

# Youth Futures Foundation

## Call for research proposals

### Practice guidance for youth participation in evaluation

#### 1. Introduction

Youth Futures Foundation (YFF) is the national What Works Centre for youth employment, with a specific focus on marginalised young people. We want to see an equitable future society where all young people have the opportunity to be in good work.

Our work has two overarching objectives to bring about systems change for marginalised young people:

1. **To find and generate high-quality evidence to better understand England's youth unemployment and inactivity challenge, and most importantly to learn which interventions and approaches work well to address these.** We do this by bringing together the best evidence already in existence and build on this by conducting original research, testing and robustly evaluating promising interventions or changes to policy and practice within places to produce much-needed new evidence where there are gaps.
2. **To put evidence into action with policy makers and employers who have the means to make direct impactful change for young people.** We do this through translating the evidence practically for stakeholders to use and understand, and through partnerships and engagement to influence, inform and support them as decision makers to back evidence-based interventions that work.

Throughout all our work, we proudly involve the voices, perspectives and participation of young people experiencing marginalisation, through our Future Voices Group, our young Board members and beyond. **We hope through this commission, that we will learn how to build on what we already do and develop a comprehensive youth participation strategy for all evidence generation at Youth Futures.** Further information on Youth Futures' existing approach and strategy for Youth Participation can be found [here](#).

In May 2024, we published [research](#) conducted by the Centre for Evidence and Implementation, reviewing existing approaches and identifying promising practice in youth participation in research and evaluation projects.<sup>1</sup> The review highlighted a gap in evidence-informed practice guidance for youth participatory approaches in evaluation projects.

This practice guidance will focus in on these gaps to present evidence-informed recommendations on how to implement youth participation in evaluation. This will be

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<sup>1</sup> Rowland, J., Wills, E., Ott, E. (2024). Youth Participatory Research: A Review of Reviews and Practice Guidance. Centre for Evidence and Implementation.

done through two qualitative methods; a literature review and focus groups with experts and young people. We expect this to be done over four stages:

- A literature review of participatory practice,
- Focus groups with evaluators and youth participation facilitators,
- Produce practice guidance based on the findings,
- Collaborate throughout with the members of Youth Futures Foundation's Future Voices Group.

## Key dates

The schedule for submitting a proposal is:

Call for Proposals issued: 25th October 2024

Deadline for submission of questions: 4th November 2024

Question responses circulated: 6th of November 2024

Email with intention to submit: 11th November 2024

Proposal submission deadline: 22nd November 2024

Interviews: week beginning: 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2024

## 2. Context

This commission follows the publication of [Youth Participatory Research: A Review of Reviews and Practice Guidance](#). Commissioned by Youth Futures Foundations and conducted by Centre for Evidence and Implementation, the review uses a multi-phase review methodology to identify and consolidate existing reviews and practice guidance for participation in research and evaluation.

The review found existing practice is inconsistent with diverse means of implementing, conceptualising and monitoring youth participation in research and evaluation.<sup>2</sup>

However, the review identified the following facilitators of promising practice:<sup>3</sup>

- Theorising, conceptualising, and reflexivity
- Consideration of youth voice
- Power sharing between adults and youth
- Communication and engagement throughout participation
- Transparency and feedback cycles
- Inclusive practices
- Safe spaces for participation
- Trauma-informed collaboration
- Incentives and recognition for youth participation

The review recommends that avoiding “rigidity around appropriate paradigms, models and methods” will further encourage the implementation of these drivers of promising

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<sup>2</sup> Rowland et al (2024), p.5

<sup>3</sup> Rowland et al (2024) pp.37-47

practice.<sup>4</sup> Instead, participatory approaches should encourage inclusivity, flexibility, and transparency over parameters of youth participation in individual projects.<sup>5</sup>

With this in mind, Youth Futures would like to better understand how to develop an evidence-informed approach for youth participation in our research and evaluation projects.

Projects range from Connected Futures, a £20m place-based, systems change programme using a range of different methods and approaches to evaluating the complex interventions, to a new £18m programme of evidence generation focusing on the use of quantitative impact evaluation methods, internally called What Works Programme 2. Whilst we carry out a variety of mixed method evaluations, this guidance will primarily focus on youth participation in impact evaluations generating causal evidence (including RCTs and QEDs) but should consider how practitioners can adapt the recommendations for use in other evaluation methods.

The What Works Programme 2 fund is to develop impact evaluations (primarily Randomised Controlled Trials but where these are unfeasible, quasi-experimental designs) of employment interventions for our target groups (which will be released in YFF's new strategy in January 2025). As part of this work, we would like to consider what types of youth participation will be possible and appropriate for RCTs already within YFF's pipeline of development (where interventions have evidence of promise and generally high-fidelity models of operation or are developed alongside statutory practice). But we would also like this review to look further to consider where youth participation could support evidence generation projects from design to dissemination.

The practice guidance will directly support participatory practice in our current impact evaluation pipeline and will inform our participatory methods in future impact and theory-based evaluations. We see this project as an initial step to improving the quality of our youth participation approach in evaluation projects. We will trial the approaches set out by the final guidance to build a participatory practice that is reflexive and adaptable to the needs of the young people and of the evaluation.

### 3. Project Overview

For this project, a commissioned research partner will conduct a literature review and primary research with experts, using the findings to build practice guidance.

The commissioned organisation and Youth Futures Foundation staff will work with members of the [Future Voices Group](#) and a youth participation consultant throughout the duration of the project with whom we will share findings from the qualitative research and collaborate on producing the practice guidance.

At the start of the project the commissioned research organisation will work with Youth Futures Foundation staff to build a plan for youth participation in this project and develop key points for input from the young people in the Future Voices Group and our external youth participation consultant.

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<sup>4</sup> Rowland et al (2024), p.50

<sup>5</sup> *ibid*

This commission will develop on the findings of Rowland et al (2024) and will consider best practice for youth participation in evaluation projects – with primary attention given to impact evaluations.

The practice guidance should use findings from qualitative research to:

- Provide a step-by-step outline of how youth participation may be integrated into the development and delivery of a RCT at its different stages, and corresponding opportunities for a quasi-experimental design.
- Where opportunities for youth participation are identified, the guidance should specify what forms of youth participation would be appropriate, making clear how these approaches strengthen the quality of the evaluation.
- Describe the practical considerations of youth participation in evaluation projects.
- Highlight findings that indicate components of youth participation at specific stages of the evaluation can have positive impacts on evaluation quality.
- Develop an approach to measuring the impact of youth participation on evaluations.
- Make evidence-informed recommendations for best practices in youth participatory methods in evaluation.
- Consider how the practice guidance could be adapted to support participation in other high quality evaluation methods for example in early stage, formative and developmental approaches.

We welcome bids from a single organisation with relevant expertise, or bids from two organisations/individuals working in partnership. We are particularly keen to work with a research team that has substantial experience of facilitating participatory approaches in research and evaluation, especially with young people from marginalised backgrounds who are more likely to experience labour market disadvantage (e.g. those from particular ethnic groups, those with learning disabilities, mental health conditions or neurodiverse or who have experienced the care or criminal justice systems).

Throughout, the practice guidance should consider the participatory work with marginalised young people and how to build inclusive approaches for all young people.

With these findings in mind, we are keen to hear how a commissioned research team would address the possibility of tension between the methodological rigour of impact evaluation methods and the flexibility required for high quality participatory approaches.

### Research questions

1. What are the existing approaches to youth participation in impact evaluations (RCTs and QEDs)?
2. What are the opportunities for youth participation in an impact evaluation?
  - i) At each stage of an impact evaluation, where are the opportunities for youth participation?

- ii) At each opportunity which forms of youth participation would add value to the evaluation and how might they do so?
3. What components, and at which stage(s), may youth participation have a positive impact on evaluation quality?
    - i) Which components of youth participation are thought to have positive impacts on evaluation quality and how?
    - ii) How should evaluators assess and monitor how youth participation is contributing to impact evaluations?
  4. How should evaluators practically implement these recommendations in their work?
  5. What best practice is there in working with young people at different stages of the evaluation?

## Methods

To establish an evidence-base for the practice guidance the commissioned research team should conduct two types of qualitative research:

- 1) Literature review** of evaluation reports or guidance which describes ways which youth participation could or has been done in evaluation contexts.

The research team should undertake an initial scoping exercise prior to starting the literature review in order to identify the extent, nature and quality of available literature. We anticipate that a systematic approach will be appropriate but are open to alternatives that can capture a useful range of literature. The research team will meet with Youth Futures Foundation staff to discuss their findings and proposed approaches for taking the research forward.

Following this conversation, researchers will need to develop an inception and scoping report. This should set out:

- Finalised research questions and sub-questions
- Definitions of key categories and themes
- Approach to searching, screening and selecting the literature
- Inclusion and exclusion criteria, including how the quality and relevance of the literature will be assessed
- How findings will be analysed and synthesised

We anticipate that there will be few robust available studies on youth participation in impact evaluations and therefore we suggest that the research should include depth qualitative research with organisations who conduct or embed youth participation into their working practices (e.g. organisations who work outside of (impact) evaluation).

- 2) Semi-structured expert focus groups** with evaluators, commissioning organisations, grant-makers, youth participation facilitators and young people.

Focus groups will establish existing practice, drivers of good practice and what forms, and at what stage of the project, youth participation has positively impacted the quality of past evaluations.

Focus group instruments will be developed in discussion with Youth Futures and youth advisory group members. The commissioned research team should develop an ethics assessment for the qualitative research, and a project ethics statement.

We would suggest that focus group invites should start with members from the [Evaluation Panel](#) and key experts from Youth Futures' advisory groups (see below), in addition to youth participation experts from organisations in the [What Works Network](#) and other academic or practice experts known to the proposal team.

### **Future Voices Group**

The commissioned research team should work with Youth Futures Foundation staff to collaborate with members of the Future Voices Group, who should be engaged throughout the project.

The Future Voices Group is made up of people aged 18-24 from marginalised backgrounds with lived experience of facing barriers to employment. The group members work across the organisation in place-based grants programmes, employer engagement activities, policy, research and evaluation projects.

### **Advisory Groups**

Youth Futures has two evaluation advisory groups. The Evaluation Expert Advisory Group (EEAG) are experts in statistical/econometric methods and primarily advise us on the RCT/QED methods, design and guidance. Our Complex and Theory Based Evaluation Advisory Group (CAT-BEE) provides expertise in theory-based evaluation methods, implementation science and mixed methods impact evaluation approaches. We aim to hold up to 3 advisory groups per year for both groups. YFF can call expertise and advice from these groups on an ad hoc basis and we may request for the successful proposal team to present to the group or submit findings for review and feedback.

### **Engagement**

The Youth Futures research, policy and communications teams will monitor ongoing project outputs and findings, along with a Youth Participation expert to advise on this project. In conjunction with the youth advisory group, they will develop a plan to engage with stakeholders.

## **4. Contractor requirements, deliverables, schedule and budget**

### **Contractor requirements**

The research team for this project should have:

- expertise in relation to evaluation methods
- expertise in youth participatory approaches
- expertise in conducting focus groups
- experience developing practice guidance

We are open to proposals *either* from a team at a single organisation which brings together the relevant skills and experience, or from two or more organisations working in partnership. In the latter case, the project proposal should include details of arrangements for collaboration between partners.

### Deliverables

- An inception and scoping report, with plans for each workstream and for drawing together the four strands of work.
- A detailed strategy for undertaking the four main workstreams, including inclusion and exclusion criteria, search terms, approach to analysis, etc.
- Presentation of interim findings.
- Final practice guidance
- A presentation findings and practice guidance

Additional interim and informal outputs may be shared with Youth Futures throughout the project.

Final reports for publication are normally reviewed by Youth Futures staff at the first draft stage. The second draft is normally reviewed by Youth Futures staff and by external peer review or reviewers. The third draft, reflecting revisions based on external and Youth Futures feedback, is normally expected to be final for publication.

Representatives from the contracted organisation will also attend:

- An inception meeting with Youth Futures staff
- Fortnightly check-in meetings with Youth Futures staff
- Interim and final presentations of findings

### Schedule

To be agreed with the commissioned organisation. We would like to receive the final (post-peer review) practice guidance by September 2025.

We would expect this project to be completed by the following timescales and outputs:

Date	Activities and outputs
Week beginning 6 <sup>th</sup> January	Inception meeting
Week beginning 12 <sup>th</sup> of February	Inception and scoping report
Week beginning 26 <sup>th</sup> February	Strategy for main workstreams & engagement
July 2025	Interim presentation
September 2025	Final practice guidance
September 2025	Presentation of findings and practice guidance

### Budget



The total budget for this work is **£120,000**.

We ask that the research team should budget for paying all members of the focus groups in order to reach wide audience of experts.

## 5. Submitting a proposal

### Proposal requirements

Please submit a short (c. 8-10pp) proposal, outlining:

- Your understanding of the project
- Your research design, approach, and methods. Your preferred approach, or different options with different budget implications
- A timeline / Gantt chart for deliverables
- Your appraisal of the challenges likely to arise in this research including any risks and mitigations. This could include a formal risk register
- At least one example of a relevant project undertaken previously by your organisation *and/or* including at least one of your team leads
- Short biographies of all team members, their experience and role within the project
- Contact details of two referees who have commissioned similar work from you
- Your budget estimate and a full budget breakdown (including the daily rate for different staff leading different elements). Youth Futures Foundation will award the successful research organisation[s] a grant to carry out the research and produce final outputs. To the extent that the research organisation[s] believe[s] it is necessary to charge VAT on the Grant Award, this amount will **be exclusive of VAT**.
- Contact details for the project lead, and for all team members.

In addition to your response, we would like you to attach the following policies for every organisation involved in the bid:

- Data protection and GDPR
- Safeguarding

Please note that value for money is a key criterion in the assessment of bids.

Please submit your proposal to [research@youthfuturesfoundation.org](mailto:research@youthfuturesfoundation.org) by 17:00 on **22nd November 2024**

If you have any questions, or would like to discuss the tender in more depth, please email [research@youthfuturesfoundation.org](mailto:research@youthfuturesfoundation.org) and use the title 'Practice guidance for youth participation in evaluation' in your email heading.



## APPENDIX

### Quality criteria

Category	Criteria	Score
Expertise and experience (30%)	a) Recent and/or extensive track record of the organisation and proposed team in conducting relevant data analysis projects.	0 - Totally fails to meet the requirement - information not available  1 - Meets some of the requirements - limited supporting information  2 - Meets some of the requirements - reasonable explanation  3 - Mostly meets the requirements - good explanation, some evidence  4 - Fully meets the requirements - detailed explanation and evidence  5 - Exceeds requirements - extensive explanation and evidence
Methodology and approach (35%)	b) Comprehensive understanding of how to effectively conduct research within these local areas, but also with these target groups in the areas. Detailed local knowledge or expertise.	
	a) A clear research and framework that fully meets the project requirements.	
	b) High quality, appropriate data collection and analysis methodologies that can fully answer the research questions.	
	c) A plan to facilitate and capture policy and practice learning and deliver high-quality, appropriate outputs that can be shared with a variety of research, policy and practice audiences.	
	a) A clear project timeline with well-phased deliverables and milestones, supported by strong project management protocols.	
Project Management, data security and risk mitigations (15%)	b) Robust policies and procedures for collecting and storing personal data from participants. Robust data protection/GDPR policies, procedures and (where possible) industry standards (such as ISO 27001). Experience of supporting a variety of organisations to comply with data protection law.	
	c) Sensitivity to potential project risks and clear strategies to support the mitigation of these. This should include a clear understanding of how to deliver research, data analysis and collection activities in the context of COVID-19.	
Costings (20%)	a) A clearly costed proposal that demonstrates high quality delivery	
	b) High quality processes, including ensuring sufficient time for analysis, costing for transcriptions and sufficient staff seniority and time to effectively quality assure all outputs.	

	c) Proposed costings demonstrate value for money (number of research days, quantity and quality of outputs, appropriateness of proposed team composition and management).	
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## References

Rowland, J., Wills, E., Ott, E. (2024). Youth Participatory Research: A Review of Reviews and Practice Guidance. Centre for Evidence and Implementation.