YOUTH ADVOCACY CANVAS

Guidance for using the tool

From Young People's Voices to Real Change



CORE PRINCIPLE

Youth voice is not the goal. Change is the goal.

A practical guide for facilitators, youth workers, teachers and organisations that support youth participation and advocacy

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Youth Advocacy Canvas at a glance



CORE PRINCIPLE

Youth voice is the starting point. Participation is the process. Change is the goal.

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Introduction

How to use the Youth Advocacy Canvas

Young people have views about the world they live in. They see the problems in their school, neighbourhood and community, and they have opinions on issues such as climate change, inequality, migration, discrimination, education and the digital environment.

But giving young people an opportunity to express an opinion and be heard is only the beginning. Meaningful participation means that they can influence decisions and contribute to changing the environment in which they live.

The Youth Advocacy Canvas is a practical tool that helps turn an issue that matters to young people into a concrete advocacy initiative with the potential to create real public change.

These guidelines are designed primarily for facilitators, youth workers, teachers, civil society organisations and other adults who support youth participation and advocacy. The tool can be used in a school, youth organisation, informal group or local community – wherever young people want not only to talk about a problem, but to take part in solving it.

The Youth Advocacy Canvas does not offer one single 'correct' way to organise a youth advocacy initiative. It is a flexible framework that can and should be adapted to the age and experience of the young people, the topic, the local environment, the cultural context and the opportunities for participation.

The most important thing is not to complete every step 'by the book', but to support a process in which young people have real space to define problems, make decisions and lead action for change.

REMEMBER

Adapt the tool to young people and the local context – not young people to the tool.

Seven connected steps

The model moves through seven connected steps:
THE ISSUE → THE CHANGE → THE TARGET → THE MESSAGE → THE ACTION → THE ALLIES → THE IMPACT.

We begin with the issue that young people recognise as important. We then define the specific change they want to achieve; identify who has the power or responsibility to make it happen; decide what we want to say to them; choose the actions we will take; identify who can support us; and finally decide how we will know whether something has actually changed.

The seven steps provide structure, but they are not a recipe. Advocacy rarely moves in a straight line. Sometimes a group will need to go back, redefine the issue, adjust the message, look for different allies or choose another action.

One question runs through all seven steps

WHERE ARE YOUNG PEOPLE?

Who defines the issue? Who decides what change is needed? Who chooses the target? Who creates the message? Who decides on the actions? Who speaks to allies? Who decides whether the initiative has succeeded?

The Youth Advocacy Canvas is not a tool through which adults design a campaign for young people and then invite them to take part. Its purpose is to give young people the space, knowledge, tools and support to become creators and drivers of change.

Adults still have an important role: to support, open opportunities, provide knowledge and remove barriers – without taking the initiative and decisions away from young people.

REMEMBER

Youth voice is the starting point. Participation is the process. Change is the goal.

1 The Issue

From a broad topic to the issue young people want to address

KEY QUESTION

What is the specific issue young people want to work on?

Every advocacy initiative begins with an issue. Defining it, however, is often more difficult than it seems. 'Climate change', 'social media', 'migration', 'violence', 'discrimination' or 'inequality' are important topics, but they are too broad to be a starting point for concrete action. The first task is to move from the broad topic to a specific issue that young people recognise as important and are ready to address together.

Do not begin with the question, 'What campaign could we run?' Begin by trying to understand what is actually happening.

- **What exactly is happening?**
- **Who is affected, and how?**
- **How do young people experience this issue?**
- **Why does it matter to them?**
- **How do we know that this is a problem?**
- **What different views exist among young people?**
- **Which part of the issue is specific enough for us to work on?**

At this stage it is important to distinguish the issue from a possible solution. If someone says, 'Social media should be banned for children', that is already a proposed solution. A useful facilitator question is: 'What problem are we trying to solve through this ban?' The same applies to the opposite position – 'There should be no ban.' We first need to understand what problem young people see in the proposed restriction.

Start with young people's experience

Adults often have their own ideas about the most important problems facing young people. Parents, teachers, experts, institutions and the media may, for example, see screen time as the main problem associated with social media. Young people may raise different concerns: cyberbullying, harmful content, privacy, algorithms, freedom to communicate, or the fact that they are excluded from decisions about restrictions that affect them.

In youth advocacy, we should therefore avoid deciding in advance what young people's problem is.

This does not mean that every first impression should automatically be treated as fact. The group can test its assumptions through a short survey, conversations with other young people, interviews, observation, existing research or other accessible sources. In this way, lived experience is connected to a broader picture.

From different issues to a shared choice

Several issues may emerge during the discussion. They do not all need to be addressed at the same time. An advocacy initiative has a better chance of achieving a result when it focuses on one clearly defined issue.

The first step therefore ends with a shared group decision: Is this the issue we want to work on?

Complete unanimity is not required. Young people may disagree about the causes of the problem and especially about how it should be solved. What matters is that there is enough shared agreement that the issue is significant and that the group wants to invest time and effort in changing it.

- **Is this important to us and to other young people?**
- **Do we genuinely want to do something about it?**
- **Can we work on it together even if we have different views about the solution?**
- **Is there a realistic possibility for young people to influence this issue?**

If there is not enough agreement, there is no need to rush to the next step. The group may need more discussion, more information or a different formulation of the issue.

Where are young people?

At this first step, the facilitator should keep checking who is actually defining the issue. Was it formulated by young people or proposed to them by adults? Do they have space to express different views? Are quieter voices being heard? Do young people have the final say in choosing the issue they will work on? If adults have already selected the issue, decided what is wrong and chosen what should be done before young people are involved, it is difficult to describe the initiative as youth-led.

What do we write in the Youth Advocacy Canvas?

CANVAS
The issue we want to work on is: ...

A well-defined issue is specific, understandable, meaningful to young people and focused enough to allow action.

Before moving on, make one final check: Do we have enough shared agreement that this is the issue we want to work on together?

Only then do we move to the next question: What exactly do we want to change?

STEP 1

THE ISSUE

From a broad topic to a concrete problem that young people want to work on

1 THE ISSUE — 2 THE CHANGE — 3 THE TARGET — 4 THE MESSAGE — 5 THE ACTION — 6 THE ALLIES — 7 THE IMPACT

From a broad topic ...



... to a specific issue

Decisions on restrictions on social media can be made without sufficient participation of students.



OUR EXAMPLE SO FAR

1 THE ISSUE	2 THE CHANGE	3 THE TARGET	4 THE MESSAGE	5 THE ACTION	6 THE ALLIES	7 THE IMPACT
Decisions on restrictions on social media can be made without sufficient participation of students.						

2 The Change

From ‘we do not like this’ to ‘this is what we want to be different’

KEY QUESTION

What specific change do we want to achieve?

Recognising and defining the issue is only the beginning. Advocacy starts when the group can say what, specifically, it wants to be different.

Many initiatives remain at the level of a broad aspiration: ‘We want a safer internet’, ‘We want better education’, ‘We want more equality’, ‘We want young people to be heard.’ These are important goals, but they do not yet provide a sufficiently clear direction for action.

The desired change must be connected to the issue the group has chosen, but we should not automatically accept the first proposed solution. The same problem may have several possible solutions.

For example, if a group identifies risks linked to students’ use of social media, possible changes could include age-based restrictions, stronger platform safeguards, digital education, clearer school rules, more effective mechanisms against cyberbullying, or mandatory youth participation in the development of rules that affect them.

At this stage, the task is not to find the ‘correct’ answer. It is for young people to explore the options and choose the change they want to work towards.

From a broad goal to a concrete change

It can help to imagine that the initiative has succeeded. The facilitator can ask:

TRY THIS

Imagine that six months from now we have succeeded. What, specifically, will be different?

- **What exactly do we want to be different?**
- **What needs to happen for us to say that progress has been made?**
- **Do we want a rule, practice, decision, behaviour or public attitude to change?**
- **Can the desired change be described in one clear sentence?**
- **Is it realistic given the group’s time and capacity?**
- **Is there a smaller, concrete change that could be a first step towards the larger goal?**

Advocacy does not always change an entire system at once. Sometimes success is a new school rule, a public commitment, a change in a specific practice, or a mechanism through which young people can participate in decisions. A small, concrete change can be the first step towards a much larger goal.

From the issue to the ask

If the issue answers the question ‘What is wrong?’, the desired change should answer: ‘What do we want to happen instead?’

EXAMPLE

Issue: Decisions about restrictions on students’ access to social media are discussed without sufficient participation by young people.

Desired change: Before rules affecting students’ use of social media are adopted, there should be meaningful consultation with young people and their views should be taken into account.

Another youth group might choose a different change on the same topic. That is exactly why the facilitator should not determine this step in advance.

Choosing is also part of participation

The group may propose several possible changes. They should be discussed and compared.

- **DOES IT MATTER? Will this change make a meaningful difference to young people?**
- **IS IT POSSIBLE? Is there a realistic opportunity for us to influence it?**
- **IS IT SPECIFIC ENOUGH? Will we later be able to tell whether something has actually changed?**

The group does not have to choose the easiest change. But if the goal is so broad that no one can describe what success would look like, it probably needs to be made more specific.

Where are young people?

Who decides what the change should be? Adults sometimes allow young people to talk about the problem but have already decided what the solution should be. That still limits meaningful participation.

The facilitator’s role is to help young people explore options, ask questions, provide information and assess what is realistic. The choice of change, however, should belong to the group – including the possibility that young people choose a solution different from what adults expected.

What do we write in the Youth Advocacy Canvas?

CANVAS

The change we want to achieve is: ...

A well-defined change is specific, understandable, connected to the chosen issue, meaningful to young people and realistic enough for the group to act on.

Final check: If we achieve this, will we be able to say clearly what has become different?

Once we know what we want to change, the next question is: Who has the power to make that change?

STEP 2

THE CHANGE

From the problem to a concrete and realistic change we want to achieve

1 THE ISSUE · 2 THE CHANGE · 3 THE TARGET · 4 THE MESSAGE · 5 THE ACTION · 6 THE ALLIES · 7 THE IMPACT

CURRENT SITUATION

Decisions on restrictions on social media can be made without sufficient participation of students.



Our goal is to change this situation.

THE DESIRED CHANGE

Young people are meaningfully consulted before new restrictions on social media are introduced, and their views are taken into account.



OUR EXAMPLE SO FAR

1 ✓ **THE ISSUE**
Decisions on restrictions on social media can be made without sufficient participation of students.

2 **THE CHANGE**
Young people are meaningfully consulted before new restrictions are introduced, and their views are taken into account.

3 THE TARGET

4 THE MESSAGE

5 THE ACTION

6 THE ALLIES

7 THE IMPACT

3 The Target

Who has the power to make the change happen?

KEY QUESTION

Who has the power to give us the change we want?

Once the group has defined the issue and agreed on the change it wants to achieve, one of the most important advocacy questions follows: Who can actually make this change happen?

Many campaigns address 'the public', 'people', 'the media' or 'institutions'. That can help attract attention, but it is not enough for advocacy. If we want a specific change, we need to understand who has the authority, responsibility or influence to make it happen.

If we want a school rule changed, the target may be the headteacher or school leadership. If we want a new youth space in the neighbourhood, the decision may depend on the municipality. If we want national legislation changed, we need to understand which institutions and people are involved. If the issue concerns the way a social platform operates, part of the power may lie with the technology company itself.

Find where decision-making power sits

Sometimes the answer is obvious, but often it is not. The most visible person is not always the decision-maker, and the person who formally has the authority may be strongly influenced by others. The group therefore needs to do some research.

- **Who has the formal authority to make this decision?**
- **Who is responsible for the issue?**
- **Who can change the specific rule, practice or policy?**
- **Who can say 'yes' to our ask?**
- **Who can block the change?**
- **Who influences the person or institution making the decision?**
- **Is there more than one important person or institution?**

This is also a moment when young people learn how decisions around them are actually made.

Decision-makers and influencers

It is useful to distinguish between two groups. The primary target is the person, group or institution with the direct ability to make the desired change. Influencers are people or organisations that cannot make the decision themselves but can influence it.

For example, students may want a school rule changed. The headteacher may have the authority to change it, while teachers, parents, the student council, the school board or a local education authority may influence the decision.

This distinction matters because an effective advocacy initiative does not necessarily communicate with everyone in the same way.

Do not confuse the audience with the decision-maker

A thousand people may see a social media post. Hundreds may attend a public event. A local media outlet may cover the story. All of this can be useful. But we should keep asking: How will this influence the person or institution that can make the change?

This is the difference between awareness-raising and advocacy. Awareness-raising may aim to help more people know and care about an issue. Advocacy asks a specific person or institution with decision-making power or influence to take a concrete step. The two can work together, but publicity should not become an end in itself.

Example: social media and students

Suppose the group has defined the desired change as follows: Young people should be meaningfully consulted before rules restricting their access to social media are introduced.

The next question is not immediately 'How do we run a campaign?' but 'Who sets these rules?' The answer depends on the context: it may be the school leadership, a local or national authority, a legislative body or another structure.

The group needs to identify where the decision is actually made before deciding where to direct its advocacy. If the decision is national, for example, directing the entire initiative only at the headteacher is unlikely to deliver the desired change. The headteacher may be an ally, but cannot make the national decision.

REMEMBER

Do not start with the person who is easiest to reach.
Start with the person who can change something.

Try to understand the other side

Once you identify the target, look at the issue from their perspective. What responsibilities do they have? What concerns them? What information do they need? What constraints do they face? Who influences them? Why might they support the young people's ask? What objections might they have?

This does not mean giving up the group's position. It means understanding who you are speaking to so that the next step – the message – can be clearer and more persuasive.

Where are young people?

This step is a particularly good opportunity for young people to investigate how institutions work and how decisions are made. Instead of the facilitator simply saying, 'You need to speak to the mayor', the group can research: Who makes the decision? What are their powers? How can we reach them? Who else can influence them?

The facilitator can help with information, contacts and navigating institutions, especially where systems are complex, but should not automatically take over the communication.

What do we write in the Youth Advocacy Canvas?

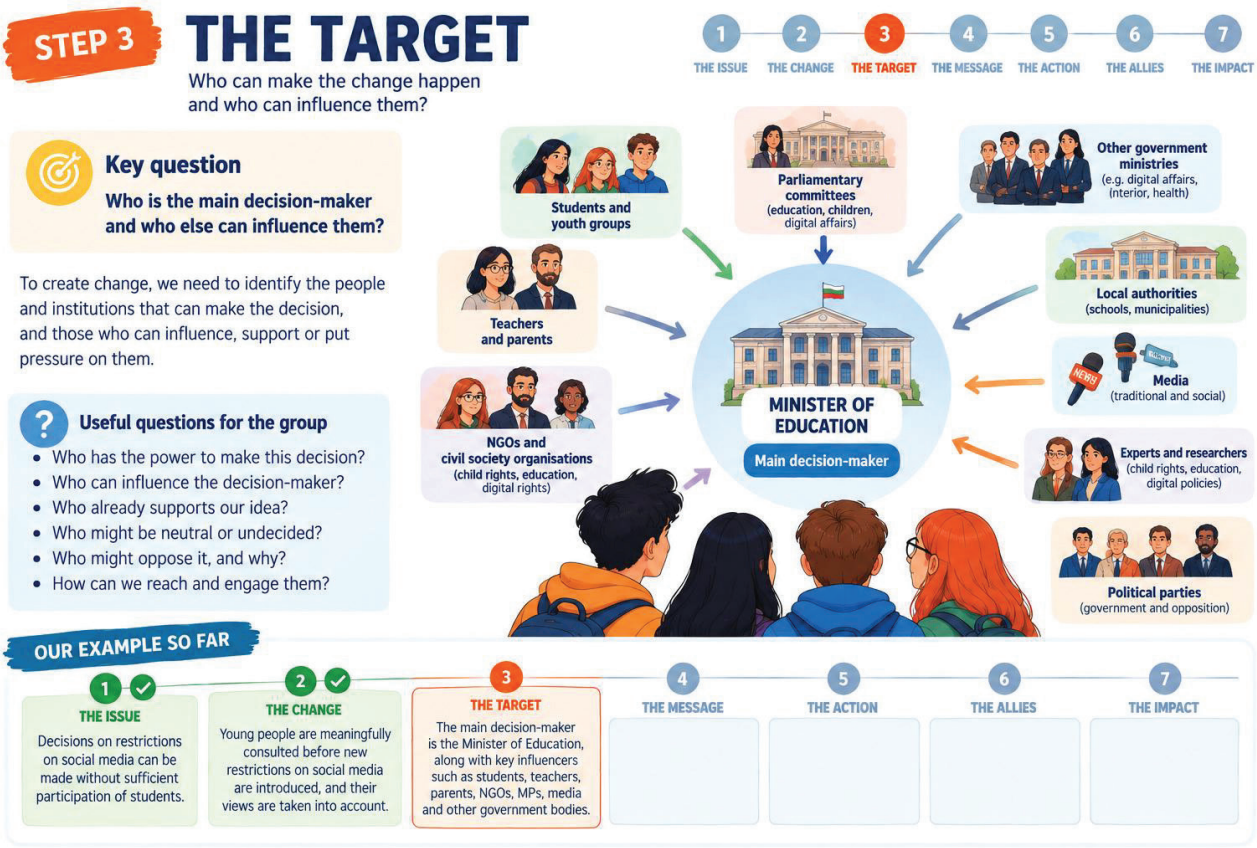
CANVAS

The person or institution that can make the change is: ...

People who can influence this decision are: ...

Final check: If this person or institution says YES to our ask, can the desired change actually happen? If not, you may not yet have found the right advocacy target.

Once we know what we want to change and who has the power to change it, we can ask: What exactly do we want to say to them?



OUR EXAMPLE SO FAR

1 THE ISSUE	2 THE CHANGE	3 THE TARGET	4 THE MESSAGE	5 THE ACTION	6 THE ALLIES	7 THE IMPACT
Decisions on restrictions on social media can be made without sufficient participation of students.	Young people are meaningfully consulted before new restrictions on social media are introduced, and their views are taken into account.	The main decision-maker is the Minister of Education, along with key influencers such as students, teachers, parents, NGOs, MPs, media and other government bodies.				

4 The Message

What do we want the other person to understand – and what do we want them to do?

KEY QUESTION

What do we want this person to understand, and what do we want them to do?

We now know the issue, the change we want and the person or institution we need to reach. The next step is to turn all of this into a clear, understandable and persuasive message.

In advocacy, a message is not simply a slogan, a social media post or a clever sentence for a poster. It should help the person we are addressing understand the issue, why it matters and what, specifically, we expect them to do.

One clear ask

One of the most common weaknesses of advocacy initiatives is that they say a lot about the problem but do not make clear what they actually want.

'Listen to young people!' 'Make the internet safer!' 'Stop discrimination!' 'Act on climate!' Such messages can attract attention and mobilise support, but the person receiving them can reasonably ask: 'What exactly do you want me to do?'

A strong advocacy message therefore needs a clear ask. One of the simplest tests is to complete the sentence: 'We want you to…' If the group cannot complete it clearly, the message is probably not specific enough.

What does an advocacy message contain?

LOGIC

THE ISSUE → WHY IT MATTERS → THE CHANGE WE WANT → WHAT WE WANT YOU TO DO

These elements do not always need to appear in exactly this order. A short video, a meeting with an institution, a public speech and a social media post will use different formats. But the group should be able to answer all four questions.

- **What is the most important thing we want the person to remember?**
- **What exactly do we want from them?**
- **Why does this change matter?**
- **Why should they act?**
- **What will change if they say 'yes'?**
- **Can we say it in language that feels natural to young people?**

Speak to the person who can make the decision

The core ask should remain consistent, but the arguments, language and format may change depending on whether the audience is a minister, headteacher, journalist, parents or the wider public.

If the primary target is the Minister of Education, for example, ask: What are the Minister's responsibilities? What information is relevant? What arguments are likely to matter? What objections might arise? What is actually within the Minister's power to do?

Facts and lived experience

Strong advocacy messages often combine reliable information with lived experience. Data can show the scale of a problem; stories can show what it means in real life.

Young people have a particularly strong position when they can say: 'This decision affects us. This is how we experience it.' But personal stories should not be used only to create emotion. They should connect clearly to the change being sought.

LOGIC

This is our experience → this is the issue → therefore we want this specific change.

When personal stories, images or experiences of other young people are used, their dignity, privacy and safety must be protected, and there should be clear consent for how the material will be used.

Example: social media and students

The group has identified the issue: decisions about restrictions on students' use of social media may be discussed and adopted without sufficient participation by young people. The desired change is meaningful consultation before new restrictions are introduced. In our example, the primary advocacy target is the Minister of Education.

Young people might initially suggest: 'Don't ban social media!' It is short and memorable, but it assumes that all young people share the same position, does not explain why participation matters, and does not clearly say what the Minister should do.

A STRONGER MESSAGE

Minister, decisions about students' use of social media directly affect our lives. They should not be made without us. Before new restrictions are introduced, create a meaningful opportunity for students to present their views and show how those views have been considered in the final decision.

This message identifies the issue, explains why it matters, states the desired change and makes a concrete ask. It also does not predetermine what young people should think about a possible ban. Some may support restrictions, others may oppose them, and others may propose different solutions.

Short, clear and memorable

A useful test is: Can we say the most important thing in less than one minute? This does not mean oversimplifying the issue. A short message may be backed by substantial research, data and discussion. But if the group itself cannot explain clearly what it wants, it is difficult to expect the other person to understand.

Young people should be able to express the message in their own words rather than memorising a text written by adults.

Where are young people?

The message is one of the points where adults can most easily take over without noticing. An expert formulates the ask, a communications professional writes the text, adults invent the slogan, and young people are then placed in front of a camera to read it.

The facilitator should therefore ask: Whose message is this? Do young people recognise themselves in it? Did they help create it? Do they agree with the ask? Can they explain it in their own words? Will they decide how and where to present it?

The facilitator can help make the message clearer, more accurate and more persuasive, but should not replace young people's language and position with their own.

REMEMBER

The strongest youth message is not necessarily the one that sounds most professional. It is the one young people recognise as their own.

What do we write in the Youth Advocacy Canvas?

CANVAS

The issue is...

This matters because...

We want to change...

Therefore, we want you to...

Final check: If the decision-maker hears only our message, will they clearly understand what we want them to do?



5 The Action

How do we turn the message into concrete steps that lead to change?

KEY QUESTION

What will we do so that our message reaches the decision-maker and encourages them to act?

We know the issue, the change we want, who has the power to make it happen and what we want to say. Now the idea needs to leave the page and become action.

Action is the bridge between youth voice and the possibility of influence. We should not choose an action simply because it looks exciting, visible or easy to organise. It must have a clear connection to the change we want to achieve.

Do not start with the format

When groups start planning a campaign, the first ideas are often: 'Let's make a petition.' 'Let's shoot a video.' 'Let's organise a protest.' 'Let's run an Instagram or TikTok campaign.' 'Let's hold an event.' 'Let's invite the media.'

Any of these can be appropriate. None is automatically effective. Before choosing, ask: How will this action help us achieve the change we want?

A petition with thousands of signatures may attract attention, but its effect may be limited if it never reaches the person who can make the decision. A video may receive tens of thousands of views, but if the goal is for a minister to take a specific step, we need to know how the publicity will help that happen. Conversely, one well-prepared meeting with the right person may sometimes have more influence than a large public campaign.

REMEMBER

The action is not the goal. It is a means of achieving change.

From one action to a small plan

Advocacy rarely consists of a single action. It often requires a sequence of connected steps that gradually lead towards the decision-maker.

It can be useful to think in three directions:

- **SHOW – make the issue and young people's position visible.**
- **REACH – get to the person or institution that can make the change.**
- **INFLUENCE – build arguments, public support and opportunities for dialogue that increase the likelihood of action.**

A strong advocacy initiative may combine all three.

How do we choose the right action?

- **How will this action bring us closer to the desired change?**
- **Will it reach the person who can make the decision?**
- **What do we want to happen after the action?**
- **Can we organise it with the time and resources we have?**
- **Will young people have a real role?**
- **What risks do we need to anticipate?**
- **Is there a simpler way to achieve the same effect?**
- **How will we connect publicity to our concrete ask?**

Visibility and influence are not the same. Views, likes, participants and media coverage may be useful, but they do not by themselves mean that the advocacy initiative has succeeded. Keep returning to the question: How does this action increase the chance that the target will take the step we are asking for?

Public action can take many forms

There is no universal list of 'correct' advocacy actions. Depending on the issue, context, age of participants, resources and target, actions may include a meeting with a decision-maker, public discussion, youth consultation, petition, open letter, exhibition, video, public-space action, presentation of youth research, social media campaign, participation in a local council meeting, media initiative or a combination of several actions.

What matters is not how impressive the action looks, but whether it is fit for purpose.

Example: social media and students

The young people want meaningful consultation before new restrictions on social media are introduced, and the primary target is the Minister of Education. The group might immediately propose: 'Let's protest against the ban!' The facilitator can ask: 'Will the protest help us achieve the change we have chosen?'

This brings the group back to its objective. The goal is not necessarily to be 'for' or 'against' a ban. The goal is for young people to participate in the decision.

A more strategic sequence could be: conduct a short student survey; organise a youth-led public discussion where different positions are presented; prepare a short paper summarising young people's views and proposals; request a meeting with the Minister where students themselves present the findings; and use social and traditional media to ask publicly: 'Will you make decisions about social media with us or without us?'

LOGIC
ASK YOUNG PEOPLE → MAKE THEIR VIEWS VISIBLE → REACH THE MINISTER → ASK FOR A CONCRETE COMMITMENT

And then what?

Whenever the group proposes an action, the facilitator can ask one simple question: 'And then what?' We make a video – and then what? We organise an event – and then what? We collect 5,000 signatures – and then what? We meet the Minister – and then what?

This forces the group to think beyond the event itself and towards the next step in the change process. A meeting with an institution is not necessarily success in itself. Decide in advance what you want to come out of it: a commitment to youth consultation, a deadline, a working group, a follow-up meeting or another concrete step.

Where are young people?

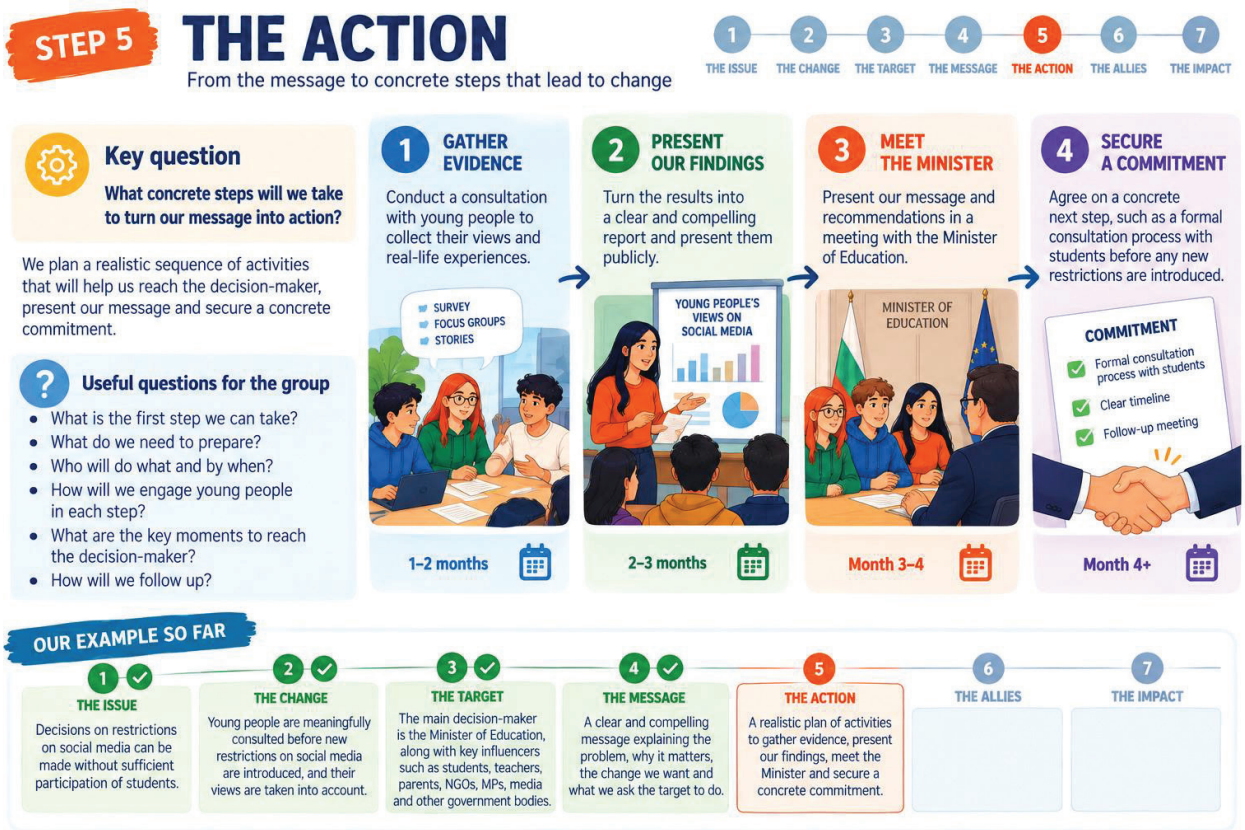
Action is another point where initiatives can gradually be taken over by adults. Adults organise the event, write the letters, speak to the media and lead the institutional meeting, while young people are invited to attend or appear in a photograph.

Ask clearly: Who is actually acting? Do young people choose the actions? Allocate roles? Conduct the research? Present the results? Speak to the media? Ask questions in the meeting? Participate in decisions when the plan needs to change?
Adults do not need to withdraw completely. Facilitators can provide information, contacts, space, logistics, training and support, and they have a responsibility to assess risks and safeguard younger participants. But there is an important difference between supporting young people to act and acting instead of them.

What do we write in the Youth Advocacy Canvas?

CANVAS
Our main action – or short sequence of actions – is: ...

Final check: Can we clearly explain how our action will bring us closer to the decision-maker and to the change we want?



6 The Allies

Who can support us and make our advocacy stronger?

KEY QUESTION

Who can help us achieve the change?

Advocacy is rarely successful when done alone. A group of young people may have a strong position, a clear message and a good action plan, but other people and organisations can help the message travel further and have greater influence.

Allies are not people who should do the work instead of young people. They can provide support, knowledge, access, resources, visibility or influence without taking the initiative away from them.

Do not simply look for 'supportive people'

It is easy to create a long list of possible allies: teachers, parents, NGOs, journalists, experts, politicians, public figures, institutions, businesses and other youth groups. But not every potential partner is needed in every initiative.

A BETTER QUESTION

What do we need in order to take the next step – and who can help us with it?

If we lack information, we may need an expert. If we want to hear from more young people, other schools, student councils or youth organisations may help. If we need public visibility, journalists, media or public figures may help. If we do not know how to reach an institution, an experienced organisation or contact may open a door. If the target is a minister, we may need people with political or institutional access.

This way, we are not collecting partners for the sake of partnership. We are building support around a specific change.

Who can be an ally?

- **other young people, student councils and youth organisations;**
- **teachers and school leaders;**
- **parents;**
- **civil society and non-governmental organisations;**
- **experts and researchers;**
- **journalists and media;**
- **people with public influence;**
- **professional organisations;**
- **representatives of local and national institutions;**
- **business representatives;**

- **politicians from governing and opposition parties;**
- **members of parliamentary committees;**
- **people inside the institution targeted by the advocacy.**

Sometimes the most useful ally is someone close to the place where the decision is made who can help young people's voices reach it.

Map your allies

Begin with a simple question: Who could help our change, and how specifically? Then consider two characteristics: How supportive are they of our goal? How much influence do they have over the decision?

Someone may strongly support the initiative but have limited influence; they may still be valuable for mobilising young people or increasing visibility. Another person may have considerable influence but not yet be convinced; dialogue with them may be important. A third may both support the initiative and have direct access to the decision-maker – a potentially key ally.

This gradually creates a map of support and influence around the decision.

Look for allies where decisions are made

Do not limit the search to civil society, schools, parents, experts and media. Look at the political and institutional environment around the decision-maker as well.

If the target is a minister, for example, ask who in the governing majority is interested in the topic; who may disagree with the proposed policy but support youth participation; who has influence over the minister; which opposition representatives might raise the issue publicly; which parliamentary committee members work on the topic; and who has direct access to the minister.

Support and influence are not the same. Someone may strongly support the cause but have little influence over the decision. Someone else may not share all of the group's positions but may be able to raise the issue directly with the decision-maker.

REMEMBER

An ally does not have to agree with us about everything.
It is enough to have a shared goal on which we can act together.

Allies can play different roles

One ally may provide data and expertise. Another may open a door to an institution. A third may provide a venue. A fourth may help reach the media. A fifth may connect the group with more young people. A sixth may publicly support the ask. A politician or institutional representative may raise the issue directly with the decision-maker.

For every potential ally, ask: What specifically do we want from them? 'Support us' is too vague. 'Help us reach ten more schools', 'Provide expert information', 'Share the findings of our survey', 'Help us arrange a meeting with the Minister', 'Raise this issue in the parliamentary committee' or 'Ask the Minister how students will be involved' are much more useful requests.

Not everyone has to be persuaded

Public issues almost always involve different positions. Some people will support the initiative, some will be uncertain and others may openly oppose it. Young people do not need to turn every opponent into an ally.

The more useful questions are: What position does this person have? How much influence do they have? Is there something specific we can work on together?

On a contested issue such as social media restrictions, one politician may support restrictions and another may strongly oppose them. Both may still accept the principle that young people should be heard before a decision directly affecting them is made. That shared point can become a basis for co-operation.

Example: social media and students

The young people want meaningful consultation before new restrictions are introduced. They plan a student survey, public presentation of the findings and a meeting with the Minister.

Natural allies may include other students, student councils and youth organisations, which can broaden participation; teachers and school leaders, who can support discussions and outreach; parents, who may hold different views on restrictions but support meaningful dialogue; child and youth organisations, which can contribute expertise in participation and rights; digital, education and child-development experts; and journalists who can make young people's views visible.

The group can then look closer to the decision-making process. Representatives of governing parties may raise the issue with colleagues or the Minister. Opposition representatives may raise it in parliamentary or public debate. Committee members may propose a hearing or meeting involving young people. These actors may hold different political views, but the common point can remain simple: Young people should participate in decisions that directly affect them.

Searching for allies therefore becomes a search for different routes through which youth voice can reach the place where the decision is made.

Where are young people?

There is an important risk here. When large organisations, experts, journalists, public figures or politicians join a youth initiative, the campaign may become stronger while young people's voices gradually become weaker.

Adults speak to the media, experts explain the issue, organisations lead the meetings and politicians use the topic in their own public debate. Young people move into the background.

Keep checking: Who sets the direction? Who decides which allies to involve? Who speaks for the initiative? Who attends the meeting with the decision-maker? Whose voice do the media hear?

Facilitators can help identify the right people, open institutional doors and create contacts that young people may struggle to reach alone. But once the door opens, young people should be able to walk through it themselves.

REMEMBER
Allies should amplify young people's voices, not replace them.

What do we write in the Youth Advocacy Canvas?

CANVAS
Our key allies are: ... **They can help us with: ...**

Final check: Do we know not only who can help us, but what specifically we want from each ally?

STEP 6

THE ALLIES

Who can support us, and how can we work with them?

1 THE ISSUE — 2 THE CHANGE — 3 THE TARGET — 4 THE MESSAGE — 5 THE ACTION — 6 THE ALLIES — 7 THE IMPACT

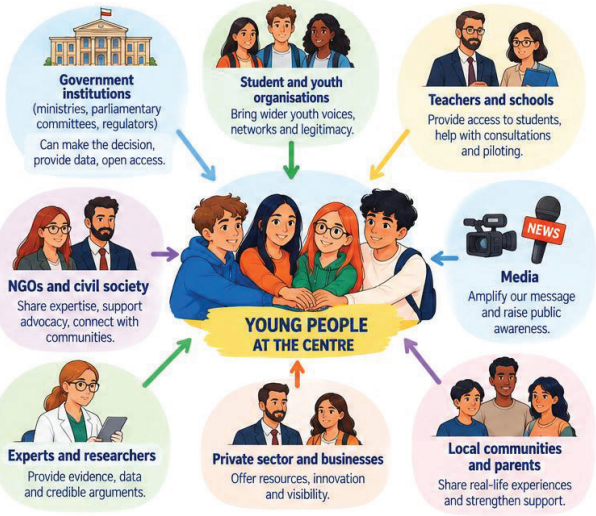
Key question

Who can help us achieve our change, and what can they contribute?

Change rarely happens alone. We need allies – people and organisations who can support us, open doors, share resources, amplify our message and help turn our plan into reality.

Useful questions for the group

- Who already supports our idea?
- Who has the knowledge, influence or resources we need?
- How can they help?
- What is in it for them?
- How can we build and maintain the relationship?
- Are there any potential opponents? How can we address them?



HOW TO ENGAGE ALLIES

1. **Map our allies** — Identify who can support us and what they can contribute.
2. **Understand their interests** — Why is this issue important for them?
3. **Reach out** — Start with a clear, concrete and relevant ask.
4. **Build the relationship** — Keep them informed, involve them in key activities, and show appreciation.
5. **Keep everyone on board** — Maintain communication and celebrate progress together.

OUR EXAMPLE SO FAR

1 THE ISSUE	2 THE CHANGE	3 THE TARGET	4 THE MESSAGE	5 THE ACTION	6 THE ALLIES	7 THE IMPACT
Decisions on restrictions on social media can be made without sufficient participation of students.	Young people are meaningfully consulted before new restrictions on social media are introduced, and their views are taken into account.	The main decision-maker is the Minister of Education, along with key influencers such as students, teachers, parents, NGOs, MPs, media and other government bodies.	A clear and compelling message explaining the problem, why it matters, the change we want and what we ask the target to do.	A realistic plan of activities to gather evidence, present our findings, meet the Minister and secure a concrete commitment.	A wide range of allies can support us, including students, teachers, NGOs, experts, media, local communities and the private sector.	

7 The Impact

How will we know that we have really changed something?

KEY QUESTION

How will we know that our advocacy has achieved a result?

We have reached the final step of the Youth Advocacy Canvas. We have an issue, a desired change, a target, a clear message, actions and allies. One important question remains: How will we know that our advocacy has achieved a result?

This question looks simple, but campaigns often lose sight of their original purpose here. We may have organised a great event, collected thousands of signatures, received tens of thousands of video views, gained media coverage or met with a minister. All of this may matter. But it does not necessarily mean that change has happened.

Do not confuse activity with impact

There is an important difference between what we did and what changed because of what we did.

- **'We surveyed 1,000 students.' – activity.**
- **'We organised a public discussion.' – activity.**
- **'We met the Minister.' – activity.**
- **'The issue was covered by national media.' – an important campaign effect, but not necessarily the final change.**

Impact begins to become visible when we can say: 'Before, things were like this. After our initiative, something specific is different.' That is why we should know what success looks like from the planning stage.

Return to the change you asked for

The simplest way to define impact is to return to Step 2 – THE CHANGE. There we asked: What exactly do we want to be different? Now we ask: Did that change happen?

If the ask was for students to be consulted before a new rule is adopted, the result is not that we ran a campaign about youth participation. The result is that students were actually included in the decision-making process and their views were taken into account.

LOGIC

THE ISSUE → THE CHANGE → THE ACTIONS → THE IMPACT

Not every change happens at once

Advocacy rarely moves in a straight line. A final goal may take months or years, so it is important to recognise intermediate results.

- **the decision-maker agrees to meet young people;**
- **the institution formally responds to the ask;**
- **a public commitment is made;**
- **young people are invited to a working group;**
- **an official consultation is organised;**
- **a youth proposal is included in a draft decision;**
- **a specific practice changes;**
- **a new rule or policy is adopted.**

These results are not equal in significance, but each can show movement from voice to influence and from influence to change. An intermediate success should not, however, be presented as the final victory.

A meeting with a minister may be a success if young people previously had no access. But if the goal is a permanent mechanism for youth participation, the meeting itself is not the final change.

What can we measure?

It helps to choose a few simple indicators of progress from the beginning.

- **Did we reach the right person?**
- **Did we receive a concrete response to our ask?**
- **Was a commitment made, and is there a deadline?**
- **Were young people included in the decision-making process?**
- **Did a rule, practice or policy change?**
- **Can we show how young people's views influenced the final decision?**

Numbers can also be useful – how many young people participated, how many institutions became involved, how many people supported the ask. But the most important question remains: What changed?

What if we do not achieve what we asked for?

Not every advocacy initiative succeeds on the first attempt. The decision-maker may refuse a meeting. The ask may be rejected. An institution may listen to young people but decide not to change its position.

That does not automatically make the process meaningless. Return to the Canvas and ask: Did we define the issue correctly? Was the desired change specific and realistic? Did we approach the right person? Was the message persuasive? Did we choose the right actions? Did we have the allies we needed? What did we learn, and what should our next step be?

The Canvas does not necessarily end at Step 7. Sometimes the impact takes us back to an earlier step. Advocacy is a process of action, learning and adaptation.

Example: social media and students

The young people asked to participate meaningfully in discussions about future restrictions on social media. They surveyed students, presented different views publicly, found allies among schools, parents, organisations, experts, media and political representatives, and brought the issue to the Minister of Education.

How will we know whether the initiative succeeded? Five thousand survey responses show strong participation, but are not the final goal. Media coverage shows public interest, but is not the final goal. A parliamentary question to the Minister shows political influence, but is still a step along the way. A meeting between the Minister and young people is an important intermediate result.

Return to the original desired change. If the Ministry establishes a meaningful consultation process, if students with different views participate, and if the institution shows how their proposals were considered and how they influenced the final decision, then we can speak of achieved change.

Success does not depend on the final decision fully matching young people's position. Participation does not mean that young people must always get exactly what they want. It means their voice has a real place in the process, their arguments are considered, and the institution can show how they influenced the decision.

THE DIFFERENCE

'We listened to young people.'

is not the same as

'Young people participated in the decision-making process.'

Do not forget the impact on young people themselves

There is another kind of change worth observing. What happened to the participants themselves? Do they understand public decision-making better? Can they formulate a position with more confidence? Have they learned how to engage with institutions, media and people who disagree with them? Do they feel more able to influence the world around them?

This does not replace the public change that the initiative sought. But it is an important result of meaningful youth participation: young people not only being heard, but gaining experience, confidence and the capacity to take part in public life.

Where are young people?

Who decides whether the campaign was successful? Do only adults evaluate it? Does the organisation write the report and define the results? Or do young people take part in analysing what happened?

- **What did we achieve?**
- **What did we not achieve?**
- **What did we learn?**
- **What would we do differently?**
- **Do we want to continue – and what is our next step?**

Young people should be participants not only in the actions, but also in evaluating the results and deciding what comes next.

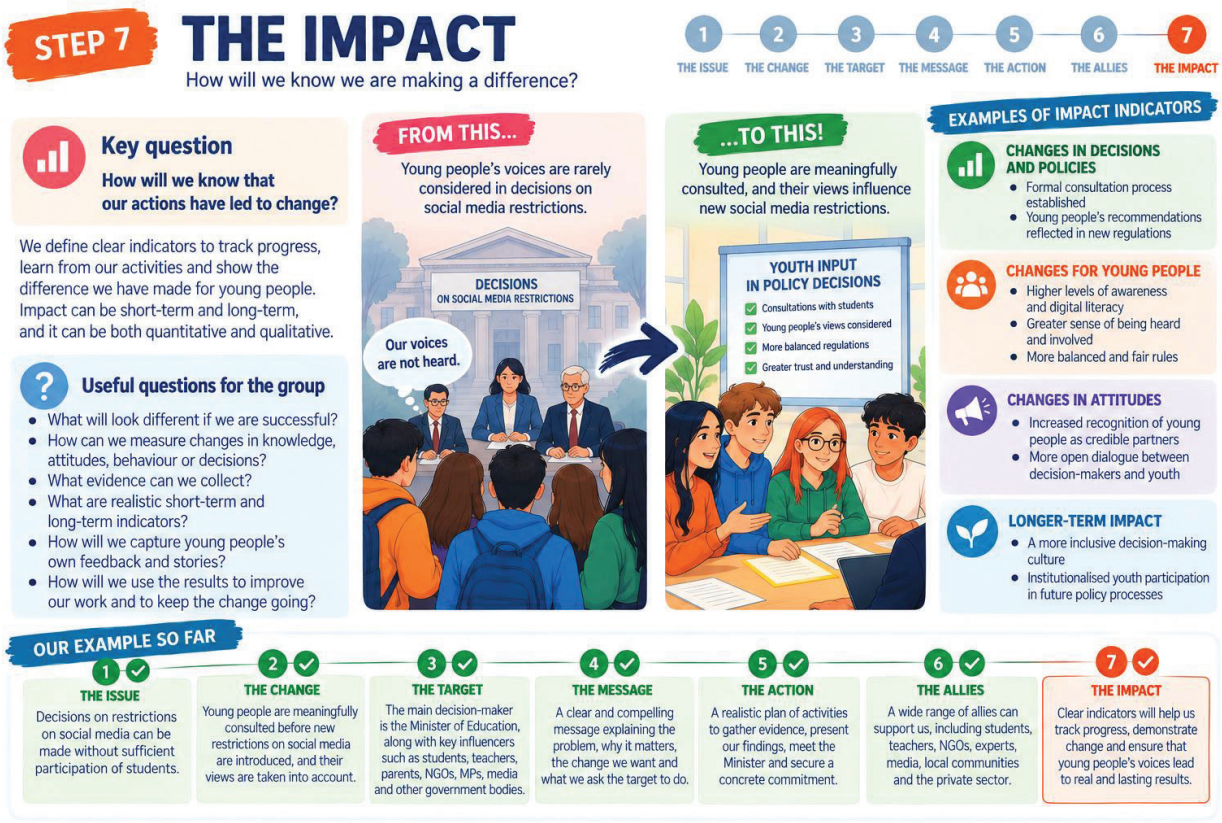
What do we write in the Youth Advocacy Canvas?

CANVAS

We will know that we have achieved change when: ...

The answer should describe a visible change, not an activity.

Final check: If this happens, can we convincingly say, ‘Yes, something is different now, partly because of our efforts’?



Completed example

Social media and students

The example running through this guide deliberately focuses on a contested issue. Young people may support restrictions on social media, oppose them, or propose different approaches. The advocacy goal in the example is not to prescribe their position, but to ensure that decisions directly affecting young people are not made without their meaningful participation.



Conclusion

Change does not always happen immediately

The Youth Advocacy Canvas ends with the question of impact. Advocacy, however, rarely ends when one campaign is over.

Sometimes we achieve exactly the change we asked for. Sometimes we achieve only part of it. Sometimes the person or institution we approached says 'no'. That does not necessarily mean the effort was wasted.

Every meaningful participation process leaves learning behind. Young people learn how to formulate a position, gather arguments, speak with people who disagree, understand institutions and influence decisions. Facilitators learn how to support young people without speaking for them, when to help and when to step back, and what should be done differently next time. Decision-makers can also learn: they encounter perspectives they might otherwise never hear and see young people not only as people affected by policy, but as participants capable of proposing solutions.

Not every change is visible immediately

The result we see today is not always the final result of our actions. An idea rejected now may return to public debate a year later. A youth proposal may not be accepted immediately but may change how a politician, teacher, journalist or institution thinks about the issue. A meeting may not produce a decision but may create relationships and trust that open a door later. An unsuccessful attempt may give young people experience that makes their next initiative much stronger.

Sometimes a change that later seems obvious begins with a small group of people who were the first to say: 'This can be different.'

Sometimes society needs time to mature

New ideas are not always accepted immediately, especially when they challenge established rules, relationships or assumptions. Sometimes society needs time to begin talking about an issue, for more people to understand it, for new arguments and experience to accumulate, and for readiness for change to grow.

Advocacy therefore requires patience. But patience does not mean resignation. We can be patient with the process while remaining demanding of our own participation: Have we understood the issue well enough? Have we heard different voices? Have we chosen the right target? Are our arguments strong enough? Have we found the allies we need? Have we given young people real power? And after a setback, are we ready to learn, adapt and try again?

From one campaign to a culture of participation

Ultimately, the greatest value of the Youth Advocacy Canvas is not to produce more campaigns, petitions, events or posts. It is to help young people experience something more important:

- **that they have the right to participate in decisions that affect them;**
- **that they can formulate their own position;**
- **that they can find allies;**
- **that they can speak to power;**
- **that they can influence decisions;**
- **and that change is a process in which they have a place.**

A campaign ends. That experience remains.

The true impact of today's advocacy may become visible only later – in a decision made differently because a young person once asked a question, insisted on being heard or proposed another possibility.

So let us not measure success only by whether we received a 'yes' today. Let us also ask whether we opened space for change tomorrow.

CORE PRINCIPLE
Youth voice is the starting point.
Participation is the process.
Change is the goal.

REMEMBER
Be patient with change, but demanding of your own participation in making it happen.

Your Youth Advocacy Canvas

Use these pages to plan your own youth-led advocacy initiative.

1. THE ISSUE
What is the specific issue young people want to address?

2. THE CHANGE
What specific change do we want to achieve?

3. THE TARGET
Who has the power to make the change happen?

4. THE MESSAGE
What do we want the target to understand and do?

5. THE ACTION
What concrete steps will we take?

6. THE ALLIES
Who can support us, and how?

7. THE IMPACT
How will we know that something has changed?

CONSTANT CHECK

WHERE ARE YOUNG PEOPLE? Who defines, decides, speaks, acts and evaluates the result?

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