OP!N

GUIDELINES

**TIPS AND TRICKS FOR MORE
AND
BETTER YOUTH ePARTICIPATION**

For more information about the EU^th project and its partners, please consult the project website: **www.euth.net**.

For more information on the OPIN platform, go to **http://www.opin.me**.

1 All URLs in this publication have been accessed on 16th of November 2017.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

WELCOME ON BOARD!

If you are reading this, it means that you are seriously considering including young people in making real decisions which will affect their lives. The EU[th] project partners thank you for this and welcome you to a large community of individuals and organisations that practices and believes in participatory democracy.

Tips and tricks for more and better youth eParticipation

The OPIN guidelines are designed to assist initiators who wish to carry out youth eParticipation projects on the OPIN platform (**www.opin.me**), developed by the EU[th] project partners, as well as initiators of youth participation in general – both online and offline – who can also benefit from reading them. Whether you are working in a public administration, a youth organisation, or somewhere completely different, the OPIN guidelines are here to help you. The guidelines offer practical tips and tricks and direct your attention to issues you need to consider in order to succeed with your project. References are made to other resources that might help you where these guidelines do not go into much detail.

Behind the scenes of the OPIN guidelines

The OPIN guidelines have been developed by the Danish Board of Technology Foundation (DBT) in collaboration with the EU[th] project partners. In the process of development, European youth workers, stakeholders, researchers, and young people have continuously shared their insights, experiences and visions for youth eParticipation with us.

As well as this document, where the guidelines are presented in full, the tips and tricks can also be found in a modularised form directly in the help section on the OPIN platform. The OPIN guidelines are just one out of several helplines that you can find on the platform, the others being:

The OPIN User Manuals: These manuals will teach you everything you need to know about how the OPIN platform and its features work.

The OPIN Decision Support Tool: This tool will help you find the online participatory process that matches your project and assist you in setting up an eParticipation project on the OPIN platform.

The OPIN Train-the-Trainer Manual: This material will enable you to conduct trainings on how to plan and realise youth eParticipation projects.

But before you check out these other important helplines we encourage you to finish reading the OPIN guidelines.

HAPPY READING!
DBT and the EU[th] project partners

WHY YOUTH *e*PARTICIPATION IS THE WAY FORWARD

Why participation?

Citizen participation in political decision-making – if properly organised – leads to more legitimate, innovative and robust decisions. It keeps democracy alive by facilitating a dialogue between citizens and decision-makers about concrete decisions to be made and policies to be designed.

Why youth participation?

In order to promote democratic citizenship and empower young people to actively influence the conditions under which they live, it is important to offer them platforms and structures for engaging in political decision-making. Young people are often under-represented in more traditional participatory processes, which are generally designed to include citizens of all ages. Therefore, it requires targeted efforts to include young people in political decision-making.

Why youth eParticipation?

In general, young people are more active users of online forums and social media than older citizens and more difficult to engage in face-to-face participatory processes, such as workshops and town hall meetings. One response to this is to design face-to-face participation in such a way that is more appealing to the young people. Another is to meet and engage with them online, which is the main reason why the OPIN platform has been developed. However, there are other arguments for choosing eParticipation methods as a substitute for – or a supplement to – face-to-face participatory methods:

- **Independence of space and time.** People can participate where and when they want.

- **Lower costs.** Direct costs for a physical venue, transport and catering can be avoided.

- **Scaling up.** More people can participate without adding much to the costs.

- **Greater transparency.** Each step of the participatory process can be tracked and made available.

It is important to be aware of the fact that the arguments listed above are only potential benefits that may not apply to the youth participatory process that you are planning. Your process may not need to be independent of space and time; eParticipation can be costly in other ways than face-to-face participation (e.g. time spent on keeping participants engaged and software license); it is often more difficult than expected to attract large numbers of participants; and over-focusing on transparency may result in participants getting lost in the details. But here the OPIN guidelines are your helpline. They will provide you with tips and tricks for reaping all the benefits that eParticipation projects have to offer.

Combining online and offline participation

Although eParticipation is well suited for certain participatory activities, it can sometimes be too restrictive and inflexible compared to the offline and face-to-face methods that it seeks to replace or supplement. In particular, participatory processes requiring extensive and complex deliberation to reach conclusions and develop recommendations are at best difficult to organise as eParticipation. Generally, the EU[th] partners believe in a participatory process where offline and online components go hand in hand. Based on our experience, this will produce the best results.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR PARTICIPATION IN BRIEF

EARLY INVOLVEMENT. Involve young people as early as possible in the decision-making process.
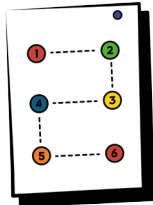
TRANSPARENCY. Be clear and honest in your purposes and objectives from the outset. The process should be transparent, so that the young participants and the general public can see what is going on and how decisions are made.

GENUINE INFLUENCE. Ensure ownership of the results through genuine influence on the decisions to be made.
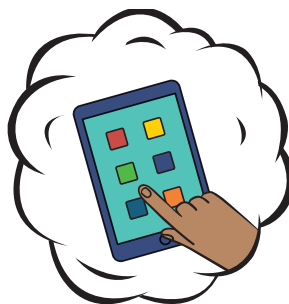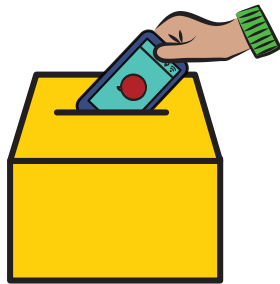
MATCHING OF EXPECTATIONS. Be clear about the extent to which young people will be able to influence the outcomes of the decision-making process you involve them in.

INFORMATION. Use targeted information which is comprehensible for the young participants and presents different and possibly conflicting points of view on the issue to be debated.

PRACTICAL ORGANISATION. Be visibly in control of the practical organisation of project activities offline as well as online.

NEUTRALITY. Management of the participatory process should be unbiased and open to different participants and opinions.

DELIBERATION. Give young people the opportunity to discuss the different needs, wishes and opportunities in a structured way with each other and – if time and resources allow – with different stakeholders, experts and decision-makers.

FOUR PHASES OF YOUTH ePARTICIPATION

In the next four chapters, the OPIN guidelines aim to help you reap all the benefits that youth eParticipation projects can potentially offer. The chapters will take you through the different steps of a youth participation project. Some of the tips and tricks given are applicable to participatory processes in general while some address youth eParticipation in particular.

Before reading the tips and tricks of the OPIN guidelines, it is important to bear in mind that eParticipation is just one building block of your project. Firstly, an eParticipation project is not solely about setting up online participation features: there are several building blocks that surround or are an integral part of the eParticipation process. You should also construct these building blocks either before, during or after the eParticipation process takes place in order to make your project successful. Secondly, an eParticipation project is never an isolated activity. It is part of a bigger political process which you may or may not be in control of, and which you should stay well-informed about too. Only then you will be able to design a project that fits well and yields relevant results which can actually be used for something.

The logic behind the structure of the OPIN guidelines

The OPIN guidelines are structured chronologically under the following four project phases:

Idea phase
The core of this phase is to frame your eParticipation project and win the support of decision-makers.

Preparation phase
This phase is all about concretising your project idea and setting it up in detail.

Participation phase
By now your project should be prepared in detail, so this phase is about actually putting it into practice.

Outcome phase
The key purpose of this phase is to make the results of your eParticipation project count.

In practice, this chronological structure will most likely be challenged as there will often be overlaps between the different phases. The same goes for the tips and tricks for better and more youth eParticipation which fall under the different phases. But as long as you put some thought into all issues presented to you in the OPIN guidelines, your project should be in good hands.

IDEA PHASE: FRAME YOUR PROJECT

It is often tempting to focus all of your energy and resources on carrying out the actual participatory activities. While this is obviously important too, there is a lot of work to be done before you get that far.

The early phase of a participatory project is often mistakenly underestimated and under-prioritised. This is a real pity because it is in this phase that the entire project should be designed and developed. If enough care and consideration is shown here, much pain and difficulty can be avoided later. If you have a clear picture of the purpose of the project, and the impact you want to achieve from the outset, the odds are that the input throughout the project will be much better. In turn, this will increase your likelihood of successfully achieving the goals of the project.

In this chapter, there are a number of tips and tricks that will give your project a strong start.

Manifesto: Take participation seriously!

Are you really willing to let the young people influence the decisions they are invited to help shape and/or make? If you can easily answer 'yes!' to this question you can skip this paragraph. If you are in doubt, please continue reading.

Never ask a question that you don't want an answer to! When you have the answer, you are obliged to try and make it count in the decision-making process. If this is not really your intention, you should not waste the young participants' time and effort.

Youth eParticipation sucks when…

- You are making the project because you want to lecture the young people and persuade them to act in a certain way.

- You are designing the project without considering what will appeal to the young people whom you want to participate.

- You are asking the young people to give input to a decision-making process, but have no plan or intention to make this input influence the decisions.

- You are asking for a lot of input, but end up spending all your time analysing it rather than making it count.

The guiding principle of your youth eParticipation project

Before you read any further you should memorise this piece of advice:

Keep the young people at the heart of what you are doing!

This means that you should always include and have young people's perspective in mind when making decisions about your project. We highly recommend that you let this piece of advice guide you throughout all phases of your project. This will maximise your chances for setting up a successful project that will appeal to young people.

Be clear in your purpose(s) from the outset

The first questions you should ask yourself are:

- Why are you initiating the project?

- Why should young people be involved in it?

If you are already a team working on the project, it is highly important that every team member has the same understanding of the actual purpose. When you have a shared understanding of the purpose, write it down. Then you can return to it later in the process if it gets difficult to keep focus.

In order to properly define the purpose of your project, you should understand and map the decision-making process in which you wish the young people to intervene. It will be easier to formulate a spot-on eParticipation project if you know where exactly the decision-makers are in the process. It is usually not under your control, but try to intervene as early as possible!

Example of a decision-making process

Consultation procedure in a Danish municipality – options for where to intervene with an eParticipation process

1

The administration prepares a case about a future housing project for young people.

2

Optional citizen participation or dialogue with stakeholders and experts – **intervene!**

3

The administration prepares the recommendation for the city council.

4

The city council goes through the case for the first time and makes a decision on the realisation of a consultation procedure.

5

Consultation procedure – **intervene!**

6

The administration prepares the recommendation for the city council. The consultation responses are incorporated into the recommendation.

7

The city council goes through the case again and makes a final decision on future housing for young people in the municipality.

Set realistic goals for your project

You should ask yourself the following question: What do you want the project to achieve? In sum, this has to do with impact. The more clearly and realistically you can define these goals, the easier it will be for you to successfully outline the needed steps of the project to reach the desired end result.

These questions will hopefully help you defining clear and concrete goals:

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO ACHIEVE WITH THE PROJECT?

WHAT SHOULD BE THE FORMAT OF THE DESIRED OUTPUT?

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO USE THE RESULTS?

WHAT DIFFERENCE WILL THE PROJECT MAKE?

WHAT KIND OF INFLUENCE DO YOU WANT THE YOUNG PEOPLE TO HAVE?
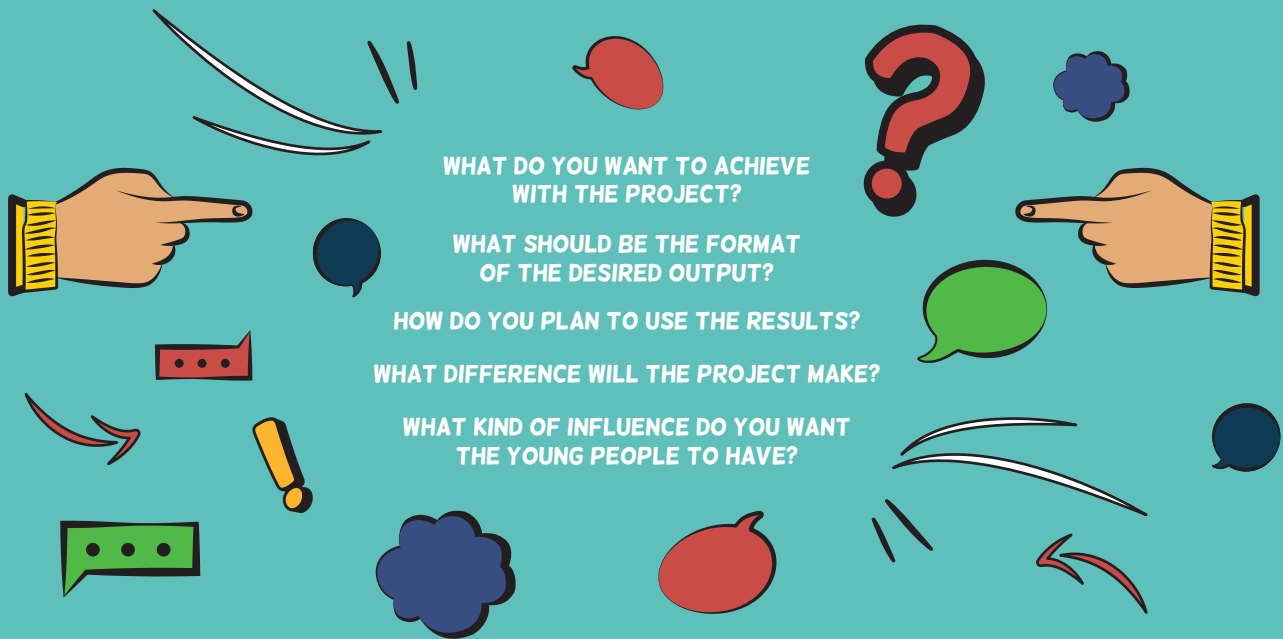
Remember that influence can be many things – and it is not always something that can be easily measured! Don't think that participants only have influence if they are granted the sole power of making decisions. More often, influence means giving input in the shape of ideas, recommendations, and opinions that those with decision-making power can take into account. The difficult part of a participatory project is to make sure that results are taken into account in a thorough manner. Don't worry – several of the following OPIN tips and tricks will touch upon this important topic!

Be clear about your own role

Neutrality and impartiality are necessary for being able to conduct methodologically sound participatory processes. As a facilitator of a youth eParticipation process you should act as an "honest broker" and not seek a particular result. An "honest broker" is an impartial mediator.

As an honest broker, you should be unbiased in the eyes of both the young people and the decision-makers. If the young people see you as allied with the decision-makers or vice versa you cannot act as an honest broker, and you should then ask someone else to run the process. Being an honest broker and an advocate of youth participation in political decision-making can, however, still go hand in hand. As long as you are able to equally listen to and include the views of all sides, of course.

Learn from others' experiences with youth eParticipation

In the process of concretising and framing your project idea, it can be very useful to learn from similar projects. Maybe your neighbouring municipality or another organisation like yours has just finalised a project. Get in touch with them and ask them to share their experiences with you. This exchange of experiences might point your attention to issues that are locally specific and thus not covered in the OPIN guidelines[2].

At this stage, you should also make up your mind whether you will realise the project on your own, or if you will need consultancy from (external) professional practitioners to carry out the project, or at least parts of it. In some cases, this is of course not your choice to make. But if it is, here are some questions that are highly useful to consider:

_____

2 You can also join the conversation in the Facebook group "eParticipation"

Questions	Preferred answers
Are you motivated and excited about planning a youth eParticipation project?	YES
Do you genuinely believe in the importance of engaging young people in the decision-making process?	YES
Do you have a stake in the decisions to be made?	NO
Do you have a sufficient number of working hours that you (and your team) can dedicate to planning the project?[3]	YES
Do you have the necessary skills in your team to plan and manage the project from A-Z?[4]	YES
Do you have the budget for hiring professional participation practitioners?	*If your answers are not (close to) consistent with the preferred answers above, you will need a budget for hiring help.*

If you – or your boss – decide that you need consultancy, the EU[th] partners would be happy to help you![5] We have a huge network of participation practitioners across Europe and beyond and can put you in touch with consultants in your own country.

Map your young participants

In this phase of the project you should also put some thought into who exactly the participants should be. In order to make this decision you should map the following:

WHO HAS A – DIRECT OR INDIRECT – STAKE IN THE DECISIONS TO BE MADE?

WHO WILL BE – DIRECTLY OR INDIRECTLY – AFFECTED BY THE DECISIONS TO BE MADE?

Another highly important issue to consider is whether the group of young participants should be representative of all young people in, let's say, your municipality. Having a representatively balanced group of young people participating in your project will make the results more politically legitimate. In most cases, decision-makers are more likely to take your results seriously if you are able to say that they represent the voices of young people in their municipality. Representativeness is an important building block in democracy. However, aiming for representativeness puts demands on your recruitment process. More on this later![6]

Furthermore, you want to "have the young people at the heart of what you are doing". Therefore, you have to get a clear picture of who the young participants are. The better you know the young participants, the easier it will be for you to prepare and implement a project that truly appeals to them. It might sound rather straightforward, but experience shows that initiators of youth participation projects sometimes forget that young people are not a homogeneous group. No, there are many different kinds of young people, and therefore different efforts are potentially needed to capture their attention. To put it simply, 15-year-olds generally have other interests than young people in their late twenties. In sum, targeted efforts are highly needed in order to succeed with your initiative!

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3 To be able to answer this question, it will be useful to have a look at *Secure funds for your project*
4 Check out *Set up an outstanding project team* and learn about the skills needed to plan and manage a youth eParticipation project
5 https://opin.me/en/help/service-and-consulting1/
6 Have a look at the tip *Recruit the young participants*

Map your (potential) endorsers with decision-making power

The next question you have to ask yourself is: Whose support do you need in order to make your project count and reach its goals?

The list of possible sources for a project idea is of course endless. However, one question that divides project ideas into two groups is whether or not you have endorsers with decision-making power on your side. If you work in a public administration, let's say a municipality, the project might have been initiated by the city council, and you have been asked to realise it. The question is then easily answered. Nevertheless, even when the decision-making power has endorsed your project from the onset, it is still highly relevant to map who your true endorsers are. Most likely not everyone in the city council voted in favour of realising the project. To put it another way, you have to map your friends and enemies. Then you know whose support you can count on, and whom you should try to win over.

For project ideas which do not yet have endorsers with decision-making power, here are some tips for changing this situation. When you have made an overview of whose support you need, you have to meet with them, present your idea and convince them to advocate for your project. If it is difficult to get access to the potential endorsers use your network. Maybe you know someone who knows someone who works in the mayor's office. Then ask this person to help you set up a meeting with the mayor. Another way to catch the decision-makers' attention is to write a small piece in the local newspaper or participate in a public political event where you can introduce yourself and briefly pitch your idea.

Pitch for decision-makers: How to win them over

Potential benefits of a youth eParticipation process to highlight

- The experience of being part of a decision-making process will plant a seed in young people's minds for more active citizenship. The experience is likely to empower them to be more politically active.

- You will meet and get to know the young (future) voters.

- If you take the opinions of young people into account, the end result will be more robust, legitimate and accepted decisions.

- The involvement in an open and transparent decision-making process will increase young people's trust in your organisation.

- The participatory activities can catch the eye of the press. There is nothing like positive press!

- **And try to give as concrete examples as possible!** You can for instance present successful stories from organisations that resemble yours to showcase the benefits of a successful youth eParticipation process. Give the decision-makers the "I want that too" feeling.

If it is completely impossible to convince people with decision-making power to support your project, analyse why this is the case. Three main outcomes of this analysis are often the following:

OPTION 1

There is no will to allow young people to influence the decisions. Then you should fight! If you don't have any direct connections at decision-making level, then try to make an alliance with influential stakeholders who can put the results to decision-makers.

OPTION 2

There is a will, but they don't like your idea. Then you should reframe it and go for what is possible. You should reanalyse the decision-making process. Maybe you misunderstood how it takes place, and you tried to intervene in the wrong way.

OPTION 3

Give up. Sometimes it just proves to be the wrong time and place. Spend your energy searching for a new opportunity for a youth eParticipation project instead.

When you have the decision-makers' support, make a contract with them. A contract can be a paragraph to include in the public version of the project description. This paragraph should capture in as much detail as possible how exactly the decision-makers will use the results of the project. The contract is a way to ensure that the decision-makers will not backpedal on their promise to allow young people to influence the decision-making process.

Secure funds for your project

Without money, no project! Even if your organisation is run by volunteers it is close to impossible to carry out a project with no costs at all.

Securing funds is a highly context specific challenge. One very useful way to start is by contacting your National Youth (Information) Council. It has expertise in giving advice on these kinds of matters, and no one will know the environment for youth participation in your country better[7]. Another way to secure funds is to prepare an application for a foundation or programme financing youth participation projects. For instance, have a look at the programmes of Erasmus+[8] and the European Youth Foundation[9] to see whether your project matches one of their many yearly calls. And lastly, if a public administration has specifically asked for your project or endorsed it, you could ask them to find money in their budget to cover the project expenses.

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7 You can locate your National Youth (Information) Council by checking out the member lists of the European Youth Forum (http://www.youthforum.org/about/member-organisations) or ERYICA – European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (http://eryica.org/page/member-organisations)
8 http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/
9 http://www.coe.int/en/web/european-youth-foundation

When you have secured funds for your project, you have to draw up a budget – or modify the version you might have already made if you have applied for funds through a programme. Here the software Excel is your best friend. The number of different budget headings and the level of detail you should apply depend on your source of funding. You should always follow the budget rules of the funding provider! However, to give you an idea, some basic budget headings are usually costs for salary and costs for goods. When you have a clear idea about the budget available, it will be much easier for you to sketch a realistic eParticipation process. For instance, when you know the budget for goods it will be a guiding principle when deciding on the number and scale of your face-to-face participatory activities. The same goes for the budget for salary. This budget will help you assess the number of working hours you can allocate to planning and implementing the different project activities.

Keep in mind that a budget is not a stable document. You should adjust the budget whenever changes occur in your project plan. In other words, it always has to be up-to-date.

Sketch the process of your project from A to Z

You should now have a clear idea about the purpose of your project, the impact you want to achieve with it and the budget available. This means that you are ready to make a *rough* sketch of the process from A to Z that should of course fit into the decision-making process.

Making a short project description of 2-3 pages is a good starting point. In this description, you could include:

THE BACKGROUND OF THE PROJECT

THE PROJECT IDEA AND ITS OBJECTIVES

THE METHOD

THE BUDGET

THE TIMELINE

In the timeline, you should outline the activities you need to carry out to cross the finishing line – face-to-face as well as online activities – and when they will take place. At this stage, it will already be useful to consult the OPIN Decision Support Tool[10] to get an idea about the online process schemes and features which are offered on OPIN. For inspiration for face-to-face methods we recommend that you consult the Engage2020 Action Catalogue which is an interactive method catalogue for public participation[11]. In the Preparation Phase we will provide more tips and tricks for designing a suitable participatory process, so it is not necessary to detail the methods at this stage.

When you sketch the process keep the budget in mind! There is no point in planning a process that is very time-consuming and expensive if your budget is very limited. Time is money. Therefore, it can be highly useful to detail your budget and allocate resources to the different activities. Then you will know how many working hours you can spend on planning, let's say, the launch of the project. Such a detailed overview will reduce the risks of exceeding the budget.

This is only your initial sketch of the project. You should still be open to modifying it (and remember to update your budget accordingly!) because now it is time to meet the young participants and your endorsers with decision-making power and ask for their feedback on the initial sketch of the project.

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10 To get access to the Decision Support Tool you have to register your organisation on OPIN. You can try out the different OPIN features and get more information on the registration process here: https://opin.me/en/start-your-project/
11 The Engage2020 Action Catalogue is available here: www.actioncatalogue.eu

Involve young people in your project idea

When you have the initial sketch of your project ready, you could set up a meeting with representatives from the group of young people you have previously mapped. You should test the initial project idea on them, let them challenge it and ask for their input. This is a way to avoid having an unappealing idea and instead coming up with a project that young people would actually take part in when it is being realised.

There are more potential benefits involved with having such a meeting:

You get to know the young better = it will make it easier for you to target your project activities to the young participants.

You have the possibility of recruiting young representatives who can act as ambassadors for your project = they can help you reach out to more young participants.

You give the young people a feeling of ownership from the beginning of the project = this will increase their commitment to your project.

It is highly fruitful to meet with these young representatives continuously throughout your project whenever you are in need of insider knowledge. One way to formalise these meetings is to set up a steering committee. There are several methods to recruit these young representatives. You could for instance carry out an Open Call, so interested young people can apply to become a member, or you could team up with the local student councils. For more inspiration for recruitment see the **Preparation Phase!**

Invite the decision-making power on board

You should also test your idea on your endorsers with decision-making power and give them the opportunity to provide feedback. At this stage, you might still be in the process of convincing them to endorse the project. Inviting the (potential) endorsers to co-create the project with you and the young people from the onset of the project will enhance your chances of achieving your goals. It will give them a sense of ownership if they feel included and listened to – and this can potentially have great impact in the end. They should feel that the project is as much theirs as it is yours. The endorsers with the decision-making power are the ones who can guarantee the influence you seek for young people.
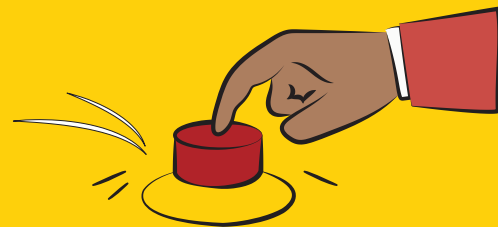
When you first have your endorsers on board you should do your best to make them stay there. This means keeping them continuously involved and updated on project developments. Your endorsers will also have important knowledge of upcoming political decisions to be made or other relevant events, so you can time your project accordingly. If you decide to invite the decision-makers to be part of the steering committee it is important that different opinions are represented, so the project will be as balanced as possible. If you for instance work with politicians, you should invite representatives from both left-wing and right-wing parties.

And if you work with stakeholders, you cannot only invite representatives from NGOs; other types of organisations should be involved too.

Update the sketch of your project

You should now take the valuable input you received from the young people and the decision-makers into account. When you have modified and further elaborated your project description, you should send it to both the young representatives and the decision-makers. Or even better set up a new meeting. There are two main reasons for this: firstly, it ensures transparency in the process, and secondly, both groups can – hopefully – see that you have listened to them. This will again strengthen their sense of ownership of the project which in all likelihood will pay off in the end. So, keep involving and consulting the young representatives and the decision-makers throughout all the phases of your project!
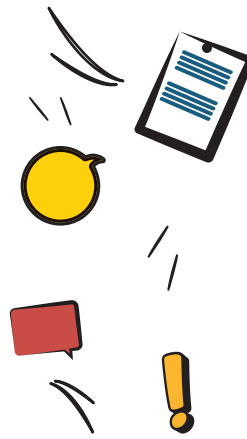
Integrate evaluation in every phase of your project

Often evaluation is only done at the end of a project. However, it can be highly valuable to spend some time evaluating after each project phase and potentially adjust original plans if needed. This is especially the case if the project will run over a longer period.

The main questions to ask yourself (and your team) are: What went well? What could have been done differently? Write down what you have learnt and keep this in mind when you evaluate the entire process from A to Z at the end of the project. These experiences represent highly valuable insights. Learn from your successes and failures the next time you set up a similar project, and share them with others who plan to carry out a youth eParticipation project.
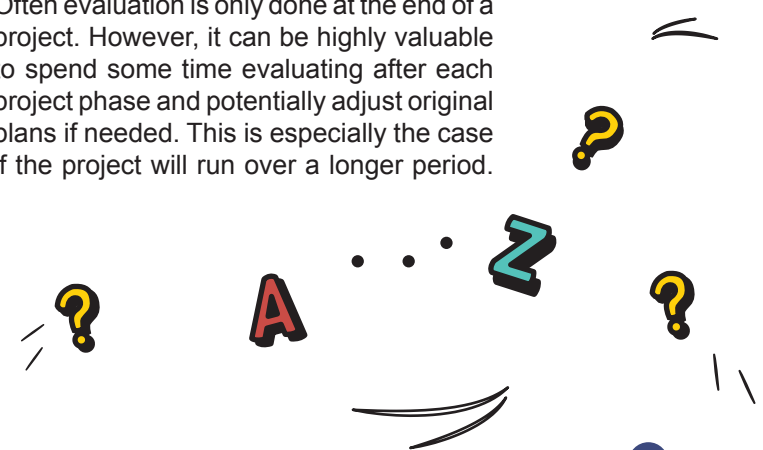
Of course, you should also include an evaluation with the young participants after the participatory activities. See the **Participation Phase** for more info on this!

PREPARATION PHASE: GET YOUR PROJECT READY

This phase is the first step in realising the project that you roughly sketched out in the idea phase. The preparation phase is often the most time-consuming one, so make sure to allocate enough time, so you will be able to have everything ready for the participation phase.

In sum, the idea phase was all about framing your project in a youth-appealing way and winning the support of decision-makers. Now it is time to concretise your project idea and set it up in detail, so you will be able to achieve your goals.

Set up an outstanding project team

Key to a great eParticipation project is a professional and dedicated project team. The leader of the project team is the project manager who should see the big picture, coordinate all project tasks and make sure that every team member meets the deadlines and sticks to the budget. Possessing the ability to keep several balls in the air is therefore crucial to be a strong project manager.

However, strong project management skills won't do it alone:

Competences that will come in handy in order to set up a successful youth eParticipation project:
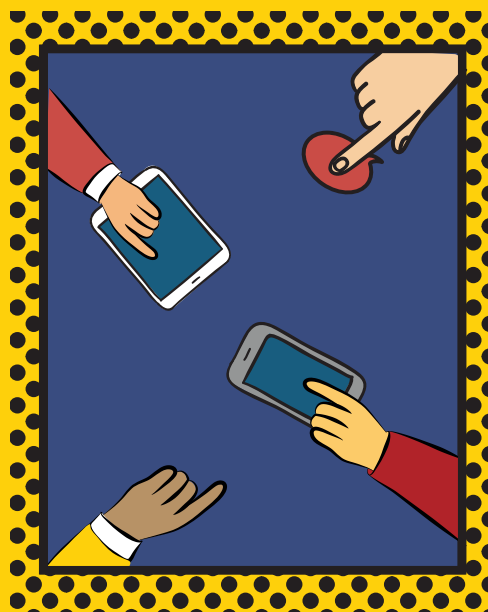
STRONG PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND ORGANISATIONAL SKILLS

STRONG COMMUNICATION SKILLS

GREAT FACILITATION SKILLS

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT DESIGNING PARTICIPATORY PROJECTS

GOOD INTERPERSONAL ABILITIES

IT SAVVY

A SOLUTION-ORIENTED APPROACH

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

A CREATIVE MIND

In some cases, a single person might possess all competences listed above. Nevertheless, it is always highly recommended to have at least a sounding board. A person acting as a sounding board can point your attention to things you have overlooked, give you new ideas for overcoming obstacles and so on. In any case, at least during face-to-face activities, you will need to draw on co-workers' assistance as you can't be in several places at the same time. All in all, the most important thing is not the actual number of team members, but whether the needed competences are present in the team. If your team consists of more than one person it is important that you meet on a regular basis, so everyone is updated on the latest project developments. If your budget is limited and you need extra help you can consider recruiting volunteers. Being part of the organising team is a good way for especially the young people to meet new people, take an interest in politics and develop new skills which can be included in their CV. But keep in mind that voluntary help is not always as reliable as paid help is.

Think about the format of your results

Before you design your participatory process and choose your methods, it is very important that you have a clear idea about what kind of format your final results should have. Here it is highly important that you listen to the decision-makers' wishes. If they have voiced a wish for the Top 10 recommendations from young people and you provide them with a catalogue with more than one hundred ideas, the chances of the decision-makers actually taking the results into account are very low.
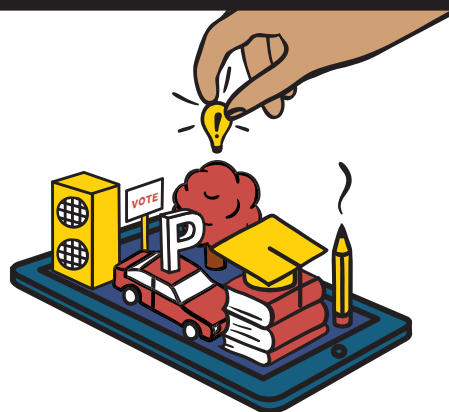
However, it might be that the preliminary result is an idea catalogue which is then being transformed into recommendations in the next steps of the project. This is also something that you have to consider when you design your process: What kind of results should be forwarded to the next activity of the project?

And consider the amount of data that each step of the participatory process can potentially generate. The last thing you want to do is to spend all your time compiling and analysing data. Therefore, put some thought into finding solutions to collecting the data in the most structured and useful way.

Ask the right questions in the right setting

In order to get useful answers, you have to ask useful questions – and this is all about framing the questions in the right way. This task often takes longer than you might expect because it can be very difficult to formulate useful questions. On the one hand, the questions should be comprehensible and interesting to young people, and on the other hand they should be able to the deliver results for the desired output. Our best piece of advice is to start drafting the questions as soon as possible and don't wait until the very last minute. Test the draft questions within your team and preferably also with the young people and the decision-makers and then use their feedback to modify them. This exercise will most likely be a recurring task, but in the end your time is well spent.

Generally seen, there are two types of questions: open-ended and closed-ended. Your desired output decides the type of question you should ask. Open-ended questions provide you with qualitative insights while closed-ended questions usually produce yes and no answers. Both types of questions have pros and cons. For instance, open-ended questions can generate huge amounts of data while closed-ended questions might not capture the nuances behind the answers.

> **Examples of open-ended and closed-ended questions**

OPEN-ENDED:

What do you think about the suggestion to build a new youth house in our town?

How would you spend the budget?

What kind of youth activities do you feel our town lacks?

CLOSED-ENDED:

Is the OPIN platform easy to use? Yes/no

Would you join the sports club? Yes/No

Do you have an account on Instagram? Yes/No

On top of this you have to consider whether a specific question should be posed to the young people in a face-to-face or an online setting. For instance, think twice about debating sensitive topics online. Keep in mind that points of view that are being expressed on the internet live longer than opinions communicated face-to-face. Completely deleting something which has been written in an online public setting proves to be impossible. So, when you plan your project, you should consider whether your discussion topic is really suitable for the OPIN platform, or it would be better to discuss aspects of it at a face-to-face event. The more sensitive the topic is, the stronger the expression of views might be.

Choose the right method(s) to achieve your objective(s)

There are tons of participatory methods out there. The difficult exercise is to find the exact method which will be appropriate to the objectives you have already outlined. This can be tricky, but the OPIN Decision Support Tool will help you. The OPIN Decision Support Tool[12] is designed as a questionnaire where you provide your answers to a number of questions. When you have finalised the questionnaire, the OPIN Decision Support Tool will provide you with an **online** participatory process which matches your project's needs. However, based on our experience, we highly recommend that you combine online and face-to-face components. It is of course possible to set up a strictly online process, but you generally raise the odds for carrying out a successful youth eParticipation project when face-to-face and online features go hand in hand.

Below we have sketched two examples of a youth eParticipation process. The first process is less expensive and time-consuming compared to the second one. Here it is important to emphasise that a long participatory process with many steps and components should not be an end in itself. More components can increase the quality of a process, but it can just as easily be a big mess.

In the first of the two process examples the youth eParticipation project is kicked off with a grand face-to-face project launch where the young people, the decision-makers, the press and other interested parties are invited. The process then begins online where the young people are asked to suggest ideas and then vote for the ones they prefer. The result of the process is a rated idea catalogue which is finally presented to the decision-makers at a press conference.

FACE-TO-FACE KICK-OFF EVENT   **OPIN PLATFORM: IDEA CHALLENGE**   **FACE-TO-FACE PRESENTATION OF RESULTS**

The second process follows on from the first process, but two more steps have been added: A face-to-face workshop where the young people review, discuss and elaborate the Top 10 ideas collected on the OPIN platform (see example of workshop programme below) and an OPIN Poll where everyone can vote for the (elaborated) idea they prefer. The result which is then presented at the press conference is a more elaborated catalogue with the most popular ideas.

FACE-TO-FACE KICK-OFF EVENT → **OPIN PLATFORM: IDEA CHALLENGE** → **FACE-TO-FACE WORKSHOP OF OPIN FEATURES** →

FACE-TO-FACE PRESENTATION OF RESULTS ← **OPIN PLATFORM: POLL** ←

For inspiration for face-to-face methods we once again urge you to check out the Engage2020 Action Catalogue[13]. Just like in the OPIN Decision Support Tool, you fill out a questionnaire, and the Action Catalogue will then suggest several methods suitable for the purpose of your project.

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12 To get access to the Decision Support Tool you have to register your organisation on OPIN. You can try out the different OPIN features and get more information on the registration process here: https://opin.me/en/start-your-project/
13 www.actioncatalogue.eu

TIME	AGENDA POINT
"YOUTH **DECIDE": 100.000 EUROS FOR YOUTH ACTIVITIES IN OUR MUNICIPALITY – HOW SHOULD WE SPEND THEM?**	
SATURDAY 25TH OF NOVEMBER 2017	
TIME	**AGENDA POINT**
09:30	**REGISTRATION AND BREAKFAST**
10:00	**WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION TO THE DAY**
10:30	**PRESENTATION OF IDEAS FROM THE IDEA COLLECTION ON OPIN**
11:15	**FIRST ROUND OF GROUP WORK** Face-to-face deliberations and reviewing and updating ideas using OPIN Text review
12:45	**LUNCH**
13:30	**SECOND ROUND OF GROUP WORK** Face-to-face deliberations and reviewing and updating ideas using OPIN Text review
15:00	**PRESENTATION OF GROUP WORK**
16:00	**EVALUATION AND WHAT'S NEXT IN THE PROJECT?** Remind the young people to vote for their favourite idea on the OPIN platform using OPIN poll
16:30 - ?	**RECEPTION AND CELEBRATION**

Compose a communication strategy to be publicly visible

The purpose of a communication strategy is to raise awareness of your project. You often want this for two reasons:

1 To capture the attention of young people so they will participate in your project; and

2 to achieve impact with your project.

Communicating about your project will increase its visibility which will hopefully strengthen the commitment of both the young participants and the decision-makers.

You need to prepare a strategy that targets each of your target groups. Composing a strategy can be complex, but it does not have to be. You have already mapped your main target groups – the young people and the decision-makers – so now you just need to decide on the main messages you want send to them and **how** to get these messages across. Creativity knows no bounds for what exactly this **how** can be. To give a few examples, it could be promotion stickers for laptops and keychains, happenings at local schools, YouTube videos with young project ambassadors advocating for the project, a project flyer, an interview in the local newspaper, a press release, and so forth. In conclusion, the **how** depends on the desired target of the message and resources available.

Besides the young people and the decision-makers, it can be useful to communicate about your project to a wider audience. This effort will increase the awareness of your project, and you will potentially win important stakeholders over, and they might help to get your messages across. Speaking of stakeholders, you should start by identifying the people and organisations that also have a stake in the decisions to be made or youth eParticipation in general. In so doing, you should think broadly – both with regards to the different types of stakeholders (from the big company to the small interest group) and the whole spectrum of interest.

The next step is to prepare targeted communication efforts. This includes making an overview of the different means of communication which you will use to communicate with your different target groups. See a guiding example below which could of course be further elaborated:

Means of communication

Target groups		Facebook	YouTube	Instagram	Website	Press releases	Local newspaper	Workshops	OPIN platform	Project flyer	Merchandise	Project launch
	Young people	X	X	X				X	X	X	X	X
	Decision-makers	X	X		X	X	X	X	X			X
	Media	X	X		X	X	X			X		X
	The general public	X	X	X			X					X

It is important that you consider communication as a continuous task which runs throughout all phases of your project. Keep the young people, the decision-makers and other stakeholders continuously updated on project developments to hold their attention. To ease this work, we recommend preparing a detailed plan where each communication activity is described and scheduled. You should take the timeline of the project activities as your starting point. The first message you could communicate to a wider audience is that the, let's say, municipality is in the process of organising a youth eParticipation project – that is a story in itself! It is very important that you start as early as possible to communicate about the project, so it is already known before the actual participatory process is kicked-off. And speaking of kick-off, you could organise a grand project launch which convinces everyone to be involved!

If your project organisation is not already present on social media (SoMe) you could create an account on one or several of these channels. You should of course pick the channel(s) where young people are already present, so they will see your updates and tweets, and hopefully share them with their network. If you have established a steering committee with young representatives, ask them which SoMe channels are the most commonly used because this highly depends on country and age group. In addition, it can be useful to create a hashtag (#) for your participatory project to be used to facilitate the online dialogue about your project, not just on the OPIN platform but across different SoMe channels too.

And one last thing: When you design your communication products, make sure to avoid copyright infringements! Everything from pictures, sound recordings to literary works can be covered by copyright. Check out Creative Commons[14] for more information on this topic.

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14 https://creativecommons.org/

What is useful to know about the young people and their communication habits?

Where do they get news from?

Which SoMe channels do they use?

When are they online?

What kind of devices do they mainly use? (e.g. smartphone, tablet, and laptop)

How to get the answers?
Start by asking the young representatives!

Provide the young participants with balanced and easily accessible information

You need to consider when and what kind of information the young participants should receive before they participate in the project and its deliberations. The answers highly depend on the purpose of your project. In some cases, a brief flyer that sets the scene will do; in other cases, a bit more background information is needed. To give an example: A project asks the young people to give input to a political strategy on youth housing which the city council is drafting. In order to give substantive and well-considered responses, the young people should receive balanced information in order to understand the issues already debated among the local politicians. But what exactly is meant by 'balanced'? It means that competing views on the topic should be presented. The material should describe both pros and cons of different options according to different stakeholders. This is the principle of providing both expertise and counter-expertise to the issues discussed. It is important that there is agreement on the disagreements which are presented in the information material. In order to ensure this, setting up an independent advisory board can be very useful. This is especially the case if the topic to be debated is politically sensitive. The composition of the advisory board should of course be balanced too. For instance, this means that if you invite a left-wing politician you should invite a right-wing politician as well.

In general, the information material should bring the young people closer to a common starting point for the deliberations. This means that the material should be equally understandable to all young participants. Therefore, think a great deal about the format of the information material and let the young representatives review it before you distribute it! The information does not have to be provided in text. It can just as well be communicated in a short film or podcast. If you use text, supplement it with graphics which visualise the main arguments which the young should have knowledge about. If the young participants receive the information material before the deliberations, then they have the opportunity to do some homework and show up at the meeting or log in to OPIN well-prepared.

Recruit the young participants

Without participants, there is no participatory project. Recruitment is often one of the most time-consuming tasks in a participatory project – and there is no indication that recruitment for online participatory activities is easier than recruiting for offline ones. Having designed a killer project is not always necessarily enough.

The first thing that you have to do is to prepare a recruitment strategy. You have already identified the young people whom you would like to invite to take part in the project. In the box below we have included a selection of methods which are often used in participatory projects. Have a look and choose the ones that suit your project and country.

RECRUIT FACE-TO-FACE

Even though parts of your project are happening online, experience shows that the best way to recruit young people and make them aware of and interested in a project is by meeting them face-to-face. One way of doing this is to meet and present the project to the young people where they already are: For example, in schools and youth and sports clubs. If you have young ambassadors it can be useful to involve them in these kinds of visits, especially if you are not a spring chicken yourself. At eye level, the young ambassadors can advocate for the importance of the young people voicing their opinion and therefore taking part in the project. Another option is to ask your endorsers with decision-making power to join. This will send the message to the young participants that the decision-makers are genuinely interested in listening to their opinions.

USE PEER-TO-PEER APPROACH

This method is similar to the snowball method which works like this: The young ambassadors invite other young people from their network to participate, who then recruit young people from their network and so on.

SEND LETTERS OF INVITATION

In the context of eParticipation it may sound like an old-fashioned method. However, receiving an invitation with your name on it in your letter box will often make the receiver feel a bit more special and take the invitation more seriously. You can of course also send an email, but the invitation can easily get overlooked in an already crammed inbox. Being able to apply this method will of course require that you have access to a record of addresses. Again, having access to and obtaining this kind of record is highly country specific: in some countries, you can obtain the addresses through the Office of Civil Registration. Another option is to buy the addresses from a market research company.

RECRUIT BY TELEPHONE

This method is similar to the method above. Instead of sending a letter of invitation you give the young people a call.

SoMe AND WEBSITE

You can invite young people to participate in your project through online advertisements and open invitations. Your young ambassadors could also play an important role here as they will most likely be members of Facebook groups and the like where they can share the project's advertisements. Have a look at the tip **Compose a communication strategy to be publicly visible** too!

If your project runs for several months, recruitment is not a one-off activity. It is something which takes place continuously. However, in this case, you need to decide whether it is important to retain the same group of people throughout the whole process, which does not necessarily have to be the case.

If it is important for your project's legitimacy that participants form a diverse and representative group of young people then you have to collect demographic data. However, this collection of data cannot be done on the OPIN platform as it only asks for a minimum of data when you sign up. So, start by reading the tip **Privacy and data protection: OPIN is a safe place!** Whether you should aim for diversity (mix of opinions and experiences) or representativeness (statistical sample of population) highly depends on where you are in your process. If you are in the early stages of your project and collecting inputs, then diversity should do. If you are at the more advanced stages of your project and voting for, let's say, different policy options then you should aim for representativeness. In any case, the method for selecting participants is the same.

The collection of demographic data should be done when young people sign up for the project. When the deadline for signing up has passed, you should go through all the registrations and put together a group that reflects the demographic distribution in the context of your project (e.g. school district, city or region). To ensure that it is only the selected young people who participate in the online activities you can set up a private process on OPIN. Learn more about this in the OPIN User Manuals![15]

Example: Socio-demographic criteria

GENDER

GEOGRAPHICAL ZONE

OCCUPATION (E.G. IF THE PROJECT INVOLVES YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE FINISHED THEIR EDUCATION)

AGE GROUP E.G. 15-20; 21-25; AND 26-30

EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

OTHER CONTEXT OR PROJECT SPECIFIC CRITERIA

Another way to recruit a diverse group of young people is to collaborate with the local schools, sports clubs or the like. This is also a way to reach young people who don't normally participate in these kinds of activities.

Take care of practicalities for your face-to-face events

This tip is rather straightforward. However, sometimes it is these simpler tasks that you tend to forget when you are totally absorbed in an exciting process. Being visibly in control of the practical organisation of project activities is a sign of professionalism which will carry over to your young participants, the decision-makers and the general public.

When you have appointed the date for an event you should book a venue. If it is important that you get a specific venue for your event, let's say the town hall, it might be easier to ask when it is available and then decide on a date. When booking a venue, the most important thing to take into account is whether it is able to accommodate the activities which you have planned for the event. If your project has political endorsers you could discuss the opportunity of having the event at their work place. Having the event at a town hall, the parliament or the like can have a motivating effect on the young people and really show them that their input will contribute to a political decision-making process. It might also be easier to convince the press to show up and cover the project.

Example of a check-list for face-to-face events

- Book a venue
- Make a seating and stage plan for the venue
- Book technical equipment
- Make a list of moderation material needed, like presentation cards and flip charts
- Make a list of communication and promotion materials to be handed out
- Finalise arrangements with speakers (for instance political endorsers or inspirational persons)
- Organise shared transport to the venue if it is difficult to reach
- Take care of catering
- Recruit staff for the event

Even if your event is well-prepared, unforeseen situations can always occur. To be able to tackle this it is always better to be overstaffed than understaffed.

15 https://opin.me/en/help/user-manual/

Prepare online community management

A key to a successful eParticipation project is a good online community manager. A community manager is a cross between a guard and a friend making sure that everything is going the right way. When discussions are side-lined, you should get discussions back on track. And most importantly, don't leave the young users alone for 24 hours. Being an online community manager is potentially more than a 9 to 5 job.

However, it is understandably not possible for you to be online day and night. Therefore, before you launch your eParticipation project you should decide how often you will be available online, and then you should communicate this clearly to the young participants. If you can't be present outside office hours, make it known to the young people when they can expect answers.

For the participants' own sake, you have to keep a watchful eye on what the young are posting. You should remove posts which expose personal information or don't live up to the Code of Conduct[16]. If you decide to remove content, you should of course notify the user.

As previously touched upon it is important to consider how your project affects your participants' privacy[17]. Based on these considerations you should set up clear rules for online behaviour in the form of do's and don'ts. To keep the online participatory activities safe, it can be highly useful to organise a face-to-face meeting that kicks off the online deliberation. At such a meeting,

you can explain what the do's and don'ts in online dialogues are. You can also give the young participants the skills to become good online debaters. More on this in the **Participation Phase**, where you can also read more about the role of the community manager once the eParticipation process has been kicked-off!

OPIN recommendations for do's and don'ts for participants

DO'S INCLUDE:

Use a pseudonym on the OPIN platform if you are a minor.
Frequently change your password.
Respect other contributors and post constructive contributions.

DON'TS INCLUDE:

Exposing personal information about yourself and others.
Expressing illegal, unethical and inappropriate views.

Carefully test the eParticipation process before it airs

It is highly important that everyone who is involved in the project management team is familiar with the OPIN platform – and especially the team members who are in charge of online community management. This will only happen if you use the platform actively and thus try all the different functionalities and features. Of course, it is especially important that the online community manager is a super user. The OPIN platform also offers user-friendly manuals. Check them out to learn more about the OPIN functionalities and user roles[18]!

When your online process is set up you should test it. In a perfect world both your project team and young representatives should test it and provide their feedback. The reason for this is twofold:

1 You have the chance to get rid of technical problems. If something doesn't work you will have time to fix it. You only have one shot! If something doesn't work when you launch the process, the young participants will most likely get bored and not take part again.

2 You have the chance to modify the contents of your process (for instance text and pictures) if you receive less positive feedback from the young representatives.

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16 The OPIN Code of Conduct is available here: https://opin.me/en/code-conduct/
17 See the tip *Ask the right questions in the right setting*.
18 https://opin.me/en/help/user-manual/

Privacy and data protection: OPIN is a safe place

Complying with privacy and data protection regulation? Phew, does this sound like too much of a mouthful? Believe us – it is not!

OPIN is a safe place. The EU[th] project and Liquid Democracy, which will host and maintain opin.me, comply with European data protection legislation. Additionally, Liquid Democracy in particular complies with the German Federal Data Protection Act (BDSG). This legislation describes how to proceed with the collection, processing or use of personal data. For example, to ensure that authorised users of data-processing systems can only access data of their authorisation level, and that personal data in the processing, use and after storage cannot be read, copied, changed and removed by unauthorised personnel.

The EU[th] project and Liquid Democracy even go beyond this regulation: Data submitted via OPIN are kept on European servers and not given to third parties. For the registration process, OPIN only asks for a minimum of data, such as a user name and a password. Moreover, it is possible to use pseudonyms when registering on OPIN.

If you want minors to take part in your project you need their parents' consent for them to do so. A minor is a young person below the age of 18. When the minors sign up on OPIN, they declare through their registration that their legal guardians agree with the participation of their son or daughter[19]. Keep in mind that it is possible that minors register on OPIN without having involved their legal guardians in this decision – but you won't be held legally accountable, if this happens. But one way to avoid this situation is to involve the parents or legal guardians more in your project.

Furthermore, we advise you to follow these basic do's and don'ts:

⚠ *OPIN STRONGLY RECOMMENDS YOU TO ADVISE YOUR PARTICIPANTS BELOW THE AGE OF 18 TO CHOOSE A PSEUDONYM AS THEIR USERNAME ONLINE.*

⚠ *RAISING AWARENESS AMONG THE PARTICIPANTS ABOUT NOT DISCLOSING PERSONAL INFORMATION ON THE PLATFORM IS EQUALLY IMPORTANT. YOU COULD BRING UP THIS TOPIC AT FACE-TO-FACE EVENTS AND/OR CLEARLY COMMUNICATE ABOUT THIS DIRECTLY ON OPIN. CAREFUL COMMUNITY MANAGEMENT/ONLINE MODERATION AND CHECKING OF PARTICIPANTS' POSTS ARE TWO ADDITIONAL IMPORTANT MEANS TO AVOID DISCLOSURE.*

⚠ *DURING FACE-TO-FACE EVENTS, YOU HAVE TO ASK FOR PERMISSION TO TAKE PHOTOS OF THE PARTICIPANTS. IF THE PARTICIPANTS ARE MINORS, YOU SHOULD INCLUDE A BOX IN THE CONSENT FORM, SO THE LEGAL GUARDIANS CAN GIVE THEIR CONSENT TO THIS TOO.*

⚠ *IF YOU COLLECT PERSONAL DATA ABOUT YOUR PARTICIPANTS YOU CANNOT SHARE THEM WITH THIRD PARTIES. PERSONAL INFORMATION INCLUDES ANYTHING THAT CAN IDENTIFY A PERSON. YOU HAVE TO KEEP PERSONAL DATA PHYSICALLY SEPARATE FROM INFORMATION YOU HAVE GATHERED DURING PROJECT EVENTS.*

If you are ever in doubt if your project is legally compliant or have questions about data protection, you should contact your national data protection authority[20]. It is always better to be on the safe side when it comes to privacy and data protection!

19 See item number 3 of the OPIN Privacy Policy: https://opin.me/en/privacy-policy/
20 http://ec.europa.eu/justice/data-protection/article-29/structure/data-protection-authorities/index_en.htm

PARTICIPATION PHASE: PUT YOUR PROJECT TO WORK

'All' you have to do now is to carry out your participatory activities. If you have carefully done your work in the first two phases of your project, this phase should prove to be uncomplicated. However, it does not mean that you can just lean back and relax.

You should now have taken care of all the practical preparations, so you are ready to put your project into practice. Now it is all about creating a good environment for the participation to take place – and last but definitely not least to have an impact.

In some cases, this chapter will address the face-to-face and online activities separately. This is done to highlight some of the differences that need to be taken into account when conducting these processes. However, many of the tips and tricks which are presented are of relevance to both types of participation.
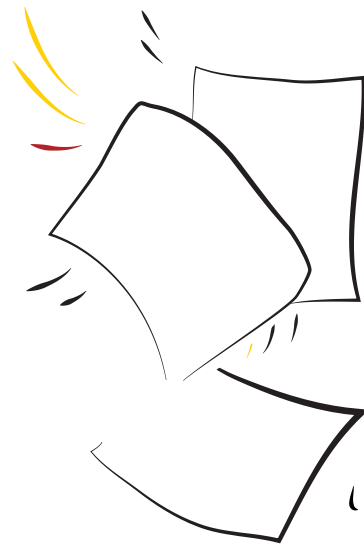
Prepare a step-by-step guide for your face-to-face participatory event

The absolute best way to ensure that your event runs exactly as you have planned and wished for is to make a detailed step-by-step guide of the whole event. In this context, a step-by-step guide is a document where all points on the programme are fleshed out in detail, so every team member knows exactly what to do when and where. It is highly useful to develop individual guides for each assigned role at the event. Below you can find an example of a step-by-step guide for a project manager who has the overall coordination responsibility at a workshop.

Based on the example programme from the **Preparation Phase**

YOUTH DECIDE: 100.000 EUROS FOR YOUTH ACTIVITIES IN OUR MUNICIPALITY – HOW SHOULD WE SPEND THEM?		
TIME	**AGENDA POINT**	**Tasks and responsibilities: Project manager**
08:30	Staff briefing	Gather the staff, make sure that everybody is there, and if not find substitutes. Encourage and motivate everyone. Repeat (very briefly) the roles and tasks of everyone. Clarify uncertainties and answer questions. Make sure that all material and equipment is there and is functioning.
09:30	Registration and breakfast	Make sure that you have staff placed at the entrance to help and guide the young people and to make sure they receive papers, merchandise and their nametags with table numbers. Make sure that visitors (journalists, politicians, and others) are taken care of and are seated. Make sure that group moderators go to their table.
10:00	Welcome and introduction to the day	Start the programme by letting the politician begin. Make sure that the politician keeps the time. Introduce yourself, thank the young people for participating, and make a short presentation of the project.
10:30	Presentation of ideas from the idea collection on OPIN	Introduce the presentations. Make sure that the young presenters keep the time.
11:15	First round of group work	Present the task of this session. Make sure that the programme and time schedule is followed. Make sure that all members of the staff actively fulfil their tasks.
12:45	Lunch	Take your time to speak with the young people and ask them how things are going. Let the participants know when there is 5 minutes left of the break, so the next session can start on time.
...	...	And so on...

Organise a training session for all team members

In order to make everything run as smoothly as possible it is highly recommended that you organise a training session a few days before a face-to-face event. Here every person who has a role in the programme should participate. You should try and send all relevant materials such as the programme, information material and step-by-step guides well in advance, so everyone has time to read it beforehand.

During the training, the project team should explain the purpose of the youth eParticipation project and more specifically the objectives of the event. You should carefully go through every point in the step-by-step guide and explain the different roles at the event. Make sure to allocate time for questions and answers, so uncertainties about the programme, roles and the like can be clarified beforehand. If table discussions are part of the event, it can be very useful to make an exercise where you play out the discussions in order to show how the group moderator should act. During this exercise, you can simulate different situations which might occur during the discussions and then talk about how the table moderator could solve a potential problem. If you use eParticipation features during the face-to-face event the table moderators should also test them, so they are ready to help if the young participants have questions.

When decision-makers have a role in the programme, it can be very useful also to organise a briefing session with them, so they are primed for the event and know exactly what is expected from them. If they don't have the time for a personal meeting, do the briefing session on the phone.

Do a final check-up and be visibly in control of your face-to-face event(s)

The last thing you should do before a face-to-face event is to check up on the practicalities.

Example of a check-list: Getting the final details ready for the event

- ☑ Prepare and print all materials (for example name tags and programmes)
- ☑ Make sure that all written consent forms have been collected (if your participants are minors)
- ☑ Check that everything is ready at the venue (for example seating arrangement and stage)
- ☑ Check that all technical systems are working (for example Wi-Fi, AV and IT equipment)
- ☑ Adjust the composition of groups if some of the young participants have sent their apologies
- ☑ Contact important speakers and give them a final briefing (a kind way to remind busy people about the event)

On the day of the event you can then focus on what is actually the most important: Carrying out a successful event with happy young participants and great results as the outcome!

Introduce rules for good dialogue to the young participants

It is vital that the young people feel respected and are comfortable with engaging in the deliberations face-to-face as well as online. In some cases, your project might be their first experience in taking part in a democratic exercise. Therefore, it is even more important that they have a good experience, so they will actually take part the next time they are invited to express their opinion. One way of ensuring that is to agree on a set of rules that should guide the deliberations. Below you will find a list of rules that has successfully been used in many face-to-face citizen participation events over the years. We hope it will inspire you to develop your own!

TREAT EVERYONE WITH RESPECT

DO NOT INTERRUPT EACH OTHER

FOCUS ON THE SUBJECT

WHEN YOU COMMENT, TRY TO BE CONSTRUCTIVE

THE (GROUP) MODERATOR IS NEUTRAL AND DOESN'T PARTICIPATE IN THE DEBATE

LISTEN CAREFULLY TO WHAT OTHERS HAVE TO SAY

TAKE PART IN THE DISCUSSION

KEEP COMMENTS BRIEF AND TO THE POINT

THE (GROUP) MODERATOR DECIDES WHOSE TURN IT IS TO SPEAK

Before the deliberation starts you should go through your **Rules for good dialogue** with the young people – in a non-lecturing way! Having a group moderator is the most efficient way to ensure that they follow these rules during the deliberations.

Keep the young continuously activated and motivated online

At this stage, you should have prepared every detail regarding online community management, so now it is all about carefully managing the online community of the young participants. In sum, the role as an online community manager involves moderating the discussions, activating the young people, and keeping the eParticipation process safe. Check out the OPIN User Manuals to learn more about the technical actions you can perform in your role as online community manager (i.e. initiator and moderator).[22]

eParticipation usually happens over a period of time. Keeping young people engaged in the process can be a challenge, but here are some tips to keep them activated and motivated. You need to ensure an ongoing good dialogue between the young participants. This means that you have to be an active and attending moderator and establish a good relationship with the young people. Feedback and support is vital. You should respond to their questions and queries on the platform as well as via email as soon as possible. Otherwise, they might lose interest. Remember to communicate clearly when they can expect that you, the online community manager, are online!

If the level of activity is low, it is your role to motivate the young people to be more active. Let's say that an idea has been posted. Then you should encourage the participants to further develop the idea by asking clarifying and cheering questions. But remember that you have to be neutral and not favour some ideas over others!

Another way to motivate the participants to actively take part in the deliberations is to ask the recipients of the results to be online within a certain timeframe. Here the decision-makers could either moderate the debate or answer questions from the young people in an encouraging manner. Stakeholders or experts could also be invited to do this. However, before activating this tip, carefully consider the consequences of letting the decision-makers take part in the deliberations. They can potentially influence the outcomes of the process, so you, the online community manager, have to be awake, so this doesn't happen.

Lastly, the online community manager has a very important role with regards to keeping the online process safe. For the young participants' own sake, you have to keep a watchful eye on what they are posting. You should remove posts which expose personal information or don't live up to the Code of Conduct[23] and the online do's and don'ts that you have decided on in the **Preparation Phase**. If you decide to remove posts, you should of course notify the user.

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21 For online specific rules and tips also have a look at *Prepare online community management* and *Keep the young continuously activated and motivated online.*
22 https://opin.me/en/help/user-manual/user-roles/
23 The OPIN Code of Conduct is available here: https://opin.me/en/code-conduct/

As previously mentioned the EUth project recommends that minors use a pseudonym on the OPIN platform. It might happen that some participants exploit the fact that they have not revealed their real identity and therefore see an opportunity to deliberate in a harsher tone. Regardless of pseudonym, if someone ruins it for the other participants you have to tell them to play by the rules. And if this doesn't help you have to take the consequences and evict the person in question from the project. However, all in all, there are more pros than cons with regard to minors using pseudonyms in the long run!

Ask the young participants to evaluate

The purpose of evaluation activities is twofold. Firstly, and as touched upon in the Idea phase, you will learn what went well, and what you could do differently the next time you set up a similar project. Secondly, it is documentation for decision-makers. If the project receives positive evaluation, it will increase the odds for decision-makers endorsing a new youth eParticipation project in the future. For instance, it speaks for itself if 99 % of the young answer that they would like to take part in a similar project. And if the young evaluate the organisation of the project positively, the chances are that the decision-makers will ask your team to organise the next project too. In the box below we have included an example of an evaluation form which you can draw inspiration from.

Numbers often say a lot, but not everything. If you would like to know what exactly can be improved you will most likely need qualitative input too. One way to accumulate this knowledge is to invite randomly selected participants – or your steering committee – to an evaluation meeting a few days after the event. Another option which could potentially also give the project good publicity is to make small videos where the young participants share their impressions of the project. Besides presenting them to the decision-makers, these videos could be shared on SoMe channels and be used for recruitment purposes when you start a new youth eParticipation project. But make sure that the filmed participants have given their consent to the video being shared on SoMe channels or to use it in other ways in the future.

Inspirational yes/no questions for an evaluation form

- Were the materials and videos balanced and informative?

- Were different and opposing views presented and discussed?

- Are you generally satisfied with the organisation of the project?

- Do you believe that the results will be used in a meaningful way for political decision-making?

- Should projects like Youth Decide be arranged in the future on different and/or similar issues?

- Would you take part in a project like Youth Decide again?

Follow-up with your participants

You should gather all team members for an internal evaluation. Before this meeting it is highly useful if a team member has already gone through the participants' feedback, so these valuable comments can be included in the discussions. If you are doing multiple face-to-face events you should learn from their feedback and adjust your activities accordingly.

Regardless if the activity is face-to-face or online, the key word in this phase is: Follow-up! You should keep the young participants updated on the progress of your project. You should communicate the results of the event and explain how they have already been and will be used. You should do this to demonstrate that their contributions matter and keep them engaged in the project.

OUTCOME PHASE: MAKE YOUR PROJECT COUNT

Remember, success is measured on the impact you make. This phase is all about making your project count. Well not all — you should also evaluate your project, so you are primed to make an even better and more successful youth eParticipation project the next time.

As already touched upon, impact can be many things. It can be the learning that the young people experience while taking part in the participatory project; it can be the positive impression that local politicians and decision-makers get of youth participation projects; it can also be translated directly into decisions about budgetary allocations, investment in recreational facilities, and so much more. In your case impact is primarily realising the goals you set in the **Idea phase**. No matter what kind of impact you aimed for in your project it is highly important to show the young people that their active participation in a democratic decision-making process can make a difference.

You are almost at the finishing line. Nevertheless, there is still work involved in preparing and transforming the project results into accessible output – which should then be communicated to the decision-makers and beyond. And don't forget the evaluation!

Communicate the results in an easily accessible, transparent and appealing way

The output of your **participation phase** can take many forms. No matter the form it is very important that the results are presented in a transparent way which also appeals to the recipients. As there are several recipients of the results, targeted efforts are also highly relevant here. You can ask the different groups of recipients how they would prefer to receive the results. The decision-makers might want it one way, the media a second, and young people a third.

Besides presenting the actual results in the form of ideas, recommendations or other, it is also important that you clarify the significance and relevance of your project results. You should make it clear to everyone that there is real quality output to be gained from involving young people in decision-making processes. To put it another way, you should use your results to show how well youth participation works.

Present your results to decision-makers face-to-face

Hopefully you had endorsers who initially made a promise about taking the results of the project into account. It is your responsibility to make sure that they keep their word. If nobody made this promise, you should continue trying to convince the decision-makers of the importance of including young people's voice in the decisions to be made.

The best way to present your results to the decision-makers is to meet with them face-to-face. An email with an attached report rarely gets read. This presentation meeting can take many forms and highly depends on what the decision-makers agree to. For instance, if your project has been carried out in a municipality you can arrange a press conference where you and a few of the young participants present the results to the decision-makers and other stakeholders. In this way, the results will be disseminated more widely and maybe the media will cover the event. This will put additional pressure on the decision-makers to listen to the young people's opinions. The meeting can of course also be of smaller scale. For instance, you can present the results at the city council meeting or meet bilaterally with the decision-makers to share the results with them. All in all, only your creativity sets the boundaries.

You should be well-prepared for these meetings. The decision-makers might ask critical questions about the project that you should be ready to answer. The questions you may meet are often about the number of participants, representativeness, the legitimacy of the results, the neutrality of the information material, and so on. Therefore, before this kind of meetings you could gather your project team or your sounding board and go through the potential questions and prepare an answer to them.

One meeting with the decision-makers is usually not enough. You need to follow up and remind them about the unique results that you have presented to them. In other words, you should not give up too early, but be persistent, and hopefully new opportunities for influence will occur.

Communicate your results beyond decision-making level

It is not enough only to present the results to decision-makers. Above all, follow-up with the young participants is highly essential. Firstly, you should send the results to them. Secondly, you should keep them updated on the initiatives that are being realised to make their input count, and what impact it has made so far.

In general, your results should be freely available to all interested parties online. However, you should directly communicate the results to all the target groups you identified when you prepared the communication strategy for your project. To get public mention will have a positive effect on your chances for reaching your goals.

Assess the impact of your project

An impact assessment will help you demonstrate what you have achieved with your project. It can, however, be a difficult task to document and measure political impact. But if you initially set up clearly defined goals, you're off to a good start. An impact assessment is always useful. If the impact is low you will learn what to do differently in your next project. If the impact is high you can use it when convincing the decision-makers to endorse your next youth eParticipation project, when applying for funding, or when promoting youth participation in general.

It is highly important to remember that impact is so much more than making concrete political decisions. Therefore, the impact assessment is your chance to showcase the impact that the project has had on many different levels. Firstly, there are the more indirect results which could be the positive impact that the project has hopefully had, both on decision-makers and on the young people. For instance, these results could be that the young participants' knowledge of politics, decision-making and the specific topic(s) discussed has been raised, and – for stakeholders and decision-makers as well – that they have formed (new) attitudes and opinions on the specific topic(s) discussed. And hopefully the experience has planted a seed in the young participants for more active citizenship! Secondly, the deliberations can uncover positions and issues that decision-makers haven't previously been aware of. This might lead to a reframing of the political debate. Furthermore, and this is our wish, the eParticipation project will contribute to introducing new ways of governance within the organisation involved.

Evaluate and sustain the project from the beginning to the end

You and your project management team should start with evaluating the fourth and final phase individually – just like you have done with the previous three phases. Then you should look at the project in full. Here the evaluation sheets from each of the four phases will be of great use. All in all, use this opportunity to learn from what went well and what did not and reflect on suggested solutions to this. Summarise these insights in a brief report which you can draw on the next time you carry out a youth eParticipation project.
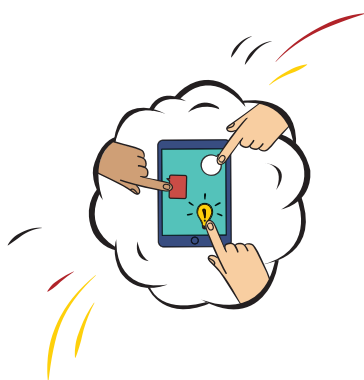
However, it is not enough to only evaluate the process internally in your team. You could also invite the youth representatives and the decision-makers to two separate evaluation and follow-up meetings. It is highly useful to include their perspectives on the process in your evaluation report as well. The meeting with your endorsers with decision-making power is also a great opportunity to plant a seed for your next collaboration on youth participation.

And an important concluding remark: Before you close down the project make sure that all project resources are accessible to everyone in your organisation, so no important knowledge will be lost. You can benefit from these resources in your next youth eParticipation project. Instead of starting from scratch you can update and adjust already existing files and, in that way, be even more efficient in your planning process.

Initiate your next youth eParticipation project

If you made it all the way through to this paragraph it means that you have either read all pages of the OPIN guidelines or carried out a youth eParticipation project. Either way, congrats! The EU[th] project partners hope that the OPIN guidelines have wetted your appetite for carrying out (more) youth eParticipation projects. In general, citizens – young and old alike – are very politically engaged after having taken part in participatory processes. Therefore, our advice to you is to initiate your next project as soon as possible, so you can sustain this energy. It is this kind of energy that contributes to keeping our democracy alive!

EUTH *PROJECT PARTNERS*

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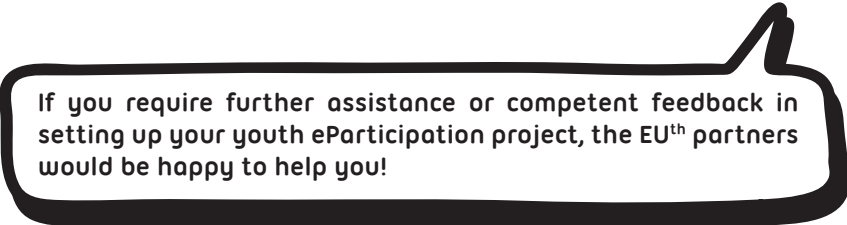Danish Board of Technology Foundation (DBT), Denmark
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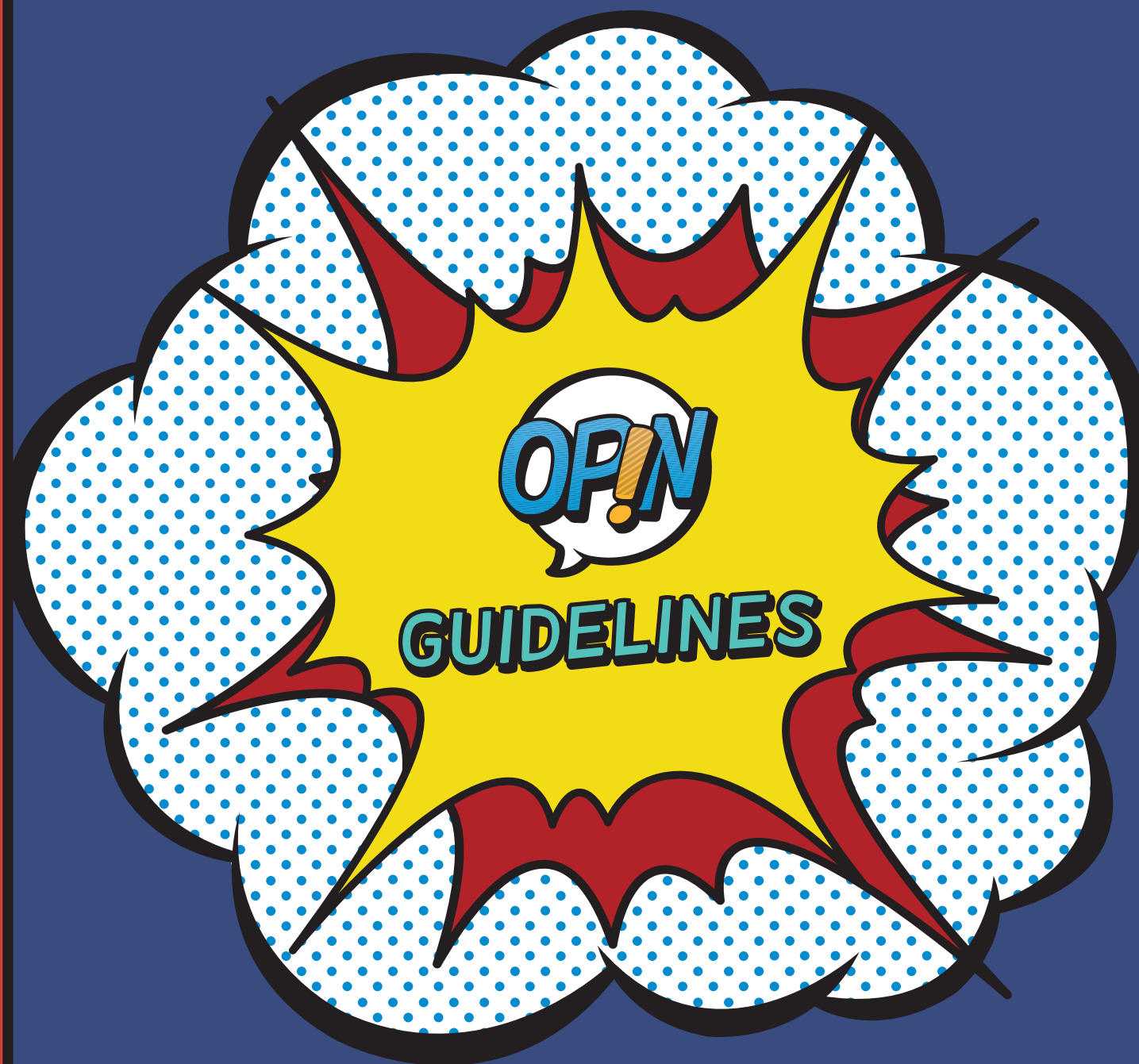
> If you require further assistance or competent feedback in setting up your youth eParticipation project, the EUth partners would be happy to help you!

THANK YOU FOR READING THE OPIN GUIDELINES!

We hope that you found them useful and wish you the best of luck with your youth eParticipation project!