



# So, you want to partner with an (i)NGO?

A Toolkit for Young People  
as Equal Partners



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# Why a guide for young people?

Are you a young person  
with a **burning desire**  
to make a difference  
in your community?



Are you looking to  
**collaborate** with an  
established (i)NGO to  
amplify your impact?



**Then this  
toolkit is  
for you!**



In this dynamic and ever-changing world, the power and necessity of young people as innovators and change makers cannot be underestimated.

**Young people possess** boundless energy, creativity, and a fresh perspective that can revolutionise the way we address social, economic, and environmental challenges.

However, partnering with an (i)NGO can be a daunting task, with its own set of complexities and intricacies.

**We designed this toolkit** to bridge this gap and equip young changemakers like yourself with the necessary knowledge to partner with an (i)NGO. This toolkit will help you to navigate the partnership landscape with confidence and clarity.

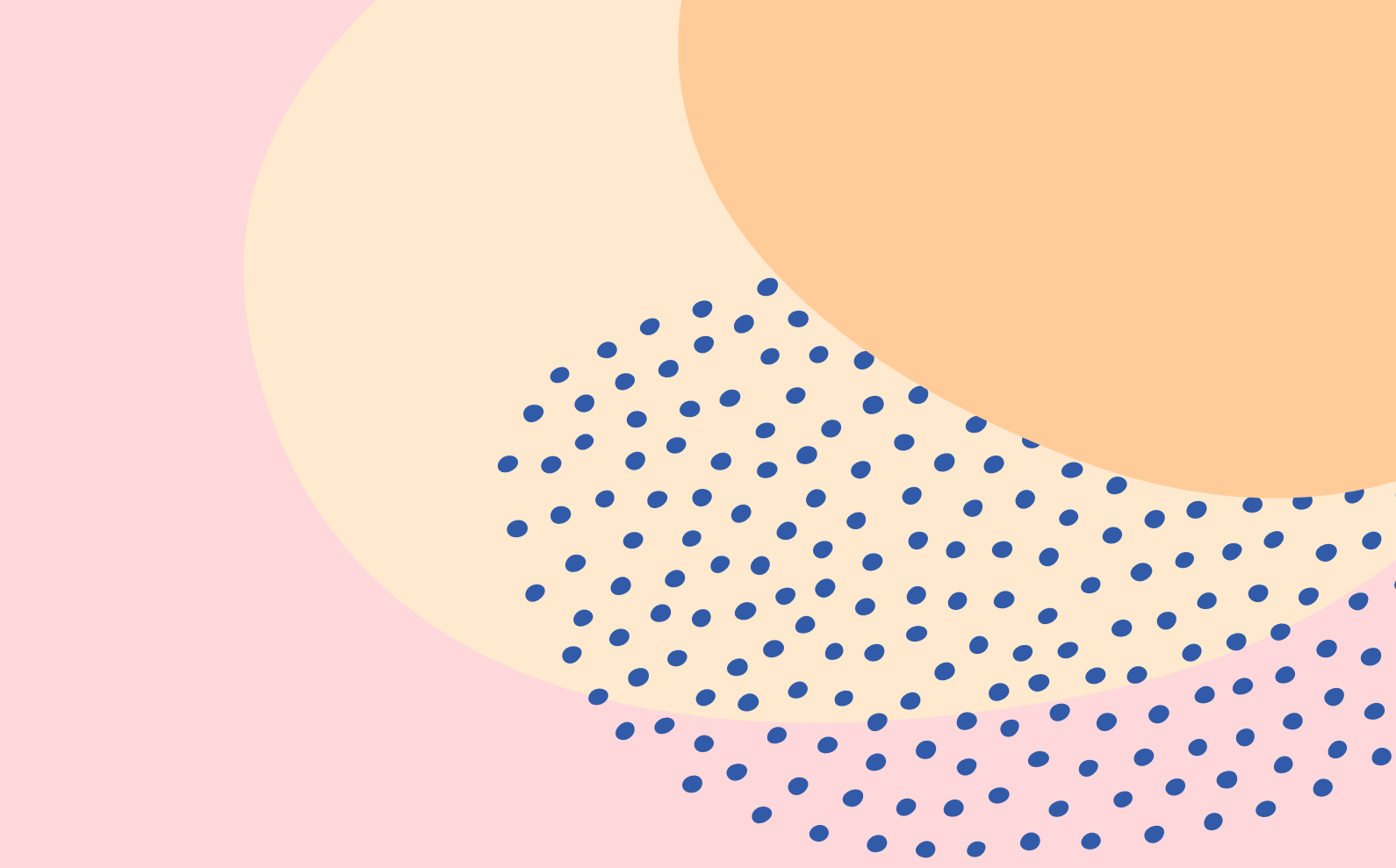
It has been developed by Plan International together with CHOICE for Youth & Sexuality, a youth-led organisation based in the Netherlands.

This toolkit was created with the input of young people and Youth Led Organisations from all around the world and Plan International country offices with extensive experience in the nonprofit sector.

**Welcome to the  
Toolkit for young  
people as equal  
partners!**

This toolkit has been developed by





**Why do (i)NGOs  
want to partner  
with young people?**

**And why might young  
people want to partner  
with an (i)NGO?**

There are many reasons why (i)NGOs actively seek to partner up with young people and YLOs. Young peoples' expertise is super important in many ways. Likewise, for the YLO, partnering up with an (i)NGO can also provide great opportunities.

## (i)NGOs and young people can make an **awesome team**. Here's are some reasons why:



Young people bring **fresh perspectives** to social issues, offering innovative ideas and solutions that might not be obvious to older generations. Their unique insights can lead to more effective strategies for addressing complex challenges.



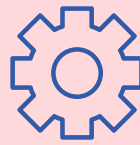
**Energy and Passion:** young people are often full of energy, enthusiasm, and passion for creating positive change. This energy can be used to drive impactful projects and initiatives forward.



Involving young people ensures that their voices, concerns, and needs are **accurately represented** in decision-making processes. This helps avoid creating solutions that might not resonate with or fully address the concerns of young individuals.



Collaborating with (i)NGOs provides young people with **valuable opportunities** for skill development, leadership training, and capacity building. These experiences can empower young people to become effective advocates and leaders in their communities.



(i)NGOs have access to **a wide range of resources** that can support young people's work, whether it be office space, staff with specific expertise, or connections with civil society.



Involving a diverse group of young people from various cultures, backgrounds and experiences also ensures **a broad range of viewpoints** is considered, creating a more inclusive and holistic approach.

## **What can you expect from this toolkit?**

The Toolkit for Young People as Equal Partners is your companion to enable you to become an effective catalyst for change.

If you are a YLO seeking to expand your reach, this toolkit will be your guide, offering valuable insights, resources, and expertise to foster impactful partnerships.

## **What is the gap we are trying to address?**

Ever felt like there's a tricky gap when teaming up with big organisations?

We totally get it! That's why we made this toolkit.

Young people like you worldwide are pushing for change! You're speaking up, and we're listening. Young people all over the world have been working tirelessly to advocate for better systems to support relationships between young people and (i)NGOs.

**So, in collaboration with young people who have navigated the partnership process themselves, we made this toolkit.**

**It's packed with tips to help you dive into partnerships with (i)NGOs while staying true to yourself!**

Some (i)NGOs are looking to share power with young people, but some might not know how.

**But guess what?**

**Young people like you worldwide are pushing for change!**





## This guide is for you if you are...



A YLO that wants to approach an (i)NGO and are looking for guidance on how to navigate partnership.




A registered or non-registered group of young people seeking partnership or support from a bigger entity.



If you are a YLO looking for funding in general (e.g., with donors, cooperation agencies, etc.) this guide isn't specifically tailored to you – but you can still use some of the tips and lessons learned to support forming equitable relationships when you are accessing funding.



Are you from an (i)NGO?  
This guide is not directly written for you, but it would be helpful to read as this consolidates many of the challenges young people face when partnering with entities like your own. By exploring the issues detailed in the guide, you and your organisation can work to become a better and more power-aware partner for young people.

An illustration of two dark brown hands holding a vibrant rainbow. The hands are positioned on the left and right sides, with fingers spread as if supporting the rainbow. The rainbow is composed of multiple bands of color: red, orange, yellow, green, cyan, blue, and purple. The background is a light cream color. The text is centered within the space between the hands and the rainbow.

## **This guide is designed to assist a wide spectrum of youth-led organisations**

It caters to the diverse array of groups that exist in terms of size, scope, formal or informal status, grassroots origins, recent establishment, leadership and decision-making methods, and more.

Whether you are an established entity seeking to engage with an (i)NGO, or an informal collective of young individuals seeking partnership or support from a larger organisation, this guide is tailored to suit your unique needs.

# Acronyms used in this document



**CSO**

Civil Society  
Organisation



**CV**

Curriculum  
Vitae



**FTE**

Full Time  
Equivalent



**(i)NGO**

(International)  
Non-Governmental  
Organisation



**MoU**

Memorandum  
of Understanding



**ToR**

Terms of  
Reference



**YLO**

Youth-Led  
Organisation

# Key terms demystified

**When a YLO partners with an entity such as an (i)NGO, they are often confronted with a lot of new information, unfamiliar concepts, acronyms and technical processes.**

Often, the language is confusing, and complicated terminology can make processes unclear. Language has the power to include or exclude people, so we are doing our best to raise awareness of the repercussions of using complex and inaccessible language.




Therefore, we are advocating for (i)NGOs to adopt simpler terminology that describes processes accurately and without resorting to jargon.

In the meantime, we want to strengthen young people by demystifying some important concepts so that they can enter the partnership feeling well informed.

Below are some terms that young people have told us they found new or confusing to them when they took their first steps on the partnership journey.









## Key terms demystified



| Term   | Definition   |
|--|--|
|  <b>Concept Note</b>   | A brief outline of the project you have planned.   |
|  <b>Civil Society Organisation</b>                             | A civil society organisation (CSO) is typically a non-profit, sometimes (but not always) voluntary, citizens' group.   |
|  <b>Capacity building / Capacity strengthening</b>            | The process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources of organisations and communities. It is often offered by adults to young people, but it can also be from young people to adults, and between young people themselves.  |
|  <b>Capacity statement / Track record / Institutional CV</b> | A document that's a bit like a CV or resume, but for your organisation, rather than an individual. It will detail relevant projects, funds obtained, achievements and impact of your organisation.   |
|  <b>Due diligence</b>  | Due diligence is the process that an organisation takes to carefully investigate and verify another entity before entering into an agreement with them. It is typically used to ensure that the organisation is aligned to the value and principles of the organisation.   |
|  <b>Full Time Equivalent</b>                                 | Full-time equivalent, often abbreviated as FTE, is a term often used when creating budgets. It's a unit based on a full-time work week, to indicate the number of hours a person works. For example, if a full-time work week for you is 40 hours, someone who works 1.0 FTE would work 100% of this, so 40 hours. If they worked 0.5 FTE, they would work 50% of this, so 20 hours. |

## Key terms demystified



| Term   | Definition   |
|--|--|
|  <b>Governance</b>                   | The framework for managing an organisation or partnership. It identifies who can make decisions, who has the authority to act on behalf of the organisation or partnership and who is accountable for the decisions that are made. |
|  <b>Memorandum of Understanding</b> | Document that includes the terms and conditions of the partnership, forms of the partnership and specifies the commitments of both parties.  |
|  <b>Partnership</b>                | Partnership means working together on equal terms in a formal, mutually agreed collaboration with shared goals and responsibilities.   |
|  <b>Risk</b>                       | The likelihood of an internal or external situation or event occurring that affects the partnership, the membership of the organisations or the management of resources.   |
|  <b>Risk appetite</b>              | Refers to deciding how much risk we are going to take with a partnership and/or activities that should include different ones.   |
|  <b>Safety risk</b>                | This is about things that might accidentally cause harm, to people, things, or your reputation. It includes big safety issues, but not the legal rules.  |
|  <b>Security Risk</b>              | This is about things that might harm people on purpose, like violence or aggressive actions. Even non-violent things like spying or threatening counts.  |
|  <b>Terms of Reference</b>         | Document defining key points: includes contracting terms, methodologies, budgets, definitions, project background.   |

# Before the partnership

**When young people or Youth Led Organisations begin the process of partnering with larger (i)NGOs, they often encounter lots of procedures and paperwork.**

To comply with (i)NGO and donor obligations, you may be asked to share certain information about your organisation...

For instance, the donor or (i)NGO may be looking for an extensive track record, which you may not have documented.

We want to ensure that young people are prepared for this process. Therefore, in this section we have compiled a list of the kinds of documentation or experience an (i)NGO may ask for when you partner with them.

# What kind of documentation might the (i)NGO ask from you?

## Track Record Documents



### Documentation required

### What does this mean?



#### **Records of the budget your organisation has managed**

Documentation demonstrating the organisation's ability to effectively manage budgets in the past.

**EXAMPLE:** Financial report or statement that outlines the income and expenditures of the organisation over a specified period.



#### **Capacity Statement**

A concise document that provides an overview of an organisation's capabilities, expertise, and past projects. Similar to a CV or resume, but for your organisation rather than an individual.

**EXAMPLE:** Document that often includes information such as the organisation's mission and vision, key achievements, expertise, services offered, relevant projects or initiatives.



# Human Resources and Policies



## Documentation required

## What does this mean?

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  <b>Governance structure explanation</b>     | <p>An outline of the organisation's governance structure, including roles and responsibilities.</p> <p><b>EXAMPLE:</b> You might create an organogram (a visualisation of how different parts of your organisation fit together) and prepare an explanation of how your organisation handles transition as individuals age out.</p>   |
|  <b>Organisational profile documents</b>   | <p>Document containing an overview of the organisation, including its mission, vision, and activities.</p> <p><b>EXAMPLE:</b> This could be found in annual reports, your website or online profiles, organisational profile summary (includes essential information such as the organisation's mission, vision, goals, key activities, target audience, and geographical scope).</p> |
|  <b>Status of your organisation</b>        | <p>Documentation that outlines the legal status of your organisation.</p> <p><b>EXAMPLE:</b> Information can be found in bylaws, bank account details, and registered address of the organisation.</p>  |
|  <b>Code of Conduct (Integrity Policy)</b> | <p>A set of guidelines and principles that outlines expected behaviour, ethics, and standards of conduct.</p> <p><b>EXAMPLE:</b> Typically defines acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, establishes norms, and promotes a positive and respectful environment.</p>  |
|  <b>Policies</b>                           | <p>Depending on the (i)NGO you may be asked about your inclusion, gender, and safeguarding policies, etc.</p> <p><b>EXAMPLE:</b> Documents outlining specific policies related to inclusion, gender, safeguarding, and any other relevant areas depending on the nature of the (i)NGO.</p>  |

# What can YOU ask the (i)NGO?

**To start a strong partnership, it's important for both sides to have equal opportunity to voice their questions and needs.**

Sometimes, it can feel like the (i)NGO asks all the questions and young people just answer. But what if young people also asked questions, too?

You can make the partnership work better by asking about the (i)NGO's values, ways of working, and how they support young people. This helps everyone decide if it's the right fit!

So, here are questions young people can ask the (i)NGO to really understand the partnership and what it means.

It's all about getting the right information to decide if it's a great fit for everyone!

## Some **questions** you can ask the (i)NGO

Have other groups of young people partnered with you before?  
What was their experience like?



How does the (i)NGO define and promote youth participation and leadership within its organisation and projects?



Where does the money for this project come from?  
Who is the donor?



How do you ensure that the budget agreed between both organisations and arrives in a timely manner?



Which requirements come from the (i)NGO, and which requirements come from the donor?



Do you have a focal point for young partners?



What are the reporting and communication expectations between the (i)NGO and its partner organisations, particularly in terms of sharing progress, results, and lessons learned?

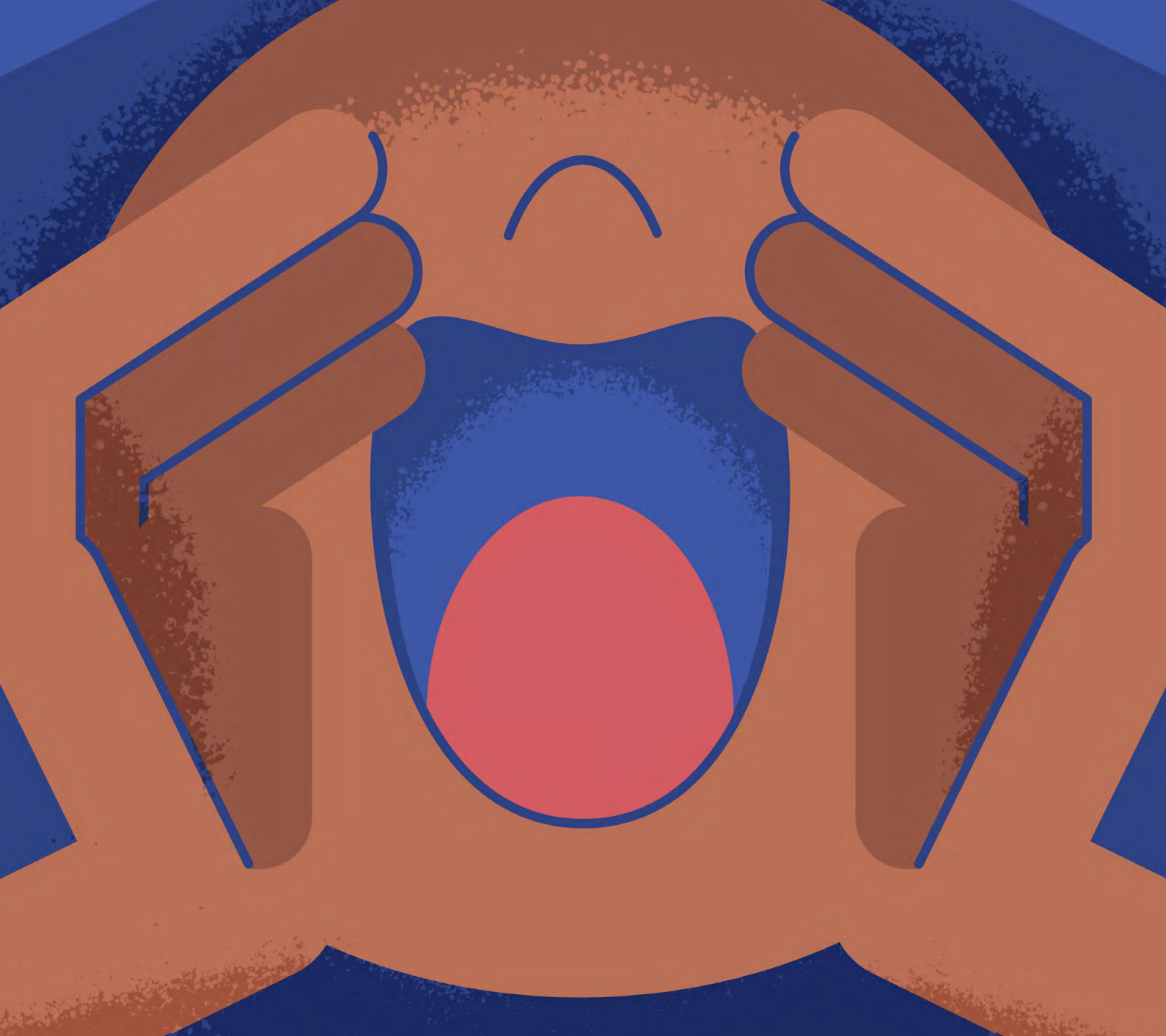


Can you tell us how your (i)NGO makes decisions? How can young people be part of that?



What are the administrative mechanisms that the organisation has for youth organisations?





**It's wise to  
ask questions**

**that aim to gather information  
about the (i)NGO's commitment  
to working meaningfully  
with young people in  
their partnerships.**

**Don't be afraid to ask about the organisation's  
track record, policies, and practices that could  
directly impact your collaboration with them.  
Remember, (i)NGOs also need you!**

# Anticipating potential risks

**When considering a partnership with a larger (i)NGO, youth-led organisations should be mindful of potential risks that may arise.**

Below are some potential risks that other youth-led organisations have faced when it comes to partnering with bigger (i)NGO.

We have outlined some of them so that you as a young person can be more prepared to anticipate these challenges and equipped with possible strategies for mitigating them.



## **Working on sensitive issues with an (i)NGO**

### **Risk**

An association with a high profile (i)NGO could shed light on your organisation in good but also potentially complicated ways and expose you to more risks. E.g., the large (i)NGO might publicly work on LGBTQIA+ issues, but your YLO is based in a country where this is highly criminalised.

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### **Mitigation Strategies**

- Make sure to ask (i)NGOs what protection policies and safeguarding measures are in place so that you know what level of protection you can anticipate.
- Ask the (i)NGO if and how they are prepared to support your civic space for action, by supporting you if you are affected by shrinking civic space. This can include that the (i)NGO “opens doors” to policy dialogue arenas where you can influence policies on the topics you work on, but also that they are prepared to engage in policy dialogue to defend your civic space.
- Ask if there is the possibility to provide partners with psychosocial support, legal advice and/or to access emergency funds.



### **Time-consuming administration work**

**Risk** YLOs might spend more time on financial/admin tasks than actual work.

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#### **Mitigation Strategies**

- Allocate specific time and budget for administrative tasks in your work or project plan.
- Distribute the workload effectively within the team to reduce the burden on a small group of people.
- Talk about your workload with (i)NGO so that they also understand what is reasonable to ask of you.
- Include specific budget for organisational capacity development so you will be able to dedicate time and resources for increasing your organisational capacity, including on administration and finance.



### **Registration requirements & potential organisational structure change**

**Risk** Registering can take time and change the YLO's flexibility.

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#### **Mitigation Strategies**

- It's important to understand the legal requirements and implications of becoming a registered organisation in your country.
- Assess the impact of registration on the YLO's operations and structure.
- Create flexible procedures and make sure to keep your core values and mission intact.



### **Agenda shifting**

**Risk** (i)NGO/funders' priorities might conflict with YLO's mission.

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#### **Mitigation Strategies**

- Keep the description of activities broad, so that you have the flexibility to conduct activities that fit with your vision.



### **Resource dependency on the (i)NGO**

**Risk** Relying too much on one (i)NGO for money means that if a project ends, you could run out of funds.

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#### **Mitigation Strategies**

- Diversify funding sources by actively seeking additional grants, partnerships, or collaborations.



### **Aligning values and expectations**

**Risk** Your organisation may be based in a different country to the (i)NGO and have different ways of working based on both legal requirements and your specific values, e.g. you may have different public holidays, or policies around working hours.

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#### **Mitigation Strategies**

- Clearly communicate your organisation's values, goals, and expectations from the beginning of the partnership.
- Keep an open dialogue with the (i)NGO.
- Make sure to outline each organisation's values, commitments and ways of working in your agreements or contracts.

# Advocating for fair compensation

When bigger (i)NGOs want to partner with youth-led organisations (YLOs), remember that you have your own special value to bring.

It might seem as if you need the (i)NGO to survive, but really the (i)NGO benefits greatly from us, YLOs, so it's not a one-way relationship. (i)NGOs might not even get funding without working with a YLO.

To know your value, and ensure you are compensated fairly, think about the following:



What you are good at.



What you know.



How you see things differently.



Here are **some tips** you can use for determining your value and ensure that the amount of work you are doing corresponds to the way you are being compensated:



## Compare with others

- Research and benchmark the organisation's activities against similar initiatives in the field.
- Compare program costs, outcomes, and impact indicators to understand how the organisation's work aligns with industry standards.
- A question you might want to ask the (i)NGO is: "Can we review what previous projects of a similar size have cost? How have you compensated YLOs like us in the past?"



## Create your budget plan

- Figure out how much your programs and projects might cost.
- Break down all the things you will spend on, like paying people, buying things you need, and other costs. Remember, there are direct costs (like salaries and project specific costs) and indirect costs (like rent, office supplies and subscriptions).
- Look at what you've spent before to anticipate how much everything might cost. Include budget for organisational capacity development.
- Sometimes salaries might not always be on the cards for young people and projects do not pay full salaries, but they might cover expenses like travel and internet connectivity costs.

# Think of the end at the beginning: sustainability considerations

## The end of the partnership isn't usually the first thing you think of when you start collaborating with an (i)NGO.

But for small organisations like YLOs, thinking ahead is important.

For YLOs, core, unrestricted funding that isn't directly linked to short term projects can be tricky to get your hands on.

So, thinking ahead to when the partnership (and funding) ends, is a wise move if you want to ensure sustainability and continuity of your organisation, staff and activities.

- ✓ **Think about financial sustainability** by diversifying funding sources.
- ✓ **Emphasise knowledge transfer** between old and new members of your organisation, to ensure your YLO grows, learns and retains institutional knowledge.
- ✓ **Build connections** beyond the (i)NGO partnership for ongoing support.

Now you have a better understanding of the value you can bring, assess your capacity, and mitigate potential risks.

This serves as a strong foundation for successful partnerships.

Armed with an understanding of the necessary documentation, due diligence processes, and the questions to ask during the initial stages, you should be well on your way to embark on a partnership that aligns with your goals and values.

**In the next section we will delve into what happens "During the partnership", where we will explore strategies to promote mutual respect and listening and staying true to your ways of working and values.**



# Congratulations!



**You've set up  
a partnership  
with an (i)NGO!**

**Now, get ready to dive into the real action  
and do amazing things together.**

# During the partnership

**We hope you set up the partnership well, shared your thoughts, had your questions answered and made your needs clear.**

But even with the best laid plans, challenges can arise. Sometimes, there's a risk that bigger entities like (i)NGOs can influence your choices or trigger delays.

But don't worry, with the help of our YLO partners we have compiled our thoughts and tips to help you navigate this phase during the partnership as best you can!

# Mutual respect and listening

Mutual respect and listening in a youth-adult partnership are essential components that contribute to a healthy and effective collaborative relationship and are fundamental to the establishment of trust. Young peoples' ability to speak up is a central component of this. But it is not only important for young people to be able to speak out: they must also be listened to and respected.

## How can you be truly listened to and respected as a young person in partnership with an (i)NGO?

Our YLO collaborators have come up with a list of suggestions to support you in being truly listened to by your (i)NGO partner.

- ✓ Request **regular partnership meet-ups**: to help you troubleshoot, ask questions, talk about what's going well, and what needs to improve. You can even suggest meetings for big things like budgets!
- ✓ If you feel unheard or disrespected, **talk it out** with the (i)NGO: go back to your values and ways of working and remind them of what you agreed at the outset.
- ✓ Inquire about the channels: for **giving feedback** on the partnership or reporting inappropriate behaviour.
- ✓ Propose maximum **waiting times**: for responses from the (i)NGO.

## How can these difficult conversations be held?

It's not always easy to give critical feedback, especially in light of power asymmetries. Our YLO partners have shared their tips on how to do this:

- ✓ Don't assume a chat is going to be difficult – it's all about how you see it.
- ✓ Use appropriate ways to open conversations, ways of communicating messages, use assertive communication, be aware of non-verbal communication.
- ✓ Use time appropriately, make an agenda before the meeting and define the purpose of the conversation.

# Learning from each other

During a healthy youth-adult partnership, both partners engage in a shared journey of acquiring mutual knowledge, skills and insights. Often, we think about capacity strengthening flowing from adults to young people, because young people are seen as less experienced. But we would like to explore how we can reverse the dynamic so that learning flows both ways.

## What can you do as a YLO to create mutual learning spaces?

Below are listed concrete ideas, based on the experience of young people, on how we can ensure that the learning experience is meaningful, two-way and beneficial to all.

- ✓ Think in terms of a **two-way learning** strategy: not only from the (i)NGO.
- ✓ **Demand the necessary resources**: to cater for new learning.
- ✓ **Analyse** which processes are necessary: for the operation of the YLOs and which are required by the (i)NGO.
- ✓ YLOs can create **learning measurement tools**.

# Staying true to the way you work

Youth-led organisations and groups are typically driven by strong values. Staying true to these values and ways of working is essential to carry out activism and achieve change. However, unequal distribution of power means that young people are often forced to compromise their values in order to meet the requirements of the (i)NGO. Although there is an undeniable power differential between YLOs and (i)NGOs, it is not always badly intended. Donors want to ensure transparency and accountability when they give money, which means that systems and processes for reporting have built up over years.

## So how can YLOs articulate their ways of working and preferences to (i)NGOs, and be respected?

The desire for transparency is a significant part of why funding recipients are required to carry out so much reporting.

Although potentially well intended, the reporting burden becomes prohibitive and exclusionary to YLOs.

- ✓ **Share in advance** how your values work in practice: give practical examples of how your organisations values play out in day-to-day work – and articulate these at the beginning, rather than wait for a problem or misunderstanding to arise. **For example:** Your organisation might have values which prioritise the mental health and wellbeing of your staff. This might mean that you have a no working on weekends policy, or after a certain time in the evening. Make sure the (i)NGO knows this, so they don't make demands outside of these hours. Your organisation might value co-creation and meaningful youth participation when designing and delivering trainings. This takes time, so ensure the (i)NGO knows you will only be able to deliver if given sufficient preparation time.
- ✓ **Learn to say no:** Always remember that you can say no to some proposals if they don't align with you as an organisation. It may be hard to say no to funding but take a critical look and ask yourself whether or not it would genuinely benefit you and your organisation. If the source of funding doesn't align with your values, it may actually be a problem down the line.
- ✓ Always go **back to the concept note:** If you feel the (i)NGO is making requests that fall outside of your scope of work or working methods, go back to the Concept Note or original Partnership Agreement to re-assert your boundaries.

# After the partnership

Sometimes, the way the sector is currently, you can't get multiyear funding

So what can you do about this?

# 1

## Diversify your funding

Try to form multiple partnerships so that when one ends, your organisation isn't struggling.

# 2

## Consider creating a list

Create a list of contacts / connections with expertise to support future strategising – e.g. an advisory board or a trusted contact list – especially to help think about funding / sustainability / helping you to network with other organisations.

It is wise to always go with an agenda and purposeful request.

# 3

## Suggest periodical check-ins

Check-in with your partners to maintain the relationship, keep them updated about your work, and express your interest in future opportunities.

Ask them if they will support you on grant calls that you apply for in the future.





# And that's a wrap!

**We hope that the contents of this guide have helped to make the whole process of partnering with (i)NGOs less confusing and helped you to gain the knowledge you need to enter partnerships with confidence.**

By soaking in the wisdom of those who've been there, tackling challenges and celebrating victories, youth-led organisations can navigate the complexities of partnerships with greater confidence.

**So go on,  
own those  
partnerships  
and make  
your mark!**



# Acknowledgements

Creating this toolkit has been a **collaborative effort**, and we are immensely **grateful** to the many individuals and organizations that have contributed to its development.



The content of this toolkit is based on the experience and input of over sixty people who have experienced both sides of the partnership process – bringing together the experiences of both young people and (i)NGOs.



This toolkit was informed by two in-person workshops hosted in Togo and the Dominican Republic, with youth-led organisations and Plan International staff from Togo, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Mali, Guatemala, Bolivia, El Salvador, Mexico, the Dominican Republic and the Netherlands.



The content was strengthened by the inputs of youth-led organisations and Plan International staff from around the globe.



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# **CHOICE** FOR YOUTH & SEXUALITY

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is a youth-led organisation  
that strives for all young people to  
have the power to make decisions  
about their sexual, reproductive  
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