

Evaluating Youth Social Action Projects

Lessons learned while evaluating the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund

This document outlines some of the lessons we learned whilst evaluating the impact of the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund. It provides advice for organisations or funders who are planning to deliver Youth Social Action (YSA) work to help them think about how they can evaluate the impact of their projects on young people.

What is Youth Social Action?

Social action involves activities such as campaigning, fundraising and volunteering, all of which enable young people to make a difference in their communities as well as develop their own skills and knowledge.

Introduction to the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund

The #iwill Fund was made possible thanks to £54 million joint investment from The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to support young people to access high quality social action. In 2017 Comic Relief partnered with the #iwill Fund to create the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund - a £2.4million fund that would provide opportunities for underrepresented young people to participate in social action.

The #iwill Youth Social Action fund provided support to sixteen organisations (funded partners) to deliver youth social action projects. These projects targeted young people from groups who are commonly underrepresented in YSA. Based on the experiences of funded partners and young people, this short summary sets out lessons learned in effectively evaluating Youth Social Action projects.

Embed evaluation work from the beginning of the project

Where evaluation is embedded from the start of the project it can provide a valuable opportunity for projects to look at distance travelled to understand how involvement in YSA has contributed to young people's personal development. Think about how you expect the project will benefit young people and consider how you might be able to develop a baseline for this, to compare your results at the end of the project. Example questions are included in the [shared outcome measures](#) provided on the next page (see question 6 which can be asked at the start and end of projects).

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Work with young people to set the agenda

Youth Social Action should provide genuine opportunities for young people to lead and set the agenda. To compliment this ethos, it is therefore important that young people are able to have a say in setting the agenda for the project evaluation. This could include giving young people choice over how they want to feed-in to the evaluation, providing them with opportunities to develop evaluation questions or involving them in deciding what should be measured and how evaluation outcomes should be presented.

Centre young people's voices

One of the best ways to understand the impact of youth social action is through the voices of young people. Organisations who had been involved in delivering youth social action projects noted how some meaningful impacts couldn't necessarily be picked up through statistical data, and listening to the voices of young people was key to seeing how valuable this work was. For example, for some young people the most meaningful impacts may have been about having something to look forward to and having an organisation that was there for them. As a result, it's important to make sure there are opportunities for young people to share their voices in any evaluation work. This doesn't have to just come through formal feedback forms (as useful as they can be!). This could come from case study approaches or inviting young people to share their experiences through creative means as part of the project. For example, through creation of videos, blogs, poetry or artwork.

Help us to understand what groups are underrepresented in Youth Social Action by collecting key demographic data

The Youth Social Action Survey collects data that shows the participation of young people in YSA by gender, ethnicity and social grade. But less is known about the participation rates of individuals who could stand to benefit the most from this work, like care experienced young people, young carers, LGBT+ young people, young people at risk of homelessness, and other marginalised groups. Findings from the #iwill Youth Social Action Fund show that YSA can be a useful approach in helping to empower young people which is particularly relevant when considering these underrepresented groups who may have experienced disempowerment. To help understand how well represented these groups are we would encourage organisations to consider how they can capture these demographics in the design of their monitoring tools (where appropriate). We would also encourage the Government to include these categories in further iterations of the Youth Social Action Survey.

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Consider using shared outcome measures

Our research showed us that involvement in Youth Social Action is contributing to how young people develop their confidence, shape their aspirations and plans for the future, giving them a sense of self-belief, and giving them the confidence they can make a change. For future programmes that are funding organisations to deliver Youth Social Action we would advice measuring these outcomes to help build a broader evidence base around the contribution of YSA to young people's development. We've provided a template that includes questions that can be used.

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Monitoring the impact of Youth Social Action

Below we have set out some example questions that can be used by projects to support them in setting up monitoring information for their work, to evaluate the impact of Youth Social Action work.

Suggested demographic questions:

Collecting demographic information can help us to understand what groups are underrepresented in youth social action work and can give organisations the knowledge to know which groups they should be working harder to engage.

Prior to using any of the below questions, please ensure that the appropriate safeguarding checks have been undertaken and that you have consent from the young person and, if under the age of 18, their respective parent or carer.

Basic demographics – we would encourage all projects to collect these for over 16s:

1. What is your sex?

- Female
- Male
- Other
- Prefer not to say

2. What is your ethnicity?

- Asian/Asian British
- Black/African/Caribbean /Black British
- Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups
- White
- Other ethnic group
- Prefer not to say

3. How old are you?

4. Do you have a disability?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to say

We would also encourage organisations to include enhanced demographic questions where appropriate to understand participation of groups who may be underrepresented in YSA, including care leavers, care experienced young people, LGBT+ young people, or young people who have experienced homelessness, but

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we recognise there are scenarios in which these questions may be considered too invasive.

Suggested shared outcome measures - questions to ask at the start of YSA projects

5. In the last 12 months have you taken part in any activities or projects to make a difference in your community?

This could include activities like campaigning, fundraising or volunteering.

- Yes
- No

6. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

These can be asked at both the start and end of Youth Social Action projects to help measure distance travelled.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel confident that I can make a change in my community					
I feel my voice is valued					
I feel part of a community					

Suggested shared outcome measures - questions to ask at the end of YSA projects

7. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

As stated above, these can be asked at both the start and end of Youth Social Action projects to help measure distance travelled.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I feel confident that I can make a change in my community					
I feel my voice is valued					
I feel part of a community					

8. Has taking part in the project helped you in any of the following ways? Please tick all that apply.

- I feel more confident
- I have made new friends
- I believe in myself more
- I have developed or widened my aspirations
- I have new practical skills
- I have developed my communication skills
- I have learned new leadership skills
- My wellbeing has improved

9. What have you learned through taking part in the project?

10. How have you benefited from being involved in the project?