

What we've learned about working with young people

Practical ideas on how to plan successful programmes for youth (aged 13-19 years)

When you're planning your project...

Consider **why** you want to work with young people. Is it to widen your audiences? Showcase a different voice in your museum? Bring in an under-represented social group? Think about what you want to achieve and what they are going to get from the experience, and make sure the relationship is **mutually beneficial**. Be prepared to take young people's views and input seriously throughout, with no **tokenism**. If you want their opinion then listen to it. If you can, act on it. And if you can't act on it, explain to them why.

When you're recruiting the participants...

Recruitment can be very time-consuming, so allow an adequate period. Decide who your **target audience** is (in terms of background, gender, age group, interests) and the group size you need, allowing for a few to drop out. If you can reach the audience best via a school or community group, seek a teacher or youth worker as your first contact, as they can be instrumental in raising and maintaining enthusiasm for the project. Direct recruitment via advertisement is an option but may not result in the range or size of response you need.

Plan to pay for the young people's **transport** (or even better, minibus them in if you have the budget!) as it makes them feel special and helps to maintain attendance.

Before starting a project, get everyone's **contact details** as well as a parent's phone numbers and email addresses. Facebook or text message are usually the best way of getting in touch with young people. Find out if there are any food allergies or medical needs in your group. You may need to send consent forms home.

When you're planning the programme...

Design the activities to be **meaningful** to the young people, whether it's because they are into science, media or the arts, want to build their CV, or because it's a chance to see their (new) friends. Start sessions with some fun icebreakers, especially important if the participants don't know each other well. Since it isn't school, try not to tell them off or do too much 'shushing'. Make it fun, varied and active as possible.

If you have other adults participating in sessions, be clear about what you want from their involvement, and make sure they are **youth friendly**. Be realistic about what they can achieve in a given time; but be sure that what you are doing is a challenge that will make them feel proud of their achievement. Offer accreditation as an **incentive**, or something cool that they get to keep at the end of the project – ideally something they can use during the project, for example a flip camera.

Be **flexible**. Things will change spontaneously but don't panic. Have some time fillers on hand so that you can have an activity ready to roll out if necessary. End workshops with a **bang**: something fun and memorable.

When you're scheduling the activities...

Decide how long you want your workshops to be, and how frequent. Try to find out about constraints like exams, work commitments and family obligations in advance. If your workshops take place at the weekend, bear in mind that teenagers prefer a later start. Evening sessions can work, but allow for enough travel time on either side.

Book a suitable room for your event with enough space for everything you want to do. Make sure that if you change venue or there are other important things to communicate, the word goes out via text, Facebook and phone call to make sure no one misses out.

When you're planning the practicalities...

Snacks and drinks (or meals where appropriate) are **essential**. Sugar does wonders for keeping everyone motivated. Make sure **staff know the event is taking place** in advance so you don't get any surprises.

If you are working with minors, find out what the laws are and what training you should have (H&S for example) and get it sorted. Have enough staff at your sessions – at least two adults with groups bigger than 10. It's best if it's always the same people so the group can get to know them.

After the project is over...

Afterwards, **publicise** the project via the young people's schools and youth organisations, and encourage them to tell their friends and families. **Follow up** – use the relationships you've built up with the young people and keep them involved, invite them to events, and if possible work with them again on other projects.

Further resources:

Find out more about delivering successful workshops by reading:

- What we've learned about developing workshops
- What we've learned about developing community outreach programmes
- GEM Case Studies Vol 5 2010 Teenage Curators at the Science Museum