



The Youth Design Assembly

Empowering Youth to Empower You



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under Grant Agreement No 101036480

This guide was created by Democracy x - www.democracyx.dk

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DEMOCRACY X
TECHNOLOGY, SOCIETY & SUSTAINABILITY

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The Youth Design Assembly Empowering Youth to Empower You

Engaging young people in shaping the future of education, policy, and business is more important now than ever. As researchers, educators, political actors, civil servants, and business leaders alike, we are tasked with developing ideas, policies, and products that are relevant, inclusive, and help shape a sustainable future for generations to come. Creating solutions without actively involving the voices of youth risks missing out on their unique insights and experiences.

In this guide we introduce the **Youth Design Assembly (YDA)** - a method developed for the project GreenSCENT¹ to bridge this gap by allowing young people to co-create solutions in a structured, inclusive, and participatory environment, helping you improve on the specific processes, policies, or products that you are working on. This document offers a practical guide to understanding and implementing Youth Design Assemblies across an array of different issues.

Adopting this method allows you to:

- **Obtain and Harness Fresh Perspectives:** Young people bring innovative, forward-thinking approaches based on their own lived experience that can help to reshape outdated processes or bring new insights to emerging challenges.
- **Promote Democratic Participation:** By engaging youth in decision-making, young people are empowered to shape their own future, contributing to a more inclusive and representative process.
- **Build Relevant, Reliable and Robust Solutions:** Whether you are developing educational programs, policy frameworks, or new products, involving young voices ensures that your outputs are aligned with the needs and interests of younger generations.

This guide is designed to inspire action and provide practical steps for you to incorporate the Youth Design Assembly method into your work. Whether you are looking to enhance educational content, involve young voices in policy discussions, or design youth-centred products, this method can help you create more meaningful, impactful outcomes.

¹ Between 2022-24, the EU-funded project GreenSCENT developed a competence framework to respond to the EU Green Deal through collaboration with experts, schools, and the public. The project piloted tools across 45 schools and universities, creating a methodology, training kits, the GreenSCENTbox, and ECCEL – a certification for environmental skills. The Youth Design Assembly was one of the methods used to achieve these results.

The Benefits of Youth Design Assemblies

By integrating Youth Design Assemblies into your work, you don't just develop a better product—you create a richer, more inclusive process that drives innovation and fosters genuine engagement with young people.

The Youth Design Assembly is a co-creation method. A powerful tool for engaging young people in the development and testing of processes, policies, and products. These assemblies are much more than simple consultation—they offer a dynamic, participatory approach that brings real value to both the participants and the final outcomes. Here are the key benefits of incorporating Youth Design Assemblies into your work:

1. **Deepen Your Understanding of the Target Group**
Youth Design Assemblies offer a unique opportunity to tap into the insight, experiences, and perspectives of young people. By involving young people directly, you gain a deeper understanding of their interests, needs, and desires, allowing you to tailor products and services more effectively to the next generation.
2. **Develop and Improve Your Product**
Involving young people in the co-creation process provides direct feedback on everything from policies and educational materials to apps and services. This interaction not only helps to refine your product but also ensures that it is rooted in real-world experiences, making it more resilient, practical, and relevant to the wider target audience. Co-created solutions are more likely to be accepted and used, making a tangible difference in their effectiveness.
3. **Raise Interest and Motivation and Build Self-Efficacy**
Co-creation is a powerful motivator. When young people are actively involved in shaping a program or product, they feel valued and seen, which enhances their interest and motivation in the cause. Participants can inspire each other, learning through collaboration and developing a sense of shared purpose. By demonstrating that their voices matter, you foster greater commitment to the project and self-efficacy in the participants.
4. **Spark Action**
Involving youth in decision-making can ignite their passion for a cause. By helping them see how their ideas lead to real outcomes, you give them the tools to translate hope, fear, or frustration into action. This can lead to continued engagement beyond the assembly, including participation in advocacy, politics, or activism.
5. **Build a Lasting Community**
Finally, a well-structured Youth Design Assembly can build a sense of community among participants. These connections can live on even after the assembly concludes, creating a sustainable network of engaged and empowered young people who can continue working together to address future challenges.

Origins of the Youth Design Assembly

The Youth Design Assembly method is rooted in two complementary approaches: **Deliberative Mini-Publics** and **Design Challenges**. In the Youth Design Assembly method, we have taken the best from each to create inclusive, collaborative, and user-centred solutions:

Deliberative Mini-Publics bring together a diverse, representative group to discuss complex issues, creating shared understanding through informed, facilitated discussion. This approach captures a wide range of perspectives, helping policymakers and researchers anticipate public responses and integrate diverse viewpoints into decision-making.

Design Challenges, rooted in Human-Centred Design, focus on creative problem-solving through empathy, collaboration, and rapid prototyping. This approach encourages teams to reframe problems, engage multiple perspectives, and develop solutions through continuous testing and feedback.

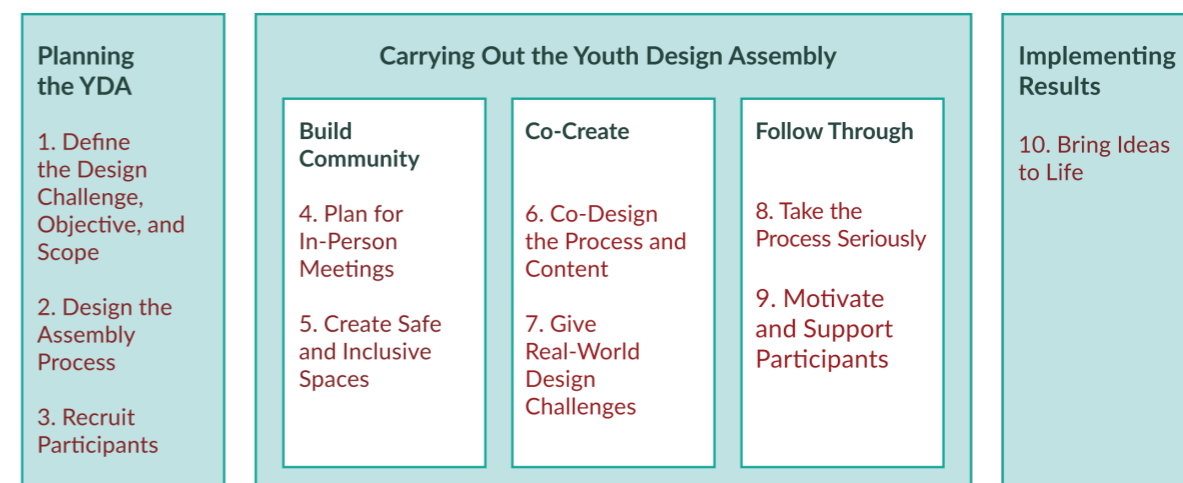
By drawing on the deliberative, inclusive aspects of Mini-Publics and the creative, user-focused strategies of Design Challenges, the Youth Design Assembly method allows you to engage young people in meaningful discussions and collaborative design activities around specific issues. This combination ensures that the solutions you create are grounded in diverse perspectives and improved through iterative learning.



How Does It Work?

A Youth Design Assembly can host any number of individual Design Challenges. Be sure to set aside enough time for building a sense of community and for a thorough clarification of expectations before starting these and for a proper implementation of outcomes after they end. Do your ground work when planning the assembly and leave time for follow-up after the assembly finishes to guarantee the quality of your work.

The YDA Steps:



The GreenSCENT Case

A Youth Design Assembly can take on many shapes. In GreenSCENT, the EU-funded research project in which this method was developed, the process took 18 months with fifty-eight participants from seven EU countries, selected via open calls to ensure diversity in backgrounds and perspectives. They were divided into smaller groups based on age, interests, and country to encourage close collaboration.

Each assembly meeting was designed to be a safe and respectful environment, with facilitation by professional organizers and educators. From the very first meeting, participants collectively developed their own code of conduct, establishing norms for respectful dialogue and collaboration.

The assembly revolved around Design Challenges in which experts in green education, app developers, and curriculum designers presented drafts of products, curricula, and concepts, which participants refined and improved over time in co-creation workshops. Each Design Challenge had a host that was responsible for presenting their challenge and collecting and implementing the feedback. Democracy x was responsible for facilitating the method.

The program wrapped up with recommendations, which were shared with GreenSCENT project partners. The participants received certificates and were offered support to continue their engagement after the conclusion of the project.

Step-by-Step Guide for Youth Design Assemblies

Here we break down The Youth Design Assembly into tasks you need to address when: 1) Planning the YDA, 2) Carrying Out the YDA, and 3) Implementing Results.

Phase 1: Planning the YDA

1. Define the Design Challenge, Objective, and Scope

- **Purpose:** Clearly define the goal of the Youth Design Assembly. Are you aiming to influence policy, develop educational tools, or co-create a product? Outline specific objectives, participant roles, the mandate of the participants, and how the outcomes will be applied.
- **Participants:** Decide who will be involved. Are you targeting a specific demographic or age group and how will you ensure diversity? Consider whether inclusiveness or representation will be a priority.
- **Incentive:** What will motivate participants to join and how will you reward them for their time spent? Ensure they understand the value of their contribution and how it will impact the outcome.

2. Design the Assembly Process

- **Overview:** Outline the structure of the assembly. How many Design Challenges are you addressing, and how many meetings will there be? Will these be online, in-person, or hybrid? Who will facilitate the discussions, and what tools or platforms will be used for communication and dissemination?
- **Length:** Allow an appropriate time for iterative meetings while recognizing participants' shifting schedules and priorities.
- **Flexibility:** Establish what content and structure will be set in advance versus co-created by participants. This ensures transparency and is necessary for creating a balanced process that is adaptable while remaining guided.



3. Recruit Participants

- **Diversity and Representation:** Recruit participants that reflect the diversity of your target audience. Use different channels to reach underrepresented groups and ensure broad participation.
- **Inclusiveness:** Ensure that all participants feel welcome and valued. Whether through personal invitations, open calls, or network-based recruitment, be intentional.
- **Number:** Select your sample for your Youth Design Assembly. The number and the selection of participants depends on the objective of the Assembly. Consider splitting the Youth Design Assembly into smaller groups to create a more intimate classroom-like feeling if you opt for a large assembly.

Selection Criteria

When recruiting participants, choose your selection criteria carefully. Classic selection criteria include geography, gender, age, or socio-economic background. For such criteria, diversity and representativity are not always the same: To be representative the selected youth should mirror the composition in their community. If a community has 60% women, this means aiming for the same balance in your assembly. However, you may be interested in maximising either diversity or inclusivity. Does your specific agenda warrant this? Or perhaps even an over-representation of certain groups?

For example, if you are working on technologies that are meant to work for people with special needs, you may wish to select a group of youth that have direct insight into or experience with such needs.

Choosing criteria consciously is important, and being transparent about the reasons for your selection will help you argue the validity of your outcome.

Phase 2: Carrying Out the YDA

Build Community

4. Plan for In-Person Meetings

- **Build Relationships:** When possible, plan for in-person meetings. Physical meetings help participants connect on a deeper level, creating stronger bonds that enrich discussions and outcomes.

5. Create Safe and Inclusive Spaces

- **Foster Connections:** Establish safe environments where participants feel comfortable sharing. Consider breakout groups, anonymous input methods, or smaller discussion circles to accommodate different comfort levels.
- **Code of Conduct:** Facilitate the creation of a shared code of conduct in the first meeting. This helps establish norms for respectful communication and collaboration and works as a social contract that can be enforced for the benefit of everyone involved.
- **Clarify Expectations:** Make sure that the roles of each actor in the assembly are clearly defined and that each participant understands their tasks, the mandate they are given, and how their input will be used by others.

TEXT BOX: Foster Agency and Self-Efficacy in Everything You Do

Agency and efficacy are ingredients that can enable a sense of responsibility and confidence in participants, so they are not only equipped with knowledge but also empowered to use it to contribute fully to your process.

Agency in a YDA refers to an individual's sense of control and influence in the decision-making process. It embodies the idea that participants are not passive observers but active agents capable of shaping outcomes.

Self-efficacy is believing in one's own ability to contribute meaningfully. Investing time in building this empowers participants to feel that their voices matter and that their actions can lead to tangible change.



Co-Create

6. Co-Design the Process and Content

- **Participant Input:** Allow participants to co-create aspects of the process and content. Where relevant, solicit participant feedback on topics, expert selection, or how the meetings should be structured.
- **Encourage Ideas:** Keep the process dynamic and flexible. Be open to adjusting the program if new ideas emerge during the assembly.
- **Follow-Up:** Regularly revisit participant suggestions and ensure their ideas are considered, both for the design of the process and the content of discussions.

7. Give Real-World Design Challenges

- **Choose Wisely:** Engage your participants in challenges that are meaningful because you have a real need for their input.
- **Co-Create:** Use principles from Human-Centred Design like the three phases of Inspiration, Ideation and Implementation to ensure that each Design Challenge allows your participants to co-create solutions together.
- **Iterate and Reiterate:** By brainstorming, going on fieldtrips, prototyping, synthesising, and testing results.

Follow Through

8. Take the Process Seriously

- **Transparency:** Clearly outline which aspects participants can influence and any limitations on their decision-making.
- **Facilitate Effectively:** Respect participants' time and contributions by maintaining a structured, engaging atmosphere. Use methods that combine ambition with approachability.

9. Motivate and Support Participants

- **Offer Guidance:** Provide support and feedback to help participants refine their ideas, whether working individually or in groups. Encourage ongoing dialogue beyond the YDA.
- **Respect Decisions:** Avoid overruling the assembly's choices, affirming that their input has real impact and fostering trust.

Phase 3: Implementing Results

10. Bring Ideas to Life

- **Follow-Up:** The hosts of your Design Challenges should always be responsible for implementing outcomes after each Design Challenge has ended but remember to compile your results so that their impact can be tracked over time.
- **Real-World Application:** Follow up on your promise to implement the ideas generated by the Youth Design Assembly. Help participants connect with relevant networks, organizations, or potential supporters to extend their impact.
- **Recognition:** Provide formal acknowledgment, such as certificates or recommendations, that participants can use in future endeavors, enhancing their engagement and rewarding their contributions.



Your Turn

The flexibility of this method allows it to be tailored to suit your needs, making it a valuable tool for fostering democratic participation wherever you are.

Is it time to involve young people in co-creating solutions in your own Youth Design Assembly?

We believe that the power of creative problem-solving can lead to more sustainable outcomes. From deepening your understanding of a target group and improving the applicability of your work, to building lasting communities, Youth Design Assemblies empower young participants while enriching your project outcomes.

Do you want to hear more?

Get in Touch with Democracy x

If you are considering hosting your own Youth Design Assembly and want to explore the method further reach out to Democracy x.

In Democracy x, we use our more than 40 years of experience to support society's actors in solving the major challenges of our time.

Read more about Democracy x on our website:

[DEMOCRACY X](#)

Or contact us directly at:

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YDA

**The Youth
Design Assembly**

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