on key issues, and building coalitions to advocate for their communities.

While this new level of political engagement is encouraging, it is not without challenges. Turning away from political parties comes at a cost. Parties are still the primary practical component of most democracies, organizing competition for power and creating a structure for how government functions. Disengaging from parties threatens to keep young people out of the spaces where important decisions are made. It also negatively impacts parties, limiting their support base and the pool of talent to develop future leaders.

This **Youth Engagement Guidance Tool** was developed to create a framework for political parties on the best practices for effectively engaging youth. The framework consists of four key principles:

Connect: Connect with youth where they are.

Engage in youth-friendly spaces, both physical and online, to understand what shapes their attitudes and perspectives on politics.

Build: Build internal structures that allow youth of diverse identities to play a meaningful role in the party. Support youth wings, include youth in decision-making processes and place youth in leadership positions.

Serve: Serve youth citizens through public policies and platforms that address their concerns, including them in developing a vision for democracy and for the country.

Guide: Demonstrate that youth are more than just potential votes. Help young activists structure their activism and develop a political career plan that is asset-driven, helps maximize skills and achieves goals.

¹ The term youth or young people refers to people aged 18 to 30 of diverse identities and backgrounds, including but not limited to young women, young people with disabilities, LGBTQI+ youth and other groups facing exclusion from politics based on their identity, background or access to opportunity.

This tool is a part of the National Democratic Institute's (NDI) ***Bridging the Divide Initiative*** which aims to better understand and restore the relationship between young people in civil society and political parties. Bridging the Divide looks to create and enhance the inclusive and equitable partnerships between young people of diverse identities and backgrounds and political parties that are essential for creating political change and establishing new norms of engagement. This requires understanding young people's legitimate concerns about engaging with parties and institutions and creating linkages between the diverse ways young people want to organize politically and the mandate of parties and institutions.

The resources in this tool build on research conducted as part of the Bridging the Divide Initiative. Recommendations from the Bridging the Divide report highlight how different stakeholders assume critical roles in building meaningful connections between young people and political parties. Key recommendations include:

Key Recommendations for Democracy and Governance Practitioners

- Encourage intergenerational collaboration and foster strong mentorship and allyship between older and younger organization members, with particular attention to the need for strong mentorship and allyship for young women and young people with disabilities; and
- Create avenues for the participation of groups that reflect diverse sectors of the population and encourage youth inclusion in decision-making processes through the creation of youth caucuses or youth-inclusive mechanisms in legislative bodies at the local, regional or national levels.

Key Recommendations for Young People

- Identify opportunities to collaborate with political parties beyond traditional political party activities and learn how to “deepen their engagement,” starting with a better understanding of available political entry points; and
- Deepen commitments to inclusion by adopting a gender transformative approach and by collaborating with organizations representing segments of civil society that face additional barriers to political participation.

Key Recommendations for Political Parties

- Meet young people where they are and through their preferred communication styles, by including young people in the party's media and communications team and provide them with decision-making power over method and content.

Key Recommendations for Organizations Working with Political Parties and Young People

- Provide opportunities for young people, including young women and young people with diverse backgrounds and identities, to engage with party members through youth-inclusive town halls and conventions that meet in locations accessible to young people; and
- Move beyond interactions between political parties and young people that tokenize young people, exploit them or are extractive.

The complete set of recommendations can be found in the Bridging the Divide report.



Context

While youth have become increasingly skeptical of political parties, this has not reduced their appetite for political engagement.² They have redirected their energy to more informal or extra institutional practices, such as movement organizing. Young people have also become independent candidates for elected office or supported these types of candidates en masse. The move toward more informal activism has been enhanced by the growing role of social media both in politics and in most aspects of young people's lives.³

Social media platforms have enabled young activists to engage in political activism without the need of formal political structures like parties. Young leaders have developed individual brands through creating online content like YouTube and TikTok videos, expressing opinions on critical issues through blog posts, and engaging in dialogue on Twitter or Facebook. This has vastly expanded the pool of individuals with significant impact on political debate.⁴

Social media has also made it possible for young activists to connect with like-minded groups or individuals that would have been impossible a decade ago. The ability to coalition-build online is an essential tool for most movement organizing initiatives. It also has influenced how youth see politics, leading to a greater focus on global issues, such as social justice, inclusion and accountability instead of traditional ideological debates.

While social media has empowered many youth-led social movements, there are still significant limitations to how much can be achieved without political parties. Parties are still the primary component in most democracies. While outside movements can help shape public opinion, educate key stakeholders, and pressure lawmakers, it is still elected officials that have the final say on what legislation becomes law, how laws are implemented, or determining governing priorities. Even the most well-organized influence campaign will compete for the attention of elected officials with lobbyists, business interests or influential party leaders. In the long term, the ability of youth to either engage with or become influential members of political parties is a necessity for meaningful change.

Mistrust is also a problem for political parties. To be successful, parties must be able to attract constituents from a wide coalition of voters. A small circle of elites, typically, will not be enough to win an election. Parties need to think about long-term growth. They need to understand broader demographic trends and how the electorate will evolve over time. They also need to cultivate future leaders with an intentional focus on supporting young people with diverse backgrounds and skill sets to adapt to ever-changing political dynamics, including young women, young people with disabilities and other groups who have been historically excluded from political parties and formal politics.

² Bridging the Divide Report pg. 7–12

³ “The importance of youth participation in formal political processes,” sections on Formal and Informal participation, The ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, <https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/yt/yt10/yt210/the-importance-of-youth-participation-in-formal>

⁴ “Digital civic engagement by young people,” pg. 12, UNICEF Office of Global Insight and Policy, February 2020, https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/Digital-civic-engagement-by-young-people-2020_4.pdf. See also: South, Joseph. “Civic engagement goes viral when young voices turn to social media,” Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement (PACE) / Medium, July 20, 2018, <https://medium.com/office-of-citizen/civic-engagement-goes-viral-when-young-voices-turn-to-social-media-ea57ed0c5d65>

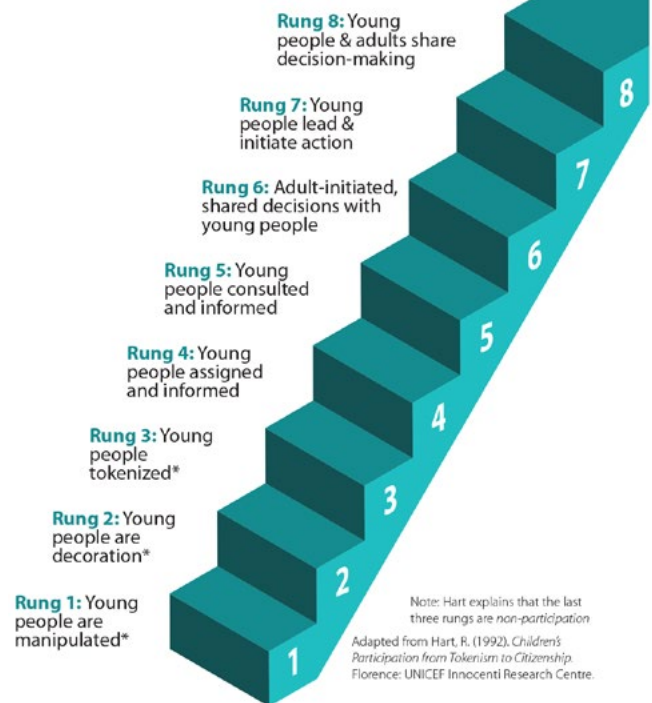
Political parties typically attempt to engage young people in two forms: assisting youth to develop leadership skills through training, and strengthening youth participation in traditional formal structures like party youth wings. While well-intended, these efforts have often fallen short of young people's desires for participation and engagement. Evidence suggests that youth wings can provide young people with a formative political experience if the political party provides an enabling environment and young people of diverse identities and backgrounds have the opportunity to develop their agency.⁵ Party youth wings are typically populated with children of influential party members, lack resources and influence within the party, and offer training to the same small group of young party activists who compile certificates and accreditations.

These efforts exclude most young people that are not politically connected, especially young people with different starting points and needs based on identity, location, experience and other circumstances. This lack of inclusion often leads to a general mistrust of political parties, with most youth seeing them as tools of an elite, resistant to meaningful change or political reform. This is especially problematic considering people under the age of 30 — including young women and young people of diverse identities — make up over half of the world's population.

When considering youth political engagement, it is important to distinguish the different routes available for engaging in the process. While specifics vary from country to country, youth engagement with parties can be broken into three categories:

1. Youth are already in political parties or interested in joining a party with existing connections (i.e., their parents are members);
2. Youth are engaged in political activity through formal structures other than political parties, like issue-focused advocacy organizations, or constituency focused groups, such as youth-focused civil society organizations (CSOs); and
3. Youth who engage in informal political activities like protests or online movements, but are resistant to or disconnected from formal political institutions.

Roger Hart's Ladder of Young People's Participation



A common mistake political parties make is to not distinguish between these differences when organizing outreach efforts toward youth. Party youth-engagement efforts typically come in three forms:

1. **Volunteer/work for the party.** This includes working as low-level staff on campaigns or for party activities, for example, doing “grunt-work” like distributing leaflets, door-to-door canvassing, and administrative staffing, without any access to leadership or guarantees for opportunities for growth.
2. **Youth wings.** Parties dedicate modest resources to support youth-wing activities.
3. **Skills training.** Parties provide political skills training like public speaking and campaign management.

⁵ “Raising their voices: How effective are pro-youth laws and policies?” NDI, March 25, 2019, <https://www.ndi.org/publications/raising-their-voices-how-effective-are-pro-youth-laws-and-policies>.

While these efforts may be well-intended, they often fall short of reaching beyond youth who are already active members or are well-connected to the party. Low-level campaign work, without a clear path of advancement, can create one-sided relationships with youth activists that lead to resentment and hard feelings. This can also be referred to as tokenism. “Tokenism is when young people appear to have been given a voice, but really have little or no choice about how they participate. It is participation for participation’s sake or for a photo opportunity. Young participants lack knowledge and capacities and are rarely mandated by their peers.”⁶

This guide focuses primarily on the third group, young people who are engaged in informal political activities, but are resistant to or disconnected from formal political institutions. While suggestions provided can benefit youth in any group, the focus is to assist parties to better engage politically active youth who are skeptical of political parties. This guidance was created as part of the Bridging the Divide Initiative, to assist parties in overcoming these challenges and work to reestablish trust and build lasting partnerships with young activists.

⁶ Roger Hart, “Children’s Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship,” *Innocenti Essay*, no. 4, (Florence: International Child Development Centre, 1992), http://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/childrens_participation.pdf; Image: “Roger Hart Ladder, Young People’s Participation,” IREX, accessed May 17, 2022, <https://www.irex.org/sites/default/files/inline-images/roger-hart-ladder-young-peoples-participation-1392.png>

Part 1: Connect

Meet Youth Where They Are

To connect with young people in a meaningful way, parties need to meet them where they are. This includes connecting interpersonally and understanding youth attitudes toward politics, social and cultural perspectives, and general attitudes toward society, which is critical for parties to facilitate meaningful engagement and develop long-standing partnerships. Young people's diverse identities, which can exclude them from opportunities to participate at all levels of society, also contribute to their attitudes about politics. The perception that parties ignore the interests of most youth — particularly the needs of young women and young people with diverse identities — in favor of a select, highly connected few is a key driving factor in the widespread rejection of political parties by young activists.

To break perception, parties must demonstrate a clear commitment to creating an enabling environment that supports the inclusion and empowerment of young people who better represent the diversity of the population. Specifically, parties must demonstrate to young activists that they prioritize — both within the party and in society — improving gender equality, including youth from communities marginalized due to socio-economic status, supporting youth who are excluded because of their gender identity and sexual orientation, and creating avenues for engagement with ethnic minority or Indigenous groups.

Connect also refers to how young people connect with others by understanding the most common communication tools and media platforms. Young activists have used new communication technology to advocate for reforms and organize movements in many countries. The ability to connect with diverse communities all over the globe empowers politically active youth to organize without the need for formal political institutions.



Parties can engage diverse groups on digital platforms effectively by creating content or organizing activities that complement organizing efforts of young activists and demonstrate the willingness to work in partnership with diverse groups and individuals.

While each country presents its own socio-cultural dynamics, there are some broader global trends in youth perspectives. For example, gender equality and support for marginalized communities are principles widely shared throughout the globe. Young activists have used new communication technology to bring more attention to these issues and advocate for reforms in many countries.

Appendix 1 provides examples of tools that can be used to better connect with youth, and meet them where they are.

CASE STUDY

Guatemala's "Juventudes"



In 2020, NDI conducted a case study examining perspectives of politically active youth in Guatemala. The study used qualitative methodology conducting 20 interviews of a diverse set of young activists from student groups, civil society organizations and diverse ethnic backgrounds.

One of the key points of the study was the principle of “juventudes.” Juventudes, translated as the plural of youth in Spanish, refers to the diversity of experiences that make up youth identities. As the study explains, “Youth leaders who are active in political parties, student movements, civil and social organizations constantly express their own conception of youth, which considers the diversity of life trajectories, circumstances, opportunities, geographic areas, and above all, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status.” The intention is not to create a single identity, but to find common cause against a current political system youth see as “adult-centric,” patriarchal, white and imperialistic.

The case study highlighted key challenges facing Guatemalan youth:

- **Relevance of youth as political actors:** Many parties do not provide youth with meaningful roles within the party, and youth candidates are rarely placed on lists for winnable seats.
- **Older adult-dominated decision-making:** Youth have little to no decision-making capacity, even in youth wings and youth-focused activities. For example, all communication and messaging typically need approval by older party leaders.
- **“Youth” not considered a political identity:** Parties do not identify youth as a political constituency the same way as gender, ethnic or socio-economic groups.

The study also highlighted how youth in Guatemala view politics differently than previous generations. In the past, ideology was framed in the traditional left-right socio-economic spectrum. Thus, politics was framed around seeking social and economic justice or sustaining individual freedom. New political dialogue is framed more around transparency, accountability and democratic practices. Younger leaders place a higher priority on gender equality, inclusion of marginalized ethnic Indigenous peoples, and recognition of diversity and human rights of the LGBTQI+ community.

The Guatemala case is consistent with youth movements throughout the world. Youth engagement today is typically more focused on access and influence on decision-makers related to issues they care about. Parties must recognize that to meet youth, it is not enough just to take an ideological position perceived as youth-friendly, offer generic policies toward youth or place youth in tokenized positions. Parties need to open internal processes to be inclusive, transparent and accountable.

To meaningfully **Connect** with youth, parties must consider the following seven principles:



CREATORS – Today’s youth are creators.

Young activists can express themselves with an unprecedented frequency through livestreams on Facebook, recorded videos on YouTube or TikTok, and dialogue with established experts and key media on Twitter.

Parties need to give youth space to create.



ONLINE – Youth are constantly online.

From academic coursework to communication with work colleagues, to personal banking, and planning social activities, every aspect of the lives of youth carries a digital element. This is especially true in their social lives and for political engagement. However, there are still challenges to equity in access to the internet, and young women may face more challenges being politically active or vocal online.

Parties need to have constant online presence, producing regular content daily, while also recognizing inequities in internet access.



NEW MEDIA – New media dominates traditional media for youth attention.

This includes social posts from established news outlets, political institutions like parties and CSOs, and independent voices like topical experts, bloggers and freelance journalists.

Parties need to coordinate traditional and social media communication strategies.



NAMES MATTER – High-profile names carry a significant weight.

Youth are influenced by a variety of voices with diverse backgrounds, expertise, experience and points of view. The credibility of the messenger has substantial impact on the credibility of the message.

Parties need to deploy a variety of influential validators in online content, public events, and party publications.



ENGAGED – Today’s youth are politically engaged.

This includes activities like organizing and attending protests or more formal engagements like joining a CSO.

Parties must build strategic alliances with CSOs and have a presence at high-profile political activities.



CONSCIOUS – Youth are socially conscious.

Youth care deeply about issues of equality and social justice like supporting gender equality, inclusion for minority and marginalized groups, and LGBTQI+ rights.

Parties need to demonstrate a commitment to ethical principles as well as public policies.



TRANSNATIONAL – Today’s youth connect beyond borders.

Young leaders are especially adept at knowing how to build common cause among diverse sets of constituencies. This can help parties connect with new constituencies traditionally disengaged due to geographic or socio-economic challenges.

Parties need to demonstrate an openness to connecting with new audiences.

Part 2: Build

Creating Youth-Centric Parties

Parties must adapt or reform internal structures, processes and institutions to provide youth an opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the party. This includes both developing new youth-centric parties and reforming outdated structures in existing parties. To help parties and members develop more integrity-focused parties, NDI created the **Win With Integrity**:

Earning Citizen Trust in Political Parties self-assessment. Through the self-assessment, guidance resources and worksheets, party members can evaluate their internal party procedures and practices around issues of integrity and identify, prioritize and plan for internal party reform.

Parties can **Build**⁷ youth-centric parties by following these five principles:

BYLAWS	Update or amend existing party statutes to guarantee positions for youth on candidate lists, internal party leadership positions and important committee leadership positions. Ensure proper implementation of these statutes.
UNITS	Establish and support youth wings and other youth-focused units. This can also include subcommittees in other influential units. For example, the committee responsible for drafting the party platform can include a youth-focused subcommittee.
IMPACT	Ensure that roles specified for youth impact party decision-making, identity and policymaking. Avoid Tokenism. A common mistake parties make is to identify roles for youth that are either symbolic or simply checking a box.
LEADERSHIP	Create opportunities for young leaders to be the face of the party in traditional media like talk shows or press conferences or engagement activities on social media. Allow young activists to lead legislative initiatives, recruitment drives, fundraising activities and other essential functions.
DEVELOP	Organize training sessions that help young activists develop important skills and understand how to apply them. Create and support a mentorship program that connects young activists with experienced party leaders.

⁷ “Importance of youth participation,” sections on Youth and Political Parties (subsections “Political Parties’ Codes of Conduct,” “Youth Party Wings,” and “Candidates and Recruitment”) and Meaningful Youth Participation Approaches (subsection “Viewing young people through different lenses”). See also: “Engaging Young People in Open Government,” OECD Communication Guide, pg. 12, [*Insert date published or last accessed*], <https://www.oecd.org/mena/governance/Young-people-in-OG.pdf>.

Additionally, examples of political youth-wing organizations in Scandinavia show that strong youth-wing organizations can lead to higher rates of young people being elected to office. These youth wings are institutionalized pathways into government. While youth-wing organizations are not always successful, and are difficult to institutionalize, they are a viable and proven

method for organizing and engaging young people. Youth wings also offer an avenue for political education, even if members do not continue working with political parties.

Appendix 2 includes a template for an assessment guide to determine whether party structures are “youth friendly.”

CASE STUDY

Lessons in Mentorship – The Sabaa Party in Lebanon



Established in 2016, the Sabaa party in Lebanon offers a unique example of how to build a party that integrates youthful energy with the experience of older professionals. Sabaa, meaning “7” in Arabic, is a political party that developed as a result of the “rubbish protests” in Lebanon. These mass protests are in response to ongoing economic crises, high unemployment, and infrastructure and sanitation issues.

A group of “challenger” parties have emerged from the protest movements, looking to develop more formalized structures to represent the calls of the people. These parties are new institutions that challenge the traditional party structure in Lebanon dominated by wealthy elites and religious leaders of rival sects. Sabaa is one of these parties. It is a youth-led party that aims to move beyond the traditional sectarian lines of Lebanese politics.

Although Sabaa faced greater challenges in sustaining momentum, and failed to create lasting electoral success, there are three elements that other parties can learn from:

- **Participatory Decision-Making:** Sabaa’s structure functioned more as a platform than a traditional hierarchical political party. Instead of a party leader, a committee of both young and more experienced board members used a participatory process to make decisions. The party is designed to reflect the activist movements that overtook the streets during the sanitation mobilizations – where younger and older generations united across sectarian lines in open public forums to discuss and debate political and economic futures.
- **Intergenerational Cooperation:** The older members of Sabaa allowed the younger activists to drive party decisions, debate and general direction, while providing guidance based on their professional experience and expertise. Young activists provided the party with energy and dynamism, while older members gave the party credibility and legitimacy with national and international leaders.
- **Intersectional Inclusion:** Sabaa, like other challenger parties, aimed to create a post-sectarian political system, breaking from the country’s sectarian past. The party maintained both membership and inclusion of the views of all sects to represent a “united front” against the old, sectarian elites.

Sabaa provides a unique example on how to **BUILD** a youth-centric party through inclusive processes and committed mentorship across generations. It is also an example of how to incorporate politically active youth, skeptical of political institutions like political parties, into formal political structures.

Part 3: Serve

Youth-Centric Policies and Platforms

Platforms and party policies that address their primary concerns demonstrate a commitment by the party to best serve their interests of youth. To best understand youth priorities and develop realistic meaningful policy solutions, parties can create an inclusive policy development process that allows young activists a chance to voice their opinions and take ownership.

To best **Serve** youth through public policy, parties should follow these five principles:



SURVEY

The best way to understand what matters to youth is simply to ask.

Common methods include traditional public opinion research like polling and focus groups, online surveys on party social media sites, and simple surveys that can be passed out during public events. This can also be accomplished in partnership with allied CSOs.



ENLIST

Include young activists in the platform development process.

Make them part of the team. Place youth in key decision-making roles in the policy-making process. Allow them a voice on deciding which issues to prioritize, which solutions to propose, and how best to articulate.



REGULAR INPUT

Ask for regular input from CSOs and young activists during all stages of the policy process. When policy proposals are developed, give young leaders the chance to provide feedback. Incorporate feedback and demonstrate you heard what they had to say.



VARIETY OF VOICES

Provide opportunities for young people of diverse backgrounds and identities to engage with party members on policy priorities.

Prioritize marginalized and underrepresented communities.

Examples include youth-inclusive town halls and conventions that meet in locations accessible to young people.



EXPRESS

Give young leaders a chance to be the face of the platform.

Examples include livestreaming events online, taped videos, television talk shows and large public events.

This will give youth a greater sense of ownership and investment in the party and make the party relatable to youth by putting a young face on their broader vision for the country.

Appendix 4 provides examples of tools that can be used to better serve youth.

CASE STUDY

Youth-Created Platforms from the Green Party of New Zealand



The Green Party of Aotearoa, New Zealand was the world's first national-level environmental party. Emerging in 1990 from the former Values Party, it was developed to push progressive policies and participatory democracy. Since 2008, the Green Party has mostly been the third-largest party, capturing an average vote share of 8.44 percent during this period. In 2017 it joined the governing coalition. The Green's manifestos typically focus on issues like environmental, social and indigenous justice. This focus is part of the party's broader strategy to prioritize youth and marginalized communities as its primary voting base.

To empower youth within the party, the Greens have integrated their youth wing into key decision-making processes. For example, young Greens have significant power in adapting the party platform. Half of the members of the Policy Area Standing Committees, the branch of the party responsible for platform development, are young Greens. This practice has been very successful in reflecting the party's youth-focused origins. Young Greens are also directly consulted on campaigns and initiatives that target youth. Young Greens are also allowed to address the party conference every year, ensuring youth voice is heard.

Greens put this focus into practice outside of the party, advocating for greater youth inclusion and empowerment in government. This includes demanding that the Local Government Act require municipalities to fund Youth Councils and employ child and youth advocates. The empowerment of youth has supported the rise of young leaders, many of whom became MPs.

The Green Party's emphasis on empowering Youth is an example of how parties can **SERVE** youth in the community. Giving youth extensive power in developing the party platform and advocating for funding for Youth Councils demonstrates that the party prioritizes the concerns of youth. The Green's empowerment of its youth wing is also an example of how to **BUILD** a youth-centric party with empowered youth structures.

Part 4: Guide

Support Young Activists in Career Planning and Leadership Development

Investing in young activists by assisting in developing a career plan that maximizes their skill sets and creates a road to achieving personal goals helps parties build strong bonds with emerging young leaders. This also helps develop a pool of young leaders with diverse skill sets that can support multiple types of party activity, recruit from a broader pool of youth beyond traditional well-connected circles, and improve efficiency by matching party functions with the skill sets of members.

A common mistake of political parties is to use skills training as a reward for political loyalty, rather than leadership development or party building. This leads to a small group of well-connected activists compiling certificates and skills that are often redundant and do not match party needs. Parties can address this by taking the time to sit with young activists and support their leadership development through helping them develop their own plans.

Parties can help **Guide** young activists and support career planning with the following five principles:

GOALS	UNDERSTAND OPINIONS	IDENTIFY	DEVELOP A PLAN	ENCOURAGE
Establish activist goals. Clarify political career goals.	Understand different actors in the political sphere. Understand useful political skills.	Assess their own personal skills and talents. Match skills with the right position.	Develop a career plan to achieve goals. Include short (1 to 2 years), medium (5 years), and long-term (10 years) goals.	Provide consistent support. Help the activist take the first step.

The templates in Appendix 4 are examples of tools the party can use to collaborate with young members to develop a career plan.

CASE STUDY

“Shamers and Famers” the case of the Not Too Young To Run Campaign in Nigeria



The #NotTooYoungtoRun Campaign (NTYTR) in Nigeria from 2016 to 2018 provides an example on movement organizing. NTYTR, an advocacy campaign introduced by the Youth Initiative for Advocacy, Growth and Advancement - Africa (YIAGA Africa) in 2016 later gaining additional support by Youngsters Development Initiative (YDI) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI), successfully lobbied lawmakers to amend the constitution to reduce the eligibility age for key elected positions. Reducing the minimum age for the House of Representatives from 30 to 25, senators and governors from 35 to 30, and the president from 40 to 35. The successful passage of the amendments on May 31, 2018, is referred to as a “youthquake” in Nigerian history.

Three specific practices made this campaign unique:

- **Inclusive and Cooperative Organizing:** The organizers of the campaign built a broad coalition of over 100 youth associations and civil society organizations, and alliances with trade unions, professional associations, community groups and religious leaders. A decentralized organizing structure was a big part of the campaign’s success. Campaign organizers provided general leadership and helped channel supplies and resources, but allowed diverse groups and activists the flexibility to apply their skills how they best see fit and adapt to changes in political dynamics in different locations in real time.
- **Systematic Engagement with Political Institutions:** The coalition engaged key decision-makers in a way that both created a space for constructive negotiation, and a mechanism to provide accountability. This included tactics like advocacy visits with lawmakers, deployment of “influencers” or individuals with an elevated level of credibility like religious leaders or experts, peaceful protests, and town hall meetings with local assemblies. These activities provided lawmakers an opportunity to listen to the coalition, ask questions, and learn more about the issue. It also provided the coalition a chance to get lawmakers on the public record, to hold them accountable.
- **Inventive Media:** The campaign deployed an inventive social media campaign to support advocacy efforts. The most notable element was the “famers and shamers” map deployed on various social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. This map gave the coalition a chance to create consequences for opponents of the bill by “shaming” them publicly for opposition. It also rewarded supporters by praising them as allies.

The NTYTR campaign can be a useful example on how to **GUIDE** young activists to pursue the right career path. It demonstrates that there are multiple avenues for political engagement beyond formal institutions. The decentralized nature shows there are avenues where they can have some ownership of their engagement. The campaign also shows that members of traditional political institutions can play a positive role in supporting youth. It also demonstrated how specific social media skills can apply to a broader movement.

Appendix 1: Connect

Template 1a: Youth Assessment of General Population

	Percentages	Changes
Percentage of Total Population	What percentage of the population is between the ages of 18 and 30?	How have these percentages changed over the past 10 years? In the last 20? 30?
Gender Breakdown	What percentage of the youth population is female? Male? Non-binary?	How have these percentages changed over the past 10 years? In the last 20? 30?
Ethnic Composition	What is the ethnic composition of the country's youth? What are the diverse groups? What percentage of the total population of youth does each group represent?	How have these percentages changed over the past 10 years? In the last 20? 30?
Education Level	What percentage of party youth have a high school diploma? Bachelor's degree? Graduate degree? No formal education?	How have these percentages changed over the past 10 years? In the last 20? 30?
Geographic Location	How is the youth population distributed across regions? What percentage of youth are in urban areas? Rural? Small cities? Suburbs/exurbs?	How have these percentages changed over the past 10 years? In the last 20? 30?
Socio-Economic Status	What percentage of youth are the bottom third based on economic income? Middle third? Top third?	How have these percentages changed over the past 10 years? In the last 20? 30?

Template 1b: Youth Digital Access

	Percentages		Changes	
Online Activity	What percentage of youth are online more than two hours a day?	What percentage of youth participate in political activities online?	How many hours a month are dedicated to online political activity?	What are the most popular types of activities? Election campaigns? Protests? Issue advocacy? Etc.?
Accessibility	What percentage of youth have access to the internet?	Do specific groups or demographics have less access to online resources? Why?	Do youth possess necessary equipment (smartphones) and training to effectively engage?	Are there available resources provided by the government or NGOs to assist challenged groups with gaining access?
Preferred Platforms	What are the preferred platforms of young people broadly?	How do preferences break down by group?	Which platform is most used for political activity?	What are the most common types of activities on each platform?

Template 1c: Youth Party Membership – Diversity Assessment

	Percentages	Changes
Total Membership	What percentage of party members are younger than 30?	How has this changed or evolved in recent years? In the last 5? 10? 20?
Legacy	Of youth members, what percentage has a family connection to older party members?	How has this changed or evolved in recent years? In the last 5? 10? 20?
Gender	What percentage of party youth are Women? Men? Non-binary?	How has this changed or evolved in recent years? In the last 5? 10? 20?
Ethnic Background	Which ethnic constituencies are represented among party youth? What percentage of total youth does each group represent?	How has this changed or evolved in recent years? In the last 5? 10? 20?
Socio-Economic Status	What percentage of young party members come from bottom third based on economic income? Middle third? Top third?	How has this changed or evolved in recent years? In the last 5? 10? 20?
Education Level	What percentage of party youth have a high school diploma? Bachelor's degree? Graduate degree? No formal education?	How has this changed or evolved in recent years? In the last 5? 10? 20?
Geographic Location	What regions are represented among youth members? What is the breakdown of youth from urban areas? Rural? Small cities? Suburbs?	How has this changed or evolved in recent years? In the last 5? 10? 20?

Template 1d: Youth Engagement — Party Youth Outreach Assessment

Type of Activities	Examples	Past Initiatives	Current Initiatives	Future Initiatives
Digital	Activities on social media platforms, party websites or other public platforms	How many of these events has the party organized over the past 5 years? How were they received?	What current initiatives is the party planning?	Are there plans for initiatives in the future? What innovative ideas do they include?
Face-to-Face	Activities where young people get to meet and interact with party leaders	How many of these events has the party organized over the past 5 years? How were they received? Which leaders participated?	What current initiatives is the party planning? Who will represent the party from leadership?	Are there plans for initiatives in the future? What innovative ideas do they include?
Diversity and Inclusion⁸	Activities like town halls, meet and greets, or roundtable discussions with targeted youth constituencies	How many of these events has the party organized over the past 5 years? How were they received by each group? Who represented the party from leadership?	What current initiatives is the party planning?	Are there plans for initiatives in the future? What innovative ideas do they include?
Creative	Activities that allow youth to use creative skills, like contests for the best streaming videos or visual designs for party materials	How many of these events has the party organized over the past 5 years? How were they received? Was created material incorporated into party communications or material?	What current initiatives is the party planning?	Are there plans for initiatives in the future? What innovative ideas do they include?
Empowering	Events that provide decision-making opportunities like allowing youth to vote on party platforms	How many of these events has the party organized over the past 5 years? How were they received? Was youth input formally incorporated into the decision?	What current initiatives is the party planning?	Are there plans for initiatives in the future? What innovative ideas do they include?

⁸ Activities specifically targeted to young women, the LGBTQI+ community, minority ethnic or Indigenous populations and different socio-economic groups.

Showcasing	Activities that showcase young party members or potential recruits. Can include keynote speakers at public events, interviews on political talk shows, and featured spots on streaming events online	How many of these events has the party organized over the past 5 years? How were they received? Were youth representatives given feedback on their performance?	What current initiatives is the party planning?	Are there plans for initiatives in the future? What innovative ideas do they include?
Supporting	Party activity that supports youth-led protests, movements, or initiatives unrelated to party activities	How many of these events has the party organized over the past 5 years? How were they received? What type of activities were supported? Did the party follow up on the issue after the activity?	What current initiatives is the party planning?	Are there plans for initiatives in the future? What innovative ideas do they include?
Convening	Party activities that bring together youth from diverse groups, CSOs and organizations, regions and countries	How many of these events has the party organized over the past 5 years? How were they received? Which groups were represented? Were events organized in partnership with other formal organizations like CSOs?	What current initiatives is the party planning?	Are there plans for initiatives in the future? What innovative ideas do they include?
Influencing	Activities featuring influential individuals like celebrities, athletes or young activists with large followings	How many of these events has the party organized over the past 5 years? How were they received? What type of influencers did the party use? Which received the most positive feedback?	What current initiatives is the party planning?	Are there plans for initiatives in the future? What innovative ideas do they include?
Problem-Solving	Party activities that focus on addressing youth issues	How many of these events has the party organized over the past 5 years? How were they received? Did the party follow up with the group on the different issues?	What current initiatives is the party planning?	Are there plans for initiatives in the future? What innovative ideas do they include?

Template 1e: Suggestions for Better Connections

<p><u>C</u>REATORS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include young people in the party's media and communications team. • Give them some decision-making power over content. • Allow some autonomy for them on party-sponsored social media platforms to create content that is more authentic and relatable to youth.
<p><u>O</u>NLINE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a set schedule for posting content. • Use livestreams, photos, short informational clips, and links to share town halls and public events on youth-oriented social media sites like Instagram and TikTok to create greater transparency. • Survey young constituents about their wants, needs, and demands.
<p><u>N</u>EW MEDIA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Match every traditional media event with a social media activity. • Ask for feedback on Facebook after an important speech or debate. • Feature “influencers” that have a wide social media following to amplify party events and initiatives.
<p><u>N</u>AMES MATTER</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and Identify “influencers” or “validators” popular with youth. • Categorize names based on topical expertise, level/type of celebrity, online presence and following, and position or produced content. • Look for connections between the party and the influencers. This can range from common cause or perspective on priority issue to direct membership.
<p><u>E</u>NGAGED</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish strong working relationships among diverse, representative youth-focused organizations and civil society actors who demonstrate a strong commitment to youth engagement and/or aim to enhance young people's status and place in society. • Have presence at large events like rallies or protests. Be there to listen, not lead or lecture.
<p><u>C</u>ONSCIOUS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create avenues for the participation of multiple groups that reflect diverse sectors of the population with respect to ethnicity, religion, tribal affiliation, economic status, sexuality and rurality. • Frame party messaging around socially conscious principles. • Include policies in party platforms that aim to increase equality and address issues of marginalized constituencies.
<p><u>T</u>RANSNATIONAL</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize events that bring distinct groups together. • Use social media to create dialogue among youth from diverse backgrounds that share common goals. • Allow young activists to lead initiatives that bring groups together from various locations and backgrounds.

Appendix 2: Build

Template 2: Party Youth Assessment

The table below provides a framework to assess how the party can become more youth-centric.

	Current Status	Ongoing Initiatives	Opportunities	Challenges
Bylaws	Do current statutes guarantee youth participation or representation? Party leadership positions? Candidate lists?	Are there any initiatives the party is currently undertaking to reform bylaws concerning youth? Are there bylaws or codes of conduct on anti-harassment and anti-discrimination?	What can the party do that it is not already doing?	What are the challenges to updating statutes?
Units	Does the party have a youth wing? Is it a significant player in the party? Are there any other youth-focused units? If there is an existing wing, does the youth wing or unit have adequate financial and human resources?	Is the party currently attempting to reform or improve its youth wing?	What can the party do to strengthen these units that it is not already doing?	What challenges make it difficult to improve youth-focused units?
Impact	Do units and roles reserved for youth have impact? Are reserved places on candidate lists winnable seats? Do youth impact important decision-making processes?	Is the party currently doing anything to give youth a greater impact within the party?	What can the party do that it is not doing to make youth members more influential?	What are some challenges to helping youth have a greater impact within the party?
Leadership	Does the party support initiatives by young activists? Does the party allow young leaders to take a public role in important activities? Is the youth wing represented in meetings with top leadership?	What is the party currently doing to provide more leadership opportunities for young activists?	What else can the party do to empower young activists in leadership roles?	What challenges do young activists face taking on leadership responsibilities?
Development	What type of support does the party provide to develop young leaders? Is the support effective and efficient?	Is the party currently undertaking any initiatives to improve its training and development programs? Does the party have existing pro-youth policies in external policy platforms?	What types of programs can the party include to improve the development of young leaders?	What challenges make it difficult to provide adequate leadership training for youth? For youth from marginalized backgrounds?

Appendix 3: Serve

Template 3: Youth-Inclusive Policy Development



Appendix 4: Guide

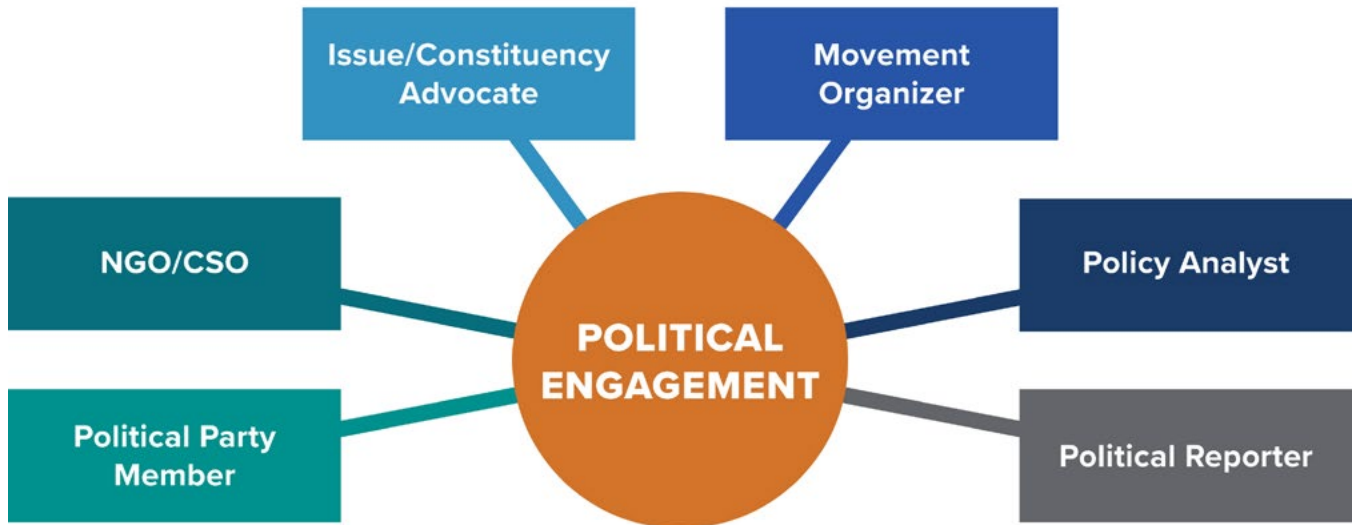
Template 4a: Goal Setting

Ask the young activists to identify career or political goals. This should include short-, medium-, and long-term goals. For example: a short-term goal could be to work on a campaign, a medium-term goal could be to run for local office, and a long-term goal could be to run for national office.

Question	Response	Additional Comments
Principles and Values: What motivated you to engage in political activism? List 3 or 4 specific things that motivated you to engage in politics. What is most important to you, and what are your “red lines”? List 3 or 4 principles that you cannot change, regardless of career impact.		
Impact: What positive change or impact would you like to result from your activism? What causes matter most? List 3 or 4 examples.		
Long-Term Professional Goals: Do your political goals overlap with your career goals? Looking ahead to 10 years from now, what would you like to have achieved? List 3 examples.		
Medium-Term: List 3 or 4 goals you would like to achieve over the next 3 to 5 years.		
Short-Term: List 1 or 2 things you would like to achieve this year.		
Personal Life: What would you like to achieve outside of your professional/political life? Would you like to have a family? Engage in philanthropy? Compete in a marathon? Climb Mount Everest. List 3 or 4 examples.		

Template 4b: Understanding Options

Walk the activists through the distinct types of political careers. This includes specific roles, organizations and skills necessary to excel in these options. Emphasize that the most important thing is to choose the path that best fits their goals and skill set. Demonstrate that the party would welcome them as a potential party member or support them as an ally if they chose to take a different path. A few examples of political career paths include:



Some useful skills for political parties include:



***Note** While this graphic focuses on political parties, a similar breakdown can be made of other career paths. The main idea is to give young people an idea of the types of skills of a political actor.*

Template 4c: Matching Skills

Work with the activists to assess their own skills. What talents or skills do they possess that can be useful to different roles? Identify potential positions or opportunities that match with their skills.

The table below offers a short visual on how to match skills with positions:

What I Do Well

Formal Training	Leadership Experience	Practical Experience	Special Talents
i.e., College degree or training certificate	i.e., Director at CSO	i.e., Job experience	i.e., Musical ability, theater, sports club

How It Matches

Training/Skill (example)	Communication	Operations	Research	Outreach and Engagement
Writing skills	Speechwriting		Draft policy proposals	
Theater	Public speaking, debates			
Captain of sports team/club		Campaign management		Coalition organization, leadership
Project manager in current position		Campaign management		Coalition management

Template 4d: Career Road Map

Encourage young activists to develop an action plan that creates a road map to achieve their goals. Suggest they start off with a 10-year plan, then work backward identifying steps needed to reach their objective. This includes skills development or specialized training, strategic networking and relationship building, participation in political activities, and benchmarks to measure progress.



Template 4e: Encourage

Encourage the young activists to take the first step in their plan. This should be a tangible step. For example, if the activist is interested in gaining knowledge in a specific policy area, connect them with an elected official, party member or NGO that works on this issue.

The following table illustrates potential first steps:

Activity	Objective	First Step
Work on a campaign	Get campaign experience	Reach out to
Public speaking training	Improve public speaking skills	Register for course with party

Bibliography

(Note: The core content for each section came from the Bridging the Distance report. The following documents, although not directly cited, contributed to each section.)

Connect

BTD Report pgs. 11, 23, 33, 35

UNICEF Office of Global Insight and Policy. “Digital civic engagement by young people.” February 2020. https://www.unicef.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/Digital-civic-engagement-by-young-people-2020_4.pdf. (General, pg. 3. “Creators,” pg. 13. “Online,” pg. 11–12. “New Media,” pg. 7. “Names Matter” and “Engaged,” pg. 21. “Transnational” and case studies, pgs. 12, 13–16.)

The ACE Electoral Knowledge Network. “The importance of youth participation in formal political processes.” [*Insert the date published or last modified/accessed*]. <https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/yt/yt10/yt210/the-importance-of-youth-participation-in-formal>. Note: See section on informal participation.

OECD. “Engaging Young People in Open Government,” Communication Guide. [*Insert date published or last accessed*]. <https://www.oecd.org/mena/governance/Young-people-in-OG.pdf>. (“Engaged,” pg. 7. “Conscious,” “New Media,” and “Online,” pg. 8–10, 12.)

Build

BTD Report pgs. 17, 33, 35

The ACE Electoral Knowledge Network. “The importance of youth participation in formal political processes.” [*Insert the date published or last modified/accessed*]. <https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/yt/yt10/yt210/the-importance-of-youth-participation-in-formal>. See: Section on Youth and Political Parties, subsections “Political Parties’ Codes of Conduct,” “Youth Party Wings,” and “Candidates and Recruitment”; and section on Meaningful Youth Participation Approaches, subsection “Viewing young people through different lenses.”

OECD. “Engaging Young People in Open Government,” Communication Guide. [*Insert date published or last accessed*]. <https://www.oecd.org/mena/governance/Young-people-in-OG.pdf>. (“Leadership,” pg. 12.)

Serve

BTD Report pgs. 11, 12, 13 17, 33, 35

Guide

Reyes, Rebecca and Malana Rogers-Bursen. “10 Ways to Overcome Barriers to Youth Engagement.” Everyday Democracy. [*Insert date published or last modified or accessed*]. <https://everyday-democracy.org/tips/5-ways-overcome-barriers-youth-engagement>.

Fjellman, Elin and Malena Rosén Sundström. “Making a (Political) Career: Young Party Members and Career-Related Incentives for Party Membership.” Wiley Online Library. May 5, 2021. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1467-9477.12203>.

wikiHow. “How to Prepare for a Career in Politics.” May 16, 2021. <https://www.wikihow.com/Prepare-for-a-Career-in-Politics>.

Covey, Stephen R. How to Develop Your Personal Mission Statement. Grand Harbor Press, 2013.

MindTools. “What Are Your Values? Deciding What’s Most Important in Life.” [*Insert date published or last modified or accessed*]. https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_85.htm.

