

Youth Social Media Playbook

Useful tips and practical advice for using social media in your projects

If you are looking to use social media with young people, then this is the playbook for you.

But wait... what even is a playbook?... We're glad you asked! Think of this as your personal guide to the ways you can use social media in your projects with young people. This playbook will help you explore options that might work for you and give you some pointers.

But how does it work?

The playbook is split into three sections: **goals**, **parameters** and **principles**.

Goals and **parameters** are designed to show you the kind of things you can do, and to give you some pros and cons for the different ways you might want to set things up. The **principles** are just that, important things to bear in mind when doing any work on social media with young people.

To back it all up we have **case studies**, so you can see how it all comes together in the real world. These are available on the website you downloaded this guide from

Or you can jump straight in and start exploring...

What's your goal?

A good to place to start is thinking about what you want to achieve using social media



Understand more

Ask a community what matters to them, use social media for rapid reporting on an important issue for young people



Get stronger

Build capacity, deliver training, upskill, whatever you want to call it. Work together, to get better at something.



Chart a course

Get strategic recommendations for your organisation, include the voices of youth in your future direction.



Celebrate

Boost engagement through events. Use social media to showcase young people's creativity and talent.



Pay attention

Launch awareness campaigns, use social media for advocacy and for gaining new members.

Social media is so much more than just cats and brands. It can be used to support and structure all kinds of projects and goals.

From creating new ways for young people to contribute, to broadening your reach, to structuring workshops and skills sessions. Once you know your overall goal, you can choose the **parameters** that best support it

Parameters

Simple decisions can have a HUGE impact on how your project unfolds.

Explore the options below to see the different ways of setting things up. Find the options that best suit you, your overall goals, and the young people you are working with.

1. Social Media Type

Different types of social media are good for different types of projects

Social Networks

Social networks, like Facebook and Twitter, are some of the oldest social media. Because of this, typical demographics tend to be older. However they are still great for creating shared spaces, such as private groups for specific projects, support and health groups, and for linking your project with other official organisations most of which will have social media presences on social networks.

- ✓ Great for creating spaces for people to come together
- ✓ Great for connecting your project with organisations and institutions
- ✗ Not so good for reaching a young audience
- ✗ Not great at privacy and security

Media Sharing Networks

Media sharing apps like Instagram and Snapchat typically focus on users creating and sharing images and videos. They make the perfect home for strong simple messages and compelling imagery, such as for viral campaigns that highlight important issues. Bear in mind that young people's use of media sharing networks is typically heavily curated with many young people holding different accounts for different audiences.

- Great for engagements that use lots of visuals
- Great for campaigns and awareness raising
- Not so good for organising and coordinating people
- Not great for text heavy or complex tasks

Messengers

Messengers, like WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger, are amongst the most popular social media on the planet and are the best at supporting direct communication between people. Typically the wealth of communication options, as well as the ability to form groups, make them perfect for creating teams and project groups. They can equally be used for keeping in touch with young people throughout a project's duration, as well as sending information and reminders. Just bear in mind that messengers are often tied to personal data, so may not be suitable or appropriate in every context.

- Great for organising and coordinating groups of people
- Great for multimedia communications options
- Not great for anonymity as often tied to personal accounts and details (e.g. phone number)
- Not great for public facing projects and engagements

2. Timeline

Different time spans suit different communities and goals

One-off events

One-off events are great for more public facing and open projects where you might not know your young people in advance. Because of this they can require lots of advance promotion and communications work, which is why they work well alongside other events. Typical uses might be setting a series of quick polls, generating responses to a 'hashtag challenge' or even gathering thoughts and opinions on an issue over multiple days.

- ✓ Great for large scale engagements and when used alongside real world events and festivals
- ✓ Doesn't require long-term commitment or motivation from young people
- ✗ Not as good for more complex tasks or deeper engagement
- ✗ Success can depend a lot on pre-event promotion and comms

Event series

Short series of social media engagements work well when more depth is required, for example hosting a series of skill sessions on community podcasting, or leading a group through the stages of a design process for a new service. Generally this requires more commitment, and more organisation, but when coupled with an end celebration or showcase event, can lead to brilliant project outcomes.

- ✓ Great for workshops, skills sessions, and creative tasks
- ✓ Great when used to build towards showcase or celebration events
- ✗ Generally requires a larger commitment from young people, so may put some off
- ✗ Requires more organisation and scheduling, so not as suitable for lighter-weight engagements

Ongoing

This is best when support and contact is needed over longer periods of time. It's useful to think of this kind of arrangement as 'infrastructure' for establishing contact methods and for longer-term reporting and feedback. Typical uses could be for the establishing of support groups, peer support networks, and connections with mentors or professional development. But bear in mind, that what's relevant now might not make sense in a year or so.

- Great for support groups, building community and structuring ongoing relationships
- Great for lightweight connections over time (e.g. for collecting impact evidence over a year or so)
- Much more likely to be impacted by the ever changing fashions and trends of social media and young people
- Can be tough to sustain engagement over longer periods of time

3. Groups and Teams

The way people are organised on social media changes what you can do

Everyone all together

Grouping everyone together in your project can work really well when groups are smaller and/or familiar with each other. The larger social media groups get, the more likely it is that those less comfortable don't contribute. However, this isn't always a problem, and having spaces where young people can sit back and be more passive doesn't mean that they aren't engaging with the conversation or content.

- Good for groups who know each other well
- Good for sending out information to lots of people at once
- Good for hosting discussions and 'live' events
- Not good for encouraging contribution from people who don't normally contribute
- Not good for complex tasks and division of responsibility
- Not good when privacy and confidentiality are required

Teams

Small teams are perfect when you want to work with large groups, but still want everyone to contribute. In particular they work well for creative tasks and project based work. For example, producing a mini-film or producing a news story. Messengers make a natural fit for small teams, where the ability to group people becomes super useful.

- Good for tackling complex or creative tasks (e.g. creative writing, photography, podcasting)
- Good for encouraging contribution from people who don't normally contribute
- Good for competitions and project work
- Increases workload of organisers who need to support teams
- Can be hard for team members to get a sense of what other teams are doing

One on One / Individual

For situations when you need more privacy, or where groups just aren't appropriate. Most social media has direct messaging features which can be used for this. A typical use is for creating mentoring links, where the content is specific to the young person, or when discussing things the young person is less comfortable discussing in group contexts. Obviously this isn't appropriate for every context, so think carefully.

- Good for when privacy and confidentiality are important
- Good for mentoring or peer support
- Good when groups don't know each other well
- Increases workload of organisers
- Not good for complex tasks/division of responsibility
- Loses the main benefit of social media - sociability

4. Responsibilities

Giving people responsibilities can change how a group works

Treating everyone the same

In many cases, there is no need to assign responsibilities, particularly when young people are comfortable with each other and when group dynamics are already strong. If this isn't the case however, it can be a good idea to think about things like icebreaker activities and even templating / modelling early contributions. It is always useful to establish a group identity (e.g. through team names, mascots and shared goals).

- ✓ Good for holding open discussions
- ✓ Good when the group already knows each other well
- ✗ Can lead to dominant personalities
- ✗ Can lead to low contributions from some members

Choosing group leaders

Giving some young people leadership roles works well when you are also using small teams. This works particularly well if that leader can help set examples for contributing to the project, encourage other young people to take part and generally act as an ambassador. Bear in mind though that not everyone likes this extra burden.

- ✓ Good for team based work
- ✓ Good for setting examples of how to contribute
- ✗ Puts an extra burden on some people
- ✗ Some peer groups are less comfortable with leadership roles

Giving everyone a responsibility

This works well when groups don't know each other that well as it gives everyone a role and something to do. Perfect for ensuring contributions from everyone, and for breaking down complex tasks into smaller chunks (e.g. giving responsibilities for writing, audio, cinematography and directing in a film making project). Be aware though that there is more organisation work required for this, and that not all groups and tasks can be neatly divided up.

- ✓ Good when breaking down complex tasks into manageable
- ✓ Good for giving people a sense of identity within a group
- ✗ Requires more organisational overhead
- ✗ Doesn't fit every group size or task

5. Openness

Making parts of your social media project public can make a big difference

Everything open to the public

This works well when you don't have a set group of young people to work with, for example when gathering wide sets of opinions and thoughts on a topic over social media, or raising awareness. It is less suited for when working more closely with a group of young people. And of course, when things are open to the public, you can get a lot of junk back, so prepare for extra moderation.

- ✓ Good for generating lots of ideas
- ✓ Good for transparency and raising profile if your project
- ✗ Can discourage contributions from people less comfortable communicating publically
- ✗ Requires extra moderation

Public showcase events

The best of both worlds, having a public event at the end of your project (e.g. to showcase what young people have produced) allows you to work closely with youth but still communicate their voice effectively to stakeholders, communities and the wider public. When coupled with short event series, these act as a perfect motivational deadline for project work.

- ✓ Great for focussing activity towards an end goal
- ✓ Great for publicly demonstrating results of your project
- ✗ Requires some foresight and planning

Completely private

In some situations, it just might not be appropriate to make projects open to the public. But you might need to think carefully about how to capture the project (e.g. for funding and progress reports). Most social media allows you to export data, which you may need to later anonymise as appropriate.

- ✓ Great for building trust within a group
- ✓ Good for working around sensitive topics
- ✗ Not great for including the wider community
- ✗ Not great for demonstrating the value of your project

Overall Principles

When it comes to any social media project with young people, there are some general principles that are ALWAYS useful to keep in mind



Be authentic

There is nothing worse than jumping on trends or memes to try and seem with it. You'll be spotted a mile off.

It is far better to be authentic and honest. It might seem strange in a world of Instagram influencers and fake faces, but authenticity is an important factor in how young people relate online. Of course this is important for building trust and communication, but also because in a world of fake news and misinformation, authenticity is an increasingly valuable commodity on social media. Keep your messaging honest, ideally with a recognisable person (don't worry about being flash), and you'll be fine.



Know the digital environment

Facebook for family, Snapchat for friends... Different apps are for different things, so where you choose to communicate will affect how it is perceived.

That doesn't mean just go wherever is popular, as it is important to respect boundaries. Young people need spaces that they call their own, and this is true on social media where many young people have different accounts for different uses and different sets of friends. Choosing the right social media platform that allows young people to keep their personal and professional online lives separate is important.



Know your young people

Get a sense of where they are online and what they use social media for. Ask them what excites them on social media, and why.

Understanding young people's relationship to social media is the first step to delivering effective projects on it. Learn who their favourite YouTubers are, who they watch on TikTok, which influencers they follow. The more you know, the better decisions you'll make on using social media in your projects. Plus it's always a good idea to give young people room to talk about what they enjoy and are passionate about.



Format your media

A bit of a simple one, but make sure you format any images and videos to suit where you're posting. Google if you're unsure.

There are guidelines for each social media on how to format media (e.g. size, dimensions, file types) so that it is presented at its best. All of this information can be found with a quick search online, and it just helps you avoid any simple errors. There are even websites that will automatically format your media for you or help you preview what it will look like. There is nothing worse than spending ages creating the perfect piece of content only for it to be automatically cropped out of all recognition when you click post.



Know your voice

Make sure your tone and the way you communicate on social media is consistent. This is important for building trust.

What in marketing they call a 'brand voice'. As well as helping you stand out and your work be more recognisable, staying consistent is particularly important with young people who are very careful in choosing which organisations they will engage with. This principle goes hand in hand with 'be authentic', as one of the cornerstones for building trust and effective communication with young people.



Let the young people lead

The more control young people have over your social media projects, the better. Chances are they are the experts, not you.

This one speaks for itself, in fact you could replace the other principles with this. When you place young people at the heart of your social media projects you make them more authentic, and more powerful. This could be from letting them make decisions on how to structure and use social media in your projects, to acting as social media ambassadors, to letting them completely control your social media accounts.

About

Learn more about the playbook and why it was made

Project

This playbook was created as a resource for any organisation or institution who wants to use social media to more effectively engage with young people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. It is a result of a project by Action Lab, Monash University, the Monash Migration and Inclusion Centre on “Co-designing and scaling effective COVID-19 communication strategies for young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in Victoria”.

Although the project started with COVID-19 in focus, it quickly became clear that young people have more on their mind than the pandemic. That’s why this playbook is about all types of projects and goals that put young people at the heart of the decision making, and lets them express what matters to them through the social media they already use and are comfortable with.

Team

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Contact

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