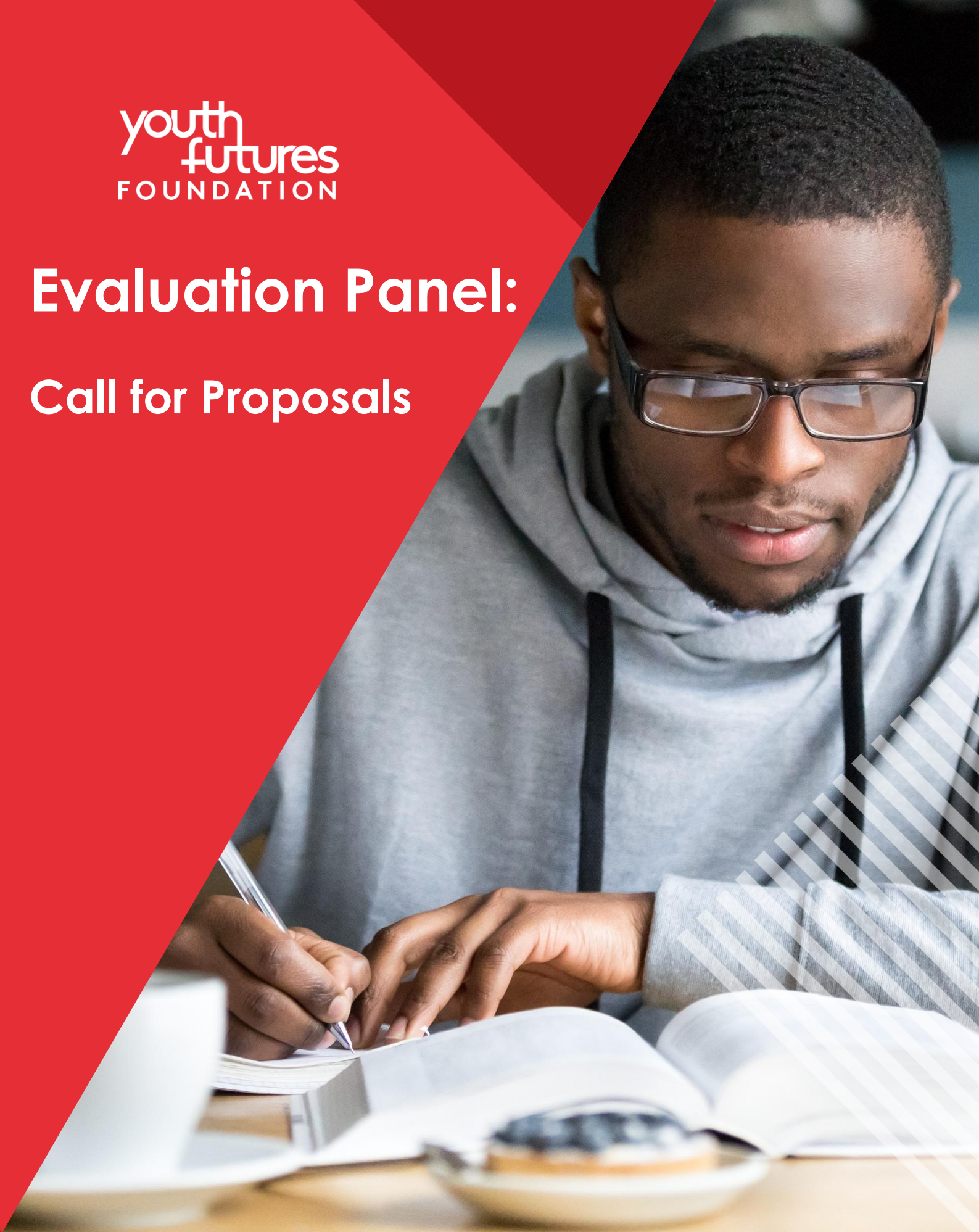


youth  
futures  
FOUNDATION

# Evaluation Panel: Call for Proposals



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## An introduction to Youth Futures Foundation

Youth Futures Foundation (Youth Futures) is the national What Works Centre for youth employment, with a specific focus on marginalised young people.

Our work has two overarching objectives to bring about system 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 what solutions work to address this.
2. To put evidence into action with policy makers and employers who have the means to make direct impactful change for young people.

We believe that the young people who are most affected by the system must be at the heart of efforts to change it. That is why we meaningfully involve the voices, perspectives and participation of young people experiencing marginalisation throughout our work.

NEET rates in the UK are worsening, with 1 in 8 young people out of education, employment or training.

Some young people have more challenges than others including those from certain minoritised ethnic backgrounds, those with special educational needs and disabilities and those with experiences in the care system. And there is significant regional variation, with the North East seeing the highest NEET rate at 15%.

## Youth Futures' approach to evaluation

Youth Futures is the national What Works Centre for youth employment. Our evaluations adhere to the six core principles of the What Works Network, which were designed to uphold the academic legitimacy of the centres and improve the effectiveness of services and outcomes for citizens: independence, methodological rigour, practicability, accessibility, building capacity, and transparency. Youth Futures-funded evaluations are designed to generate high quality evidence about what works to support young people from marginalised backgrounds into good work. We fund evaluations across three key areas of work: interventions, places and systems, and employers.

### **What Works: testing youth employment interventions**

Our What Works programme launched in 2020 and aims to build a stronger evidence base by testing employment programmes and improving national understanding of

what really makes a difference for young people. Through our What Works programme, we aim to identify compelling evidence for change by evaluating delivery partners whose existing programme have been identified as ready for full impact evaluations; and testing new programmes that are being specifically designed for evaluation. To generate high-quality, causal evidence about youth employment, education and training outcomes we use randomised controlled trials, quasi experimental designs and, where appropriate, high-quality qualitative impact evaluation methods. We aim to work with major statutory partners to conduct trials at scale.

In August 2023, Reboot III (delivered by 1625ip), was the first intervention funded through our What Works Programme to progress to a randomised controlled trial; and we are also currently working to mobilise several other interventions towards impact evaluation. Alongside this, we plan to make further investments through our What Works programme in 2025 and beyond.

## **The Connected Futures Programme**

Through our Connected Futures programme, we plan to invest in interventions to change the way employment support services and the wider local employment "system" operates. These includes exploring new approaches to cross-sector collaboration, initiatives to develop youth voice within decision-making, and other policy experiments. The first phase of this work is developmental, with local partnerships building their systems analysis and theories of change. We are moving to full implementation during 2025, including commissioning evaluations that can capture complex and emergent systems outcomes.

## **Evaluating Employer Practice**

To date, our evaluation portfolio has primarily focussed on evaluating interventions aimed at supporting young people into work (the supply-side). However, we are now expanding our evaluation work to gain a greater understanding of what works on the demand-side (i.e. employer practice). Based on an assessment of the current evidence base, our aim is to identify potential interventions and industries of interest, and to work with suitable employers to design and deliver trials of employer practice. In 2025, we aim to commission our first set of employer trials, with the aim to launch approximately 8 feasibility studies and with 3 of these progressing to full-scale trials.

## **Building Futures**

In 2024 we also launched our Building Futures programme, which will invest in targeted mentoring support for young people aged 14-16 at risk of becoming not in employment, education, or training (NEET). The evaluation work for Building Futures will be conducted

in phases, with an initial test-and-learn phased progressing through to a feasibility stage and culminating in an impact evaluation stage. The initial evaluative work for Building Futures has already been commissioned, but the impact evaluation stage will be commissioned through the refreshed evaluation panel.

## Methodological Approach

All Youth Futures evaluation projects are grounded in a programme theory that outlines the outcomes an intervention is expected to achieve, and the mechanisms through which these outcomes are expected to be achieved. In accordance with the guidance set out by HM and Treasury in the 'Magenta Book' (2020), we choose the appropriate evaluation design to commission through considering 'the type of evaluation and question(s) to be answered, alongside an understanding of the intervention itself, the context in which it is being implemented and information/data available'. We aim to ensure that all our evaluations generate the highest quality of evidence possible within the context of the intervention, system, or policy that is being evaluated.

Typically, Youth Futures uses quantitative impact evaluations (i.e. randomised controlled trials or quasi-experimental designs) to understand whether interventions work. The successful delivery of an impact evaluation requires a range of conditions to be met (e.g. a clearly defined and stable intervention, clear referral routes, sufficient sample sizes, and suitable data sources), therefore Youth Futures will usually conduct a feasibility study or pilot study prior to launching a quantitative impact evaluation. In some instances, prior work will also need to be done to understand whether adaptations need to be made when transporting an intervention from one context to another. We will also always commission a theory-informed implementation and process evaluation alongside an impact evaluation to understand how and why an intervention works (or doesn't); and in many cases we will also commission an economic evaluation (e.g. cost benefit analysis) to weigh up the costs and benefits of delivering an intervention.

Where the conditions for a quantitative impact evaluation are not met, we may consider commissioning a theory-based impact evaluation which uses high quality theory-based methods (such as realist methods or contribution analysis) to understand the impact that an intervention, policy, or system is making. The decision to use theory-based impact evaluation may be taken, for example, where we need to generate deep evidence about the most marginalised groups, or where we need to evaluate small-scale interventions or complex systems.

In some cases, a programme may be at too early a stage, or a context may be too dynamic, to evaluate using either a quantitative impact evaluation or theory-based impact evaluation. In this instance, we may consider commissioning developmental

evaluation to support the design, innovation or adaptation of an intervention, policy, or system.

Across all our evaluations portfolio we place high importance on centring youth voice, and therefore youth engagement and participatory approaches are also central to our evaluation approach. We seek to include youth engagement and participatory approaches at the point that best complements the evaluation design.

## **Implementing high quality processes and developing methodological guidance**

To support the delivery of the second phase of the What Works Programme, Connected Futures, Building Futures and Employer work, we are also conducting work to improve our 'What Works Architecture' (by which we mean the processes, systems and guidance we have in place to support our evaluation work).

During 2025, we are aiming to improve our processes and systems through the development of a Youth Futures outcomes framework, the development of a standardised approach to using administrative data in our evaluations, and the creation of a Youth Futures data archive. Details on the development of these processes and systems will be released to the panel as they are finalised.

Alongside these process and systems improvements, we are also planning to develop a series of methodological guidance. During 2025/6, this will include the publication of a trial protocol template, statistical analysis plan template, guidance on statistical analysis, guidance on conducting theory-informed implementation and process evaluation, and guidance on conducting theory-based impact evaluation. We anticipate that our panel of evaluators will support the production of this guidance as well as making use of the guidance to support their evaluation work.

## The Youth Futures Evaluation Panel

The Youth Futures Evaluation Panel was established in 2020 and is currently comprised of eighteen panel members. As we prepare for a new portfolio of evaluations across our What Works and Connected Futures programmes, we are excited to invite evaluators to submit applications to be part of our refreshed Panel of Evaluators.

We are seeking to refresh and expand the panel to ensure that our panel represents a wide range of methodological and subject matter expertise and meets the needs of our upcoming evaluation work. To ensure equitability and transparency, we are requiring both current panel members and prospective panel members to apply through the same process.

Our panel will not be expected to be experts in all of Youth Futures' methodological or thematic areas of interest, but we aim for the final panel to cover:

- Experience of youth-focused employment, training, and labour market evaluations (including working with local government, central government departments (e.g. DfE, DWP, HMRC), employers, and/or statutory or third-sector delivery organisations).
- Experience across a range of evaluation approaches, including:
  - Feasibility and pilot studies
  - Randomised controlled trials
  - Quasi-experimental designs
  - Economic evaluation
  - Theory-informed implementation and process evaluation
  - Theory-based impact evaluation
  - Developmental evaluation
  - Participatory approaches

### Expectations of Panel members

Our evaluation team appoints independent evaluators to rigorously evaluate our funded programmes – from early-stage evaluation through to impact evaluation. Evaluators on our panel will be eligible to apply to deliver these independent

evaluations. We will also commission non-evaluation opportunities, such the development of methodological guidance, which evaluation partners will also be eligible to bid for. It should be noted that appointed panel members are not guaranteed to secure evaluation funding and each evaluation project will be tendered for individually. Projects requiring significant evaluation funding investment will need to be ratified by Youth Futures' Grants and Evaluation Committee prior to the start of any evaluation work.

Youth Futures will share our evaluation panel framework agreement with those who express an intention to submit a proposal. This framework outlines Youth Futures' expectations of panel members. Following confirmation of the refreshed panel, Youth Futures may also require panel members to attend initial workshops and roundtables to present and discuss Youth Futures' evaluation guidance and strategy.



## How to apply

Please read this guidance carefully so that your response includes all the information we need to make an informed decision about your relevant skills and experience. All proposals must be a maximum of 16 A4 pages (no smaller than size 11 Arial font); suggested page lengths for each of the sections is detailed below (though these are only a guide). It would be helpful for you to follow the outline structure below.

### Response Template

#### Organisation Details (guide: 0.25 pages)

- Name(s) and contact details for key person(s) of contact
- Registered name and address of organisation
- Company and / or Charity Number

#### Experience (guide: 2 pages)

- Organisational experience in delivering youth-focused employment, training, and labour market evaluations.
- Organisational experience in working with local government, central government departments (e.g. DfE, DWP, HMRC), employers, and/or statutory or third-sector delivery organisations.
- Organisational experience conducting evaluations with young people likely to experience labour market disadvantage (e.g. young people with experience of the care system; young people in contact with the Criminal Justice System; Black, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi young people; young people with disabilities, including mental health problems, autism, and/or learning disabilities).

#### Methodological expertise (guide: 8-10 pages).

NB. You do not have to have experience in every section; we only require responses for sections where you have significant expertise and experience.

##### 1. Programme theory

- Experience of, and approach to using, programme theory in evaluation.

- Experience of, and approach to conducting, theory-informed implementation and process evaluation at different stages of project maturity.

## **2. Quantitative impact evaluation and economic evaluation**

- Experience of, and approach to conducting, early-stage evaluation with the aim of preparing an intervention for an impact evaluation (e.g. transportation studies, feasibility studies and pilot studies).
- Experience of, and approach to conducting, quantitative impact evaluations (i.e. randomised controlled trials and quasi-experimental designs).
- Experience of, and approach to primary data collection with Youth Futures' cohort of young people, or similar cohorts.
- Experience of, and approach to conducting, economic evaluation (e.g. cost benefit analysis).
- Experience of, and approach to accessing and using, administrative datasets (such as LEO) in evaluation.

## **3. Theory-based evaluation and evaluation of complex interventions / systems**

- Experience of, and approach to conducting, theory-based impact evaluation (i.e. where theory-based methods are used as an alternative to quantitative impact evaluation).
- Experience of, and approach to, evaluating complex interventions (including place-based approaches and systems change).
- Experience of, and approach to conducting, developmental evaluation.

## **4. Youth participation**

- Experience of, and approach to incorporating youth participation into evaluation design and delivery.

## **5. Other relevant high-quality methods and approaches**

- Experience of other high-quality methods and approaches of relevance to evaluating youth-focused employment, training, and labour market interventions (please only include experience of other methods and approaches if it is essential to understanding your organisational expertise).

**Reporting Approach (guide: 1 page)**

- Approach to reporting, disseminating, and ensuring relevance of all findings to optimise regional and national learning and policy influencing.

**Project Management (guide: 1 page)**

- Project management protocols.
- Quality assurance protocols.

**Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (guide: 1 page)**

- Approach to incorporating EDI principles into evaluation design and delivery.

**Day Rates (guide: 0.25 pages)**

- Table of day rates for staff / grades.

**References (guide: 0.25 pages)**

- Contact details of two recent references for your work.

**Conflicts of interest (guide: 0.25 pages)**

- Details of any relevant conflicts of interest.

## **Addendums**

In addition to your (up to 16 page) response we would like you to attach the following policies:

- Research ethics
- Safeguarding
- Data protection and security

We will also accept further annexes to include references (with hyperlinks where available) to published evaluations you highlight in your response template, and staff CVs.

Please note, we will also require evaluators to provide further information on request as part of our due diligence process.

## Scoring Criteria

### EXPERTISE AND EXPERIENCE

- Strong organisational experience conducting evaluations within the youth employment context.
- Strong project management and quality assurance protocols.
- Necessary research ethics, safeguarding, and data protection and security policies in place.

### METHDOLOGICAL EXPERTISE

- Experience in one or more of the five listed evaluation specialisms.
- Robust, high-quality approaches to specific methodologies, with an excellent understanding of how to apply these to the youth employment context.

### REPORTING

- Robust and transparent reporting approaches at every stage of an evaluation.
- Ability to write for a variety of policy, practice, and public audiences.
- Ability to use a variety of communication methods and formats.

### EQUITY, DIVERSITY, INCLUSION

- Experience, or understanding of, how to incorporate EDI principles into evaluation design and delivery within the youth employment policy environment.

Each criterion will be scored as follows:

SCORE	
1	Clearly does not meet the requirements - insufficient explanation and evidence.
2	Meets some of the requirements - explanation and evidence missing in some areas.
3	Fully meets the requirements - good explanation and evidence.

Evaluators who score a 3 across all proposal criteria will be invited to be part of the panel. Evaluators who score a 1 on any proposal criteria will not be invited to be part of the panel. Where an evaluator scores a 2 on any proposal criteria we may ask for more information; in this case Youth Futures will make an assessment as to whether an evaluator will be invited to be part of the panel.

Please note, we will also require evaluators to provide further information on request as part of our due diligence process.

## Application Process

**The deadline for submission is 5pm on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2025.** Any proposals received after this deadline will not be considered.

Responses should be submitted to: [evaluation@youthfuturesfoundation.org](mailto:evaluation@youthfuturesfoundation.org)

STAGE	DATE
Call for proposals released	24/03/2025
Q&A session	w/c 31/03/2025
Deadline for submission of written questions and intention to submit a proposal	04/04/2025
YFF response to written questions and evaluation panel framework agreement shared	11/04/2025
<b>Deadline for submission of proposals</b>	<b>16/05/2025</b>
Decisions confirmed and communicated	18/06/2025
Panel onboarding webinar	w/c 23/06/2025
Evaluation panel agreements shared with successful partners	30/06/2025
Evaluation panel agreements signed	14/07/2025