Principles/Guidelines/Checklist for Youth Participation at ISPCAN Congresses

INTRODUCTION

Although there may be a desire to involve youth in ISPCAN generally and specifically in conferences and congresses, there are also many challenges. To be meaningful, participation of youth takes time and resources.

For the purpose of ISPCAN Congresses, the age of youth is considered 18 + years and to 25 years as an (flexible) upper limit.

Participation may mean different things in different contexts. The terms “youth involvement” or “youth participation” are used interchangeably in this document. It is fundamentally about the exercise of power, respect and influence. In simple terms it means young people partaking in and influencing processes, decisions and activities.

Participation by youth is much more than giving them the opportunity to attend meetings or to speak. It implies that they are seriously listened to and that their issues, experiences and insights are taken into account and given appropriate weight when developing policies or taking specific actions that concern them.

PRINCIPLES

The conveners of the consultation should:

- Adopt a rights-based approach, focusing on encouraging all youth to access their rights, i.e. it is gender and culturally inclusive. The right and the ability to advocate on one’s own behalf, to be in control and a part of decision making processes and interventions.

- Actively encourage and mentor the involvement of youth in the development, planning, implementation and evaluation of their projects.

- Ensure that youth participation processes should always result in the empowerment of the youth that participate.
• Should not cause harm.

• Involvement of youth in a meaningful way having clear outcomes that reflect that their voices are heard and taken into account when addressing specific issues or problems.

• Recognize that the participation of youth has cultural implications and interpretations that need to be taken into account. Different cultures differ on how youth are valued and socialized, which impacts on the kind of opportunities youth have to participate. It is a challenge to be aware of these differences and focus on the positive aspects in each culture that could further enable youth to participate.

• Ensure that youth understand the issues being addressed, feel comfortable and willing to participate, understand the possible outcomes of their participation and have clear roles and responsibilities.

• Encourage work with adult stakeholders (such as parents, educators) to make sure that youth understand and support the process and consequences of the participation of youth.

• Ensure that the participation of youth enhances their personhood. It is important to recognize that their individual growth may be sidelined, especially when they are a part of an organization/group.

• Ensure that the participation of youth should be in keeping with their capacity and ability (milestones of development) and contribute positively to the process of youth growth and development. However, all this operates within the context of their rights and their participation is the means by which they realize their rights.

• Ensure that the participation of youth respects the impact of their various capacities and abilities.

• Ensure that the participation of youth should use various modalities, verbal, creative, playful, competitive, collaborative, individual, utilizing food, rest and activities as appropriate.

**BENEFITS**

The participation of youth can:

• Help youth form higher aspirations, gain confidence, attain resources, improve skills and knowledge, change attitudes, and develop more meaningful relationships with adults
• Foster resilience by giving youth opportunities to contribute to family or community
• Enhance youth’s social competence, problem-solving skills, and autonomy, and give them a sense of purpose
• Help youth be more open to learning, engaging in critical dialogue, exercising creativity, and taking initiative
• Alert adults who work with youth to the challenges of participation of youth and encourage greater sensitivity in working with them.

REQUIREMENTS

Youth need the following for meaningful participation

• Opportunity - Youth should be given opportunities to use their ability to respond to issues affecting them. Youth can be given the opportunity to share their views and actively participate.
• Responsibility - Allowing youth to make decisions and to share in the consequences helps their growth and experience in influencing or directing project activities or community action. Youth should fully understand the consequences of their decisions.
• Support - Participation of youth is a process that takes time and the development of confidence. As a result they must be supported in various ways. These usually include providing new or additional information, skills and material or financial resources.
• Respect - Respect can be shown by listening to what youth say, asking for opinions, explaining decisions and actions, and giving all youth equal treatment regardless of their ability, language and skills.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Balancing the rights of youth to both participation and their protection is critical and sometimes challenging. The ‘best interests of the child’ principle is paramount and participatory processes must always take into account the following:

- The evolving capacities of youth
- the context of the youth
- the provision of a safe environment
- the need to enable youth to make their own decisions within safe parameters;
- confidentiality of opinions and their identity must be appropriately assured;
- trust must be built through clearly defined roles and responsibilities;
- informed consent from youth must be obtained both before and after the event or process and before information about the project is made available and explained;
- referral and support systems for youth should be set up to ensure that youth are assisted where and when appropriate as participation processes can lead to personal issues emerging which may need to be professionally addressed beyond the scope of the project;
- permission to disseminate findings must be obtained.
- Disability issues must be recognized, anticipated and addressed
- Processes should be established to ensure respectful participation for all youth

METHODS

• Use pre-participation processes to ensure the youth are aware of the project or event
• Ensure that engagement processes enable them to get to know each other
• Ensure that participation engagement processes enable adults to get to know the youth that will participate in the project. This should enable understanding of their context, their capacity, motivations, interests and how they perceive issues
• Ensure that the youth are aware of assumptions of adults.
• Project strategies for the participation of youth should incorporate and build on supportive local structures, traditions, knowledge and practice that involve youth
• Involve youth in the project design as early as possible. This will help to develop ownership, learning and commitment from an early stage
• Youth should be involved in all whole project phases; planning > implementation > review.
• All stakeholders to agree on the purpose and benefits of youth participation
• The decision about the level and nature of the participation should involve all project stakeholders, including youth
• Positively view youth’s capacities and competencies to participate and focus on the type of support they need to
enable them to participate meaningfully.

- Focus on youth-centered methodologies and friendly approaches to facilitate participation.
- Support adult stakeholders in developing their capacities to support youth. It is crucial to understand the experiences and attitudes of adults towards youth participation so that they can be sensitized and supported to enable them to accommodate and recognize the benefits of youth participation in different settings. Work in parallel with youth supporters, who themselves may not have much opportunity to be listened to or to participate.
- Ensure that there is appropriate support and essential referral services available for youth that participate in specific projects.
- Ethical considerations, environmental safety, mental health safety, protection issues and other vulnerabilities should be identified and considered. It is imperative that the physical and emotional well-being of the youth involved is ensured both throughout the project and after the project ends.
- Manage the processes flexibly, document the processes and be open to learn. There are many ways of facilitating youth participation. There is no single model that suits all contexts and situations. It is important to be able to adapt and change according to the specific circumstances and situations. Each project should be a learning process that is well documented so this can be shared as well as contribute to the knowledge in the field of youth participation.
- Ensure youth participation include opportunity for food, rest, fun, appropriate length sessions, and creative activities.
Preliminary Checklist for ISPCAN Congress Youth Forum Committee
The following ‘checklist’ is offered as a draft document to assist coordinators for youth participation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Have the following matters been considered by each of the conference committees. It is recognized that some issues will be more relevant to certain committees?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Action and timeline Note if not possible, or other comments</th>
<th>By whom?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Has a decision been made to the age of the youth to be invited with the understanding that that the age of the youth is 18 years up until a (flexible) 25 years?</td>
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<td>2. Has the need for safety and potential risks been jointly identified by youth and adults involved in Congress planning? It is recommended that this should occur at least 9 – 12 months prior to the event.</td>
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<td>3. Have youth living under guardianship or the supervision of the State obtained clear and written permission for attendance, and active support of the State child protective services?</td>
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<td>4. Have the principles of youth participation as provided by the United Nations and other groups such as Save the Children and other groups been reviewed and followed by the local and ISPCAN organizing groups?</td>
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<td>5. Have the youth forum themes and goals been clearly articulated and described? Both at the planning stage through regular review?</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Is the event able to ensure that the rights of the youth to express their opinions and have a voice are supported and protected?</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Has the outcomes of consultation with youth been integrated into the Conference/Congress programme?</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Will a record be kept of these proceedings and opinions and will the materials be distributed in a formal manner to ensure that young people’s voices are heard by organizations, professionals, government etc?</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>Are multiple processes provided to express opinions – structured, semi structured and artistic?</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Have processes been established to ensure that no recording of faces, opinions etc. are recorded and used without the youth and adult participants’ informed and valid consent?</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Have processes been established to ensure that all adults involved in Youth Forum processes have undergone appropriate criminal and child protection screening?</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>With regard to the Youth Forum and other participation activities, has a Congress specific safety plan been developed to include the following components?</td>
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<td>- Is there access to a safe space and information about when and how to use the space</td>
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<td>- Is there an opportunity for participants to give early indication of their distress to others?</td>
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<td>- Is there a plan for protective behavior strategies to be made available, at the beginning and throughout the process? (Even well-functioning young people can find these discussion upsetting)</td>
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<td>- Is there mental health first aid trained support available (young people and professionals), available during the consultation?</td>
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<td>13. Is there a plan to provide access to independent support and recognition of participation after the session – i.e. back-up professionals</td>
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<td>14. Is there adequate recognition of cultural respect for participants both in person and in virtual engagement?</td>
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<td>15. If there is a plan for international participation by youth, is there a screening, registration and preliminary preparation process organized?</td>
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<td>16. If the forum includes discussion of child abuse, neglect, bullying, parents etc., careful clarification should take place – is this discussion a strength based, solution focused process which may be therapeutic (but is not psycho-therapy) and expects only very limited self-disclosure? This is not to limit the topics for youth but to ensure no further harm occurs to anyone participating.</td>
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<td>17. Is there a pro forma for a report that can be prepared at several stages of the Congress ensuring these and any other issues are being addressed?</td>
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<td>18. Is there provision to ensure that councilors and local organizers accept the responsibility of assisting with and enhancing the international youth forum processes at ISPCAN Congresses and working with youth as recommended in UNICEF material?</td>
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<td>19. Has here been a process to ensure that privacy and appropriate reference to youth’s images and ideas are considered when reviewing abstracts and presentations at all levels?</td>
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<td>20. Is there a plan that those who contributed films and material be sent a formal letter of thanks and sent by Congress co-chairs and ISPCAN president? This could accompany an invitation to future collaboration.</td>
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21. Has a plan been developed that will allow the participants to continue their work together after the Youth Forum, if they so desire?

22. Will the local youth consultation team ensure follow up of all participants in view of the possible emotional issues raised by the Youth Forum process?

ATTITUDES & BEHAVIOURS

- Trust young people to analyze, plan, act, monitor, evaluate and reflect.
- Don’t lecture or dominate young people.
- Listen to young people.
- Learn from young people and share your own knowledge as appropriate.
- Don’t judge young people, but do challenge harmful ideas to help young people see things in a new way.
- Respect young people and be friendly.
- Be honest with young people about intentions and expected outcomes.
- Embrace error and learn from mistakes.
- Have fun!
- Don’t rush; let things evolve at their own pace.
- Relax with young people.
- Don’t work for young people; work with them. Better still be with them.
HOW TO GET STARTED:

1. Both the ISPCAN and local youth forum committee chairs should meet via Skype to brainstorm approach
2. A local youth age group should be identified and begin to invite participants in a transparent way (method to apply should also be put on our website
3. Youth should be convened with the assistance of the chairs to brainstorm topics of interest. Once the topic is determined by the youth then there should be a plan to lay out the event for the day
4. For a Congresses the agenda and final plan needs to (ideally) be complete by 6 to 8 months prior to the event. Details must be finalized and on our website minimum 3-4 months prior to the event. Please plan the meetings accordingly.
5. Youth should be encouraged to take creative license to express themselves
6. Findings and outcome will be shared to the Congress audience during a plenary session (chairs should prep the youth)
7. Photos and/or outcome documents should be captured as appropriate
8. The International YPAC (Youth participatory advisory council) for ISPCAN should be involved and if there is an option to have global youth participate, please arrange this
9. Meeting space (can be a youth friendly space like a children's museum, etc.) and lunch catering with need to be arranged for confirmed participants
10. Sign up, check in process and proper permissions must be in place
11. Sponsorships for the youth forum should be sought in the local community to help defray costs-- ISPCAN provides no budget for this event.
12. Tee-shirts need to be made for the event, badges made for the participants, and group photo should be taken