PARTICIPATORY CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT TRAININGS

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This section is part of the Youth Action Lab Playbook - a collection of resources, learnings and recommendations for donors and youth partners based on the Youth Action Lab pilot project. Click here to read more about the YAL Playbook, its background and purpose.

BACKGROUND

Fellowships often assume what the needs of young people are when starting their journey as changemakers, and design courses and mentorships around those topics from the outset. It is likely that those courses may meet some or all the needs of a good percentage of the group. However, within a diverse group of young activists representing multiple backgrounds, intersectionalities and challenges, the priorities differ for each one. While all participants might find themselves in similar stages of their activism, their contexts, experience and formation separate one from the other, making the process of technical assistance a complex task.

APPROACH

Offer capacity development opportunities which are tailored specifically to suit the partners' needs so that the training content and formats are contextually relevant and applicable. Avoid assuming what technical needs young activists should acquire.
Having assessed the participants’ needs during the YAL onboarding phase, the CIVICUS coordination team - along with expert consultants - offered virtual workshops and courses on the prioritised areas to develop. The selected courses in the first YAL iteration were introductory sessions on storytelling, monitoring and evaluation and critical thinking; and a deeper dive into ‘how to work remotely’ and ‘fundraising for first time fundraisers’. In the second iteration of the YAL, the cohort received courses on Sustainable Leadership and Digital Communications, and Collective Care and Wellbeing.

Capacity development training should take into account the level/stage of activism the participants are operating from. This way, the approach was to offer training formats which can be practically applied, not just theoretically understood, and used very simple language for non-native English speakers. Technical terms and jargon were minimised.

In July 2021, we began an eight-week workshop series with Elizabeth Ngozi, a lecturer and coach from Uganda, and founder of the International Social Impact Institute. She created a virtual workshop series on Sustainable Leadership covering three main topics: Sustainable Leadership of Yourself, Sustainable Financial Management and Funding for Your Organisation; Digital Strategies to Amplify Your Organisation’s Reach; and Fundraising Training. The sessions mostly had a 100 percent attendance rate, which is a good indication of the value the Lab participants saw in the workshop. At the end of the programme, this course was identified by all participants as the most valuable offering of the Youth Action Lab. A year after the course, most of the YAL activists (the English speaking ones) are still in touch with Elizabeth and recommend her course within their networks.

Once this course concluded, a feminist activist and wellness trainer from the Philippines led the YAL 2021 cohort on a Collective Care and Wellbeing journey - virtually as well. Their name is Naro Alonzo, co-founder of Keri: Caring for Activists and a Grassroots Changemaker. The Collective Care and Wellbeing sessions were conducted once a month over a period of 5 months. The sessions taught the participants about the basics of the Filipino indigenous core concept of Ginhawa (Wellbeing). It helped the participants reflect on and identify their unique stressors as social defenders by providing practical ways to assess Collective Resilience. As such, the participants were able to co-create a basic Collective Care Plan, which can be replicated or applied to their own organisations, networks or coalitions.
The 2020 YAL cohort raised strongly the issue of Zoom fatigue, therefore, in 2021 the CIVICUS team coordinated fewer but more tailored capacity development opportunities for the YAL activists (Sustainable Leadership and Collective Wellbeing). These were prioritised as a result of the Needs Assessment that indicated the common needs among the cohort being Fundraising and digital activism support, as the reality created by COVID-19 pushed everyone to shift strategies from in-person engagements to virtual ones.

Further description of the Youth Action Lab Learning Partnerships in ‘Rebalancing Power in Mentorship Programmes’.
CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

- Assessing the partners’ needs and co-creating programmes to suit them; dedicating time to discuss the findings of the assessments on a one-on-one basis and in a group.

- Having capacity development experts from the global south who understand the realities, challenges and experiences of the young activists, and have experience developing virtual workshops in an engaging, inclusive, low data cost and effective manner.

- Dedicating time to get to know each participant through one-on-one coaching sessions.

- A mix of theoretical and practical approaches. All the homework provided consisted of tools and activities that could be implemented immediately. For example: creating or updating their LinkedIn profiles, mapping and reaching out to potential donors, assessing their social media presence, clarifying their purpose statement, creating their organisational budget and social media calendar.

- In times of COVID-19 restrictions, it was very important to remain flexible. To pre-empt any changes, all sessions were recorded so everyone could catch up in case they missed anything and, after each session, all participants received an email summarising the session and the homework.
The balance of support provided on a personal and a programme level resulted in the high feedback score provided by participants to the YAL. For instance, through the Sustainable Leadership course, Vanessa experienced a mindset shift which helped her align her projects with her purpose. Takemore ran workshops and conferences with his colleagues where he shared resources and skills learned from the Sustainable Leadership workshops.

CHECKLIST

- Facilitators should meet with participants at the beginning of the programme to understand their needs and consider them throughout the course lifecycle.

- Set clear expectations and communicate boundaries with disengaged participants, encourage them to nominate someone from their organisation to attend the training on their behalf.

- Design capacity training to be highly interactive using different tools and formats, such as peer-to-peer learning, coaching in between sessions, and learning assessments after each session using features such as Slido, quizzes, or polls.

- Dedicate time at the beginning of each session to hear reflections from each participant about what they are grateful for to help them bond and understand their progress.

- Supplement content covered during sessions with case studies, articles, and webinars.

- Incorporate peer-to-peer learning opportunities to facilitate cohort bonding.

- Use participatory approaches throughout the session, such as storytelling, to ensure that the capacity development sessions resonate with the participants’ needs and are successful.

- Remind young activists to share everything they are learning so that new resources are spread across the movement or collective and everyone can strengthen their work.
DO YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT OTHER PRACTICES?

The Playbook is to be read and applied according to your context and can be adapted to suit your needs. Each practice is independent of the other so the order you want to choose to explore is always the right one. **Click** on one of the circles below to learn more about each practice.