BACKGROUND

Peer-led approaches prioritise the experiences and knowledge of grantee partners. Coupled with acknowledging the contributions of local stakeholders and dedicating time to understanding their needs, this approach is important for effective, contextual and sustainable development. A hands-on approach can effectively identify and analyse the needs of grantee partners because by actively engaging with partners you can gain insights into their unique challenges. Moreover, creating horizontal ‘mentorship’ programmes such as the Learning Partnership Programme and compensating the Learning Partners was important as it responded to the need for support beyond funding and addressed challenges which are often seen in traditional mentorship programmes.
APPROACH

The Youth Action Lab is about reality testing and an ongoing process of learning that goes beyond just Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E). To do this, we challenged ourselves with rethinking how we could introduce horizontal impact assessment and use a participatory methodology in gathering expected and unexpected outcomes from the pilot project. We called this methodology ‘peer bi-weekly check-ins’.

A. Start listening to and understanding the needs of the activists who will work with you during the period of the grant/project.

Similar to the Funding Agreement, if you request people to answer what needs they have through an online form with no previous orientation or guidance it can:

- create stress and self-doubt.
- create misinterpretation because of the use of development jargon. very different results than if the questions are asked during a conversation in a one-on-one space.
- waste time.
In order to avoid this, the CIVICUS team followed the same approach as the Funding Agreement process:

- An assessment survey of 4-5 questions was emailed to invite participants to start reflecting. In this case it was about their biggest challenges, gaps and needs.

- Schedule one-on-one meetings virtually with each participant for an hour each time to discuss all the questions and answers to ensure everyone understood one another clearly.

- Provide a group space for everyone to hear what others mapped as their needs.

- Send out confirmation of the outcomes of the discussion and the proposed next steps. These conversations determined the outcomes of the following steps.

### 2020 NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Assessing the capacity development or learning needs can be very complex. In order to keep needs relevant and aligned to the scope of work of the Youth Action Lab, the co-design team put together some questions for you to complete so that we can identify the best technical support for you. Please use the [SMART](https://www.smartsheet.com/smart) guide to help you write your answers (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timeframe)

#### I. VISION

Based on your vision or purpose statement, think about what the success factors are and what you need to get there. What is one main skill you wish to strengthen in 2021 and how is it relevant to your purpose in general and for the next year? (Open question)

#### II. CORE SKILLS

Past [CIVICUS](https://www.civicus.org) youth participants have benefited from these core training workshops and activities. Therefore, all Youth Action Lab participants will be opted into these core introduction sessions. However, if you would like to opt out, please share an example of the work you have done. If you want to opt out of further training in this area based on the work completed, please say, “Opt Out”.

---

2020 NEEDS ASSESSMENT (Template)
### CORE AREA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CORE AREA</th>
<th>Provide example/s of work you have done in this area</th>
<th>OPT IN or OPT OUT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring and Evaluation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital security</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Storytelling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity and Inclusion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**B.** Facilitate peer-knowledge exchanges through storytelling workshops.

One of the questions in the Needs Assessment discussion was: What skills or topics do you feel excited and comfortable in sharing with fellow YAL participants? The purpose of this question was to identify what each participant wanted to share so others could learn more about them, their contexts, their vision and strategies. This activity was framed as a Peer Learning Exchange Festival.

To kick off the Peer Learning Exchange Festival, participants were asked:

**I. Which of these areas would you be interested to know more about during the year through peer-learning sessions? And why? (put an X or tick next to those that apply):**

1. Mental health, wellbeing and resilience
2. Legal support, your rights
3. Campaign tactics and strategy
4. Financial management and planning
5. Storytelling
6. Networks / alliance building
7. Other? Please specify
Facilitate peer-knowledge exchanges through storytelling workshops.

II. In which of these areas would you be interested in leading a peer-exchange? (put an X or tick next to those that apply):

1. ● Mental health, wellbeing and resilience
2. ● Legal support, knowing your rights
3. ● Campaign tactics and strategy
4. ● Financial management and planning
5. ● Feedback and data collection
6. ● Storytelling
7. ● Networks/alliance building
8. ● Leadership
9. ● Other

➔ What would you like to share?
➔ Having learnt these skills, how will you plan to transfer your skills?
➔ What will the success of this learning transfer look like?

In 2020, each participant had a full hour to present which caused Zoom fatigue, so in 2021 we used a TedTalk format where each participant had 10 minutes to present and 20 minutes to engage the audience with questions and comments. The outcome of this exercise was very positive because:

It created confidence in the person presenting and explaining an issue very close to their heart to an audience very distant geographically.

It opened everyone’s eyes in realising that, regardless of the distance, everyone is experiencing very similar challenges caused by the same oppressive systems of patriarchy, extreme neoliberalism, corruption, inequality, etc.

It brought the cohort together so it became a virtual team building opportunity where everyone shared and learned at the same level and at the same time.
The third result from the needs assessment was the identification of the skills and knowledge each YAL participant wanted to acquire or strengthen in the course of the Lab. Each participant listed one technical skill such as fundraising, project or budget management, and one political area in which to strengthen their knowledge and connections. Once they had identified these two areas they had time to identify a possible role model in these areas from their city or country and we contacted them to offer them the role of ‘Youth Action Lab Learning Partners’.

For those who did not know anyone who they could learn from, we made the connection with existing CIVICUS partners or recommendations made by the YAL Advisory Group.

This engagement was quite unique because it responded to the need for this type of stakeholder to receive support that goes beyond funding and it responded to the ongoing challenges of inconsistency often seen in voluntary mentorship programmes. This programme was fully remunerated. It also responded to a current issue in mentorship programmes where young participants or ‘mentees’ feel there is a hierarchy or that they are in a position of disadvantage, while it has been found over and over that mentors also learn from these kinds of experiences. Hence the importance of framing this approach as a Learning Partnership Programme. More about the Youth Action Lab Learning Partnership in 2020 [here](#) and 2021 [here](#).
CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

INTENTIONALITY
Have a plan on how you are going to use the answers for each question of the needs assessment. Do not ask questions just for the sake of asking.

KINDNESS AND PATIENCE
Working with young people or first-time grantees requires a lot of patience as your grant is their first experience of receiving support. They are trying to give a good impression and many times tend to think they need to use technical language in answering your questions but might confuse the meaning. Therefore, spending time interrogating, with care, what they mean in their needs assessment form is crucial for mutual understanding.

GOOD NETWORKS
When activists do not know who from their country can support them as mentors, it is important as an intermediary or funder to have a good pool of contacts for experts from different countries in the identified skill or theme.
CHECKLIST

- Facilitate a workshop for all participants to help them clarify their activism purpose before asking about their needs. This will help them to prioritise their needs and objectives.

- Allow young activists to identify capacity development opportunities for themselves, and provide financial resources to cover the fees.

- Engage in knowledge exchange among peers regarding where to find opportunities.

- Provide a list of technical partners and courses as a 'menu' of recommended learning resources and/or tools.
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.