SELECTION PROCESS

1. Background
2. Approach
3. Conditions for Success
4. Checklist

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

Participatory selection processes are an important step in enabling more progressive practices in the philanthropy and development space. By compensating activists for their time spent in selecting grantees and collaborating with youth partners, CIVICUS staff were able to demonstrate the organisation’s commitment to meaningful youth participation. Moreover, identifying grantees through trusted partners or specific criteria, such as past work and current priorities, ensures that the allocation of resources reflects the actual needs and priorities of local communities. This approach was particularly useful for reaching harder-to-find organisations who otherwise would not have the experience with writing applications.

APPROACH

Provide enough time for people outside traditional circles of international civil society organisations to apply and work in collaboration with the co-design team and partners to reach activists outside your membership.

In both the 2020 and 2021 YAL iterations, the CIVICUS Youth coordination team in collaboration with youth members from the co-design team, previous cohorts, and CIVICUS staff, initiated the Youth Action Lab recruitment and selection process between January and March.
Be very intentional and clear about the principles you want to uphold in the process, as these will reflect the type of cohort and dynamic you will achieve in the selection and throughout the project.

Youth-led, diverse, participatory and inclusive - these were the four fundamental pillars which anchored the selection and recruitment process.

As a result of the selection process, the Youth Action Lab 2021 cohort was made up of 11 young grassroots activists between the ages of 21 and 30 from the Global South. The Youth Action Lab cohort reflected diverse contexts and struggles, and acted as a microcosm of the global community, allowing for an assortment of localised and pluralistic perspectives and learnings.

The 2021 cohort was a balanced composition and comprised individuals who identify as men, women, and they from Africa, Asia, MENA, and Latin America. The activists were a blend of progressive human rights activists, unionists, robotics activists, activists, rural organisers, disability advocates, and movement builders- making for an exciting and unique cohort.
In wanting to reach as many young activists as possible, the CIVICUS team ensured that the Youth Action Lab online application form was translated into at least three different languages, namely; English, Spanish and French. All communication throughout the recruitment and selection process was translated with additional support, where needed, being offered to participants who needed it.

Moreover, being aware of the ongoing digital divide, CIVICUS chose Survey Monkey as the chosen platform for the application process as it is one of the more data friendly and efficient platforms.

“The application form from what I remember is pretty simple which is good especially because it lessens pressure for applying.” YAL Participant

Additionally, The Youth Action Lab supports grassroots activists. As a result, the CIVICUS team needed to be aware of the possibility that some partners would have network issues during the interview process and additional time would be needed for the partner to connect. Some partners would participate in the interview process using their phones and not a laptop, and that interviews needed to be kept brief to accommodate data costs by using free or low data apps like WhatsApp instead of Zoom.
Diverse selection committee

The selection committee was an intergenerational, youth-led, diverse, and informed group of 11 youth partners and CIVICUS Staff. The selection committee members were 1) four former Youth Action Lab participants who had gone through a similar process and could provide valuable input and recommendations on how we could better coordinate the process, 2) four YAL co-design team members who helped shape the project from inception were also part of the selection committee, as they thoroughly understood the purpose of the Lab, the kind of support it offers, and the individuals who would best benefit from the programme and, 3) three CIVICUS staff who played a key role in coordinating the process and vetting the applicants. Each selection committee member dedicated at least eight hours to the entire selection process.

“I personally recommend the process as it is so transparent and gives equal opportunity to all the participants and the selection panel to assess the capabilities of the Lab applicants and fill in any existing gaps. I am pleased to see the process was co-designed and participatory. Each applicant was given equal focus.” - Sabir, former Youth Action Lab partner and selection committee member.

Compensation

The youth partners in the selection committee were offered a stipend for their time and participation reviewing, scoring, interviewing and deliberating. This was important as it indicated that the participatory approach towards selecting Lab participants was not just a tick box exercise but suggests that the selection committee members' time is valued and respected. 4 Members of the 2019 co-design team participated in the selection process without receiving or asking for compensation and were very active in the interviews and final debrief.

This collaboration between youth partners and CIVICUS staff was essential in showing the organisations commitment to meaningful youth participation.
Transparent Vetting Process

A well thought-out vetting process throughout the selection process is the cornerstone of directing the outcome of the selection process.

To start, the candidates were longlisted according to the following criteria:

1. To what extent the applicant has been committed to social change in terms of the time and experience dedicated to activism currently.
2. Demonstration of meaningful engagement within a grassroots movement in a leading role.
3. How well the approach of the applicant supports an innovative idea/approach that can be tested or improved throughout the Lab?
4. A significant contribution to the community through their work, leadership and service. What is the impact they have achieved so far?
5. Limited financial resources to advance their work.

RESULTS

In 2021, CIVICUS received a total of 560 applications, of which 447 were English, 80 Spanish, and 33 French. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the selection process took place virtually over two months.

The applicants:

- We did not get enough applications from Asia, which delayed the selection process
- Only 8 of 560 candidates came from MENA
- There were women candidates from Asia who were eligible to receive funds from CIVICUS
CIVICUS therefore reached out to members from other communities to close the gaps. **Sustaining the relationships** with alumni networks of CIVICUS youth initiatives like YAL 2020, the co-design team, Goalkeepers, previous YAT members and other networks helped the recruitment process to reach a more or less representative cohort of the diversity of grassroots youth activism. Moreover, it is important to **remain semi-flexible and, when needed, restructure recruitment processes** to ensure there is alignment between the project’s goal and the applications we receive.

In 2020, however, CIVICUS received almost 1000 applications, 130 were shortlisted and in one week, during an in-person meeting, the co-design team had selected the final cohort. The timeline for the selection process in 2020, pre-pandemic, was significantly shorter and the application reach much wider. Virtual selection processes take time and you are more likely to experience delays as it is not possible to have lengthy (full day) deliberations with the same group of people online, while it is possible to do so on a 3-day in-person retreat. Recruitment is also much more effective when in-person interactions are possible, when the co-design team was able to share the call in different offline spaces where young activists work.
CHECKLIST

- Use **accessible application platforms** and consider low data usage.
- **Translate** everything into at least three different languages.
- **Avoid long questionnaires** and be purposeful with the information you ask for at each stage.
- Use **easy-to-understand language** and avoid technical language.
- Ask **strategic and relevant questions** during the interview to avoid wasting time and energy.
- Ensure that the selection committee is **diverse** and represents the targeted applicants.
- **Allocate extra time** for delays in virtual selection processes.
- Sustain relationships with partners and **offer stipends** to express gratitude for their time and commitment.
- Be **transparent** with the process and communicate the decision-making **timeline** with unsuccessful applicants.
- Look at a number of **core thematic areas of activism** and select at least 2 activists per theme to ensure a **diverse cohort**.

For more recommendations and learnings to implement a meaningful selection process when supporting grassroots groups, young individual activists or non-registered collectives, visit the CIVICUS Solidarity Fund Learning Journey
https://solidarityfundjourney.civicus.org/index.php/learning-from-within
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.