

Weaving youth participation into the fabric of museums

Creating engaging experiences for teenagers benefits everyone. It helps young people explore their interests and understand their place in the world. It also transforms museums into more interesting, relevant, welcoming and interactive places for all.



Sustainable youth leadership

- Makes museums more relevant for everyone.
- Creates opportunities for young people to build skills.
- Facilitates opportunities to take advantage of funding opportunities.
- Improves relationships with local young people and youth organisations.

Think beyond projects to embed youth leadership

Youth participation often centres around specific funded projects, so when the project ends, the engagement ends.

Curious Minds have found that the key to sustained youth participation is to embed youth leadership within the core work of the organisation.

This summary provides insights drawn from the **Hope Streets** project on sustainable engagement with young people.

What sustainable youth leadership might look like:

- Young people's steering groups, with clear ways to influence decisions.
- Young people and youth workers included in existing governance (e.g., sitting on boards).
- Youth representatives on decision-making panels (e.g., recruitment).
- Young producer groups responsible for programming events.
- Young commissioner groups able to commission new work.
- Young people as paid staff or volunteers.
- Youth leadership routinely written into strategic funding bids.
- Ongoing relationships with local youth organisations maintained even when projects aren't happening.



Hope Streets,

was a five-year project led by **Curious Minds**. It supported cultural organisations in the Northwest of England to embed youth leadership through systemic organisational change. The participating organisations were **Tullie House Museum and Art Gallery in Carlisle, Bolton Libraries and Museum Service, West Chester Museums, Lancashire Council Heritage Team and The Atkinson in Sefton.**

Create a vision for your organisation



Think beyond projects and create a vision for what sustainable, strategic youth leadership might look like.

Focus on process rather than outcomes.

Identify champions in your senior leadership team who support your vision and culture.

Establish how your governance will provide support and accountability.



This internal work doesn't necessarily need additional resources. It is more important to make a commitment to involve young people as you carry on with 'business as usual'.

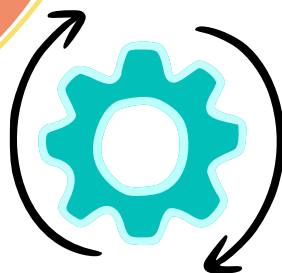


“It was amazing to have a young voice at meetings, they saw the museum's offer very differently to how many staff see it and came up with some fantastic changes we could make.”

Museum Project Lead

Start small and don't rush

- Realise it will take time to change processes and behaviours, build relationships, and trust.
- As you inevitably come across roadblocks, work on removing them rather than trying to bypass them. This will have more impact in the long run.
- Addressing administrative tasks like updating policies and procedures (e.g., admissions and safeguarding) will make youth work easier.
- Flexibility and persistence are key.



“It was a terrifying project, to be honest, because you had that moment of handing over control. If I'd done it myself, it wouldn't look anything like that...but we were really pleased with it.”

**Project Lead,
Lancashire Museum Service**



Prioritise people



- ✓ Write youth leadership into existing job descriptions and allow time and space for it. This work is hard and the people leading it will need training and support.
- ✓ Look for opportunities for young people across the organisation.
- ✓ Expect that recruiting and building relationships with young people will take time and there will be constant turnover.
- ✓ Create opportunities for positive interactions between young leaders and staff.
- ✓ Understand that change and less control can be hard for people.



I'm A Teenager Get Me Into There - free online course

was developed through Hope Streets to change how adults interact with teenagers. Curious Minds turned it into a free online course which can be completed at any time, with an accompanying set of resources that can be used in team meetings, internal training days and inductions.

Talk to Curious Minds for advice and practical support about creating change that sustainably embeds young people in your organisation.