



# Creating Youth Forums That Matter



A Practical Toolkit by Bradford City FC Community Foundation Peer Action Collective (PAC)



BRADFORD CITY  
FOOTBALL CLUB  
COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION



## About the Bradford PAC Team

The Bradford Peer Action Collective (PAC) is a group of young people working with Bradford City FC Community Foundation to lead research into issues that matter, including youth crime and violence, safety and barriers to accessing positive activities. Using their lived experience and local knowledge, the team connects with young people across Bradford to listen, learn, and lead change.

## Example of Youth-Led Social Action

Bradford PAC young people have already demonstrated how youth voice can help improve community safety. One example is the youth-led video campaign created to promote the Guardian Railway app, a tool that allows members of the public to report any incidents or concerns on the rail network directly to British Transport Police.

Working with Northern Rail and British Transport Police, our young people shaped messaging that encouraged safer reporting and helped raise awareness of how to use the app confidently. This campaign highlighted how young people can drive meaningful action on safety and wellbeing in public spaces.

Funded by the Youth Endowment Fund, the **#iwill** Fund (a joint investment between The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport) and Co-op.

PAC is here to support young people to take the lead.

Through the Peer Action Collective (PAC) young people are working to make their communities safer, fairer places to live.

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# Why We Created This Toolkit

At Bradford PAC, we believe young people should be at the heart of the decisions that affect them and not on the sidelines. Through our youth-led research, one key issue kept coming up: young people don't feel heard, especially when it comes to the barriers they face like travel, safety, or access to opportunities.

We've included what's worked, what we've learned, and how our growing partnership with First Buses and the Bradford PAC team is evolving into something much bigger than a youth forum – it's becoming a platform for real transformation.

Together, we're not just creating space for young people's voices, we're helping First Buses reshape how they connect with the next generation.

As part of this collaboration, we'll be:



- Supporting First Buses to improve digital inclusion making sure young people of all backgrounds can access travel information confidently.



- Helping review how travel offers and discounts are promoted so they actually reach young people, in ways that work for them.



- Exploring how their app and digital tools can be more user-friendly, more accessible, and more youth-driven.



- Building confidence, awareness, and trust in using public transport through peer-led input and insight.

This is about co-creation, not consultation.

We're not just helping young people use the system, we're helping them shape the system around them.

We created this toolkit to support other organisations in transport, youth work, health, housing, education, and beyond to set up youth forums that go beyond tokenism and lead to real change.

This is not a one-size-fits-all guide. It's a flexible resource designed to help:



- Youth organisations give young people real leadership opportunities.



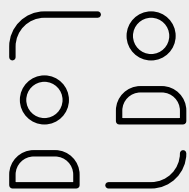
- Service providers engage young people meaningfully.



- Councils and partners build trust and co-design solutions with youth.

**“It feels like adults ask us what we think, but nothing really changes. What's the point in speaking up if no one actually listens?”**





# What Is a Youth Forum?

A youth forum is a group of young people who come together to share experiences, influence decisions, and co-create change.

**But done right, it's much more than a meeting. It's:**

- A platform for ongoing dialogue.
- A way to embed lived experience into strategy.
- A launchpad for youth-led campaigns and solutions.

## Our Example: Travel and Transport with First Buses

**In 2025, young researchers from Bradford PAC team identified that:**

- Many young people don't know about existing travel discounts.
- Cost and safety concerns limit access to activities.
- They don't feel involved or represented in how transport services are shaped.

So, we hosted a youth-led roundtable with key partners First Buses, LNER, Northern Rail and shared findings directly. From that, First Buses committed to creating a Youth Forum with us.

**Now:**

- We meet quarterly with their marketing and operations team.
- Young people help design communications and shape service responses.
- It's a two-way relationship, not just consultation.

This model can work across any sector where young people are affected and where organisations are willing to listen and act.

## Who This Toolkit Is For?

This toolkit is designed for:



- Youth organisations who want to create a space for ongoing youth input.



- Public services like transport, health, or housing who want to design with not just for young people. Potentially organisations like the police, or local religious institutions.



- Local authorities looking to strengthen youth engagement in policy or service delivery.



- Schools, charities, and networks who want to promote youth-led social change.



- Law firms / solicitors who want to engage young people in the legal system.



# Creating a Meaningful Youth Forum

1.

## Start With Purpose

Before you begin, ask:

What do we want this forum to achieve?  
How will it shape decisions, policy, or service delivery?

**“We didn’t want it to be a ‘youth voice’ tick-box. We wanted influence, not just input.”**

2.

## Let Young People Shape It

Don’t build the whole structure before involving them. Ask:

- What do you want this forum to do?
- How often should it meet?
- Where will the meetings take place?
- What feels safe and comfortable?

This builds trust and relevance from day one.

3.

## Choose Partners Who Are Ready to Listen

If you’re involving other organisations or stakeholders including people within your own team, it’s vital to work with those who are genuinely open to listening, even when the feedback is challenging.

Look for partners who are not just willing to show up, but are ready to:

- Hear difficult truths from young people about what isn’t working.
- Share power and decision-making, not just tick a box.
- Commit to action, taking youth feedback seriously and making visible changes.
- Have senior buy-in, support from leadership is key to turning insights into outcomes.

## First Buses as an Example

In our first meeting, First Buses shared that they were already rethinking how they engage with communities. When Bradford PAC approached them, they saw it as an opportunity to take that further and work directly with young people, a group they’d been wanting to connect with more meaningfully.

They’ve since committed to quarterly youth forum sessions, co-developed with PAC, and have involved their marketing team and senior leaders from the start. Their openness to change has made a real difference and it shows what’s possible when an organisation doesn’t just invite young people in but listens and adapts based on what they say.

4.

## Keep It Youth-Led, Not Youth-Used

Support young people to:

- Set agendas.
- Present research.
- Speak at meetings.
- Run sessions, but don't do it for them. Facilitate, don't dominate.

“It's their space we're just making sure it works for them.”

5.

## Build In Support and Action

Young people need more than a seat at the table they need the tools, confidence, and opportunities to drive the change they're helping to shape. Participation should never be passive. If young people give their time and voice, they should be supported to lead, create, and act.

This means building in support before, during, and after the forum or consultation process. That support might include:

- **Skill-building sessions:** Training in confidence, communication, campaigning, or leadership, whatever fits the young people's goals. As well as life skills such as budgeting, investments, and savings.
- **Incentives or recognition:** This might mean paid roles, gift vouchers, certificates, or progressions opportunities. Anything that values their time and effort.
- **Routes to real action:** Ensure there are pathways to influence from co-designing services and delivering social action campaigns, to creating youth-led resources.

Don't just listen. Act with them.

6.

## Make It Ongoing and Accountable

A youth forum isn't a one-off consultation. Build in:

- Regular meetings.
- Clear feedback loops (What changed because of their input?)

Shared goals and timelines.

“We told them what we heard. Then we showed them what we did. That's how you build trust.”

## Recommendations for Organisations Starting Out

1. **Start small but be serious.** Even a small group can create big impact if they feel heard.
2. **Be flexible. Meetings after school?** Online options? Co-create the format with them.
3. **Be transparent.** If something can't change explain why.
4. **Invest in facilitation.** Skilled youth workers can bridge the gap between systems and young people.
5. **Track impact.** Use surveys or follow-ups to measure what's changed.

## Final Word: Let Young People Lead the Way

If you want to improve services, increase reach, and future-proof your work, start by listening to the people it affects most.

Setting up a youth forum is not just about hearing voices it's about sharing power.

We've seen what's possible when young people are involved from the beginning. Our work with First Buses is now helping shape how transport is designed, marketed, and delivered.

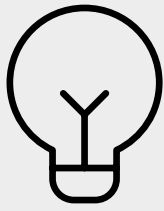
But that's just one example. Whatever your sector you can do this too.

### Call to Action:

- Are you ready to listen and act, with young people?
- Want to co-create something better, together?
- Let this toolkit be your starting point.

When young people lead, change becomes real.

Let's not ask "how do we get youth involved?"  
Let's ask "how do we get out of the way so they can lead?"



# Our Top Tips

## 1 Let Young People Shape the Forum

💡 **Tip:** Don't just invite young people in, involve them from the start. Co-create the forum's purpose and priorities with them.

🔍 **Example:** Bradford PAC didn't decide the topic, young people raised transport barriers themselves, which became the core focus of the forum.

## 4 Create Two-Way Relationships

💡 **Tip:** Make sure young people speak with, not at, professionals. Get buy-in from leadership and set up regular meetings.

🔍 **Example:** First Buses' marketing team now meet quarterly with PAC youth forum members to share plans and get feedback on safety of travel, campaigns and app design.

## 7 Actively Support Action Beyond the Forum

💡 **Tip:** Forums are great, but what happens after matters more. Support young people to launch social action projects based on the issues they raise.

🔍 **Example:** PAC youth forum members will be part of campaigns exploring safer travel, confidence in public transport, and digital inclusion.

## 2 Keep It Practical and Flexible

💡 **Tip:** Be youth-led in format too. Choose times, locations, and platforms that suit young people. Provide food, cover travel, and keep the tone relaxed.

🔍 **Example:** Forum sessions were run after school, in comfortable spaces, with transport support and food. This helped increase attendance and honest discussion.

## 5 Use the Forum to Build Confidence and Skills

💡 **Tip:** Frame it as a development opportunity, offer chances to lead parts of sessions, present to stakeholders, or feed into decisions.

🔍 **Example:** Some PAC forum members will co-chair sessions, lead discussions, and speak at external events. It's helped them grow public speaking and advocacy skills.

## 3 Focus on Real-World Impact

💡 **Tip:** Forums need more than talk; young people need to see change. Choose achievable goals and share progress visibly.

🔍 **Example:** Young people asked for better info on travel offers. First buses responded by planning clearer marketing and involving the forum in app reviews.

## 6 Reflect the Real Community

💡 **Tip:** Make it representative. Reach beyond your usual circles and target young people from a range of backgrounds and lived experiences.

🔍 **Example:** PAC will actively recruit through schools, youth groups and social action partners to ensure the forum isn't just the "usual voices".



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