

11/11/2020

GUIDELINES

RAN Young Platform – Youth Review Panel

01-02 October 2020

Digital meeting

GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES: HOW TO ORGANISE A YOUTH REVIEW PANEL

Summary

On 01 and 02 October 2020, the RAN Young platform conducted an Online Review Panel. In two half-day sessions, 23 young people who are active in P/CVE reviewed six youth-oriented projects from the [RAN Collection of inspiring practices](#). Working in small groups, RAN Young's activists evaluated each practice based on project documents, a short presentation from the practitioner and a series of discussions. Using this information and based on their own experience and perspectives, the young participants performed a SWOT analysis for each project, extracting strengths and weaknesses and offering practical advice for how practitioners could leverage their work with young people most effectively.

Youth review panels are a valuable opportunity for young people to give direct feedback to practitioners in order to help shape youth-oriented programming in the field of P/CVE. It is a critical tool to help breakdown the traditional role of youth as a passive audience to be targeted, and instead activate them as contributors and partners in programme design and delivery. The following paper presents a summary of the recommendations made by the young people in the first section and outlines an introductory guide for local authorities with different steps for the organisation of a Youth Review Panel in the second section.

Introduction

A Review Panel is a structured review process during which multiple stakeholders jointly review a project or programme and offer actionable feedback. Review Panels are a useful mechanism for integrating different audiences' feedback into the development and deployment of projects. Unlike individual reviews, a Review Panel allows you to engage with multiple reviewers at the same time and may offer more holistic outcomes, because it allows reviewers with different perspectives to work collaboratively and draw out ideas through discussion.

Ran Young's Youth Review Panel

Youth Review Panels are an ideal way to gather insights from young people to inform youth-oriented projects and can also be employed as a useful educational tool for young reviewers. By participating, reviewers are given a rare glimpse into the detailed inner workings of a project – how it was organised, how it has been delivered, key challenges and potential opportunities – which can offer those with limited experience with an invaluable insight into the process. Furthermore, as reviewers are asked to help develop actionable recommendations and dive into methods of reviewing, they get a chance to critically engage with this information, which can help deepen learning.

Successful youth programming also hinges on our ability to breakdown the traditional role of youth as a passive audience to be targeted, and instead activate them as contributors and partners in programme design and delivery. To do this, professionals and practitioners active in the field of P/CVE need not only talk *about* young people, but also talk *with* them. *A Youth Review Panel is a way for young people to give direct feedback to practitioners and help shape youth-oriented programming.*

During the RAN YOUNG Review Panel on 01-02 October 2020, *23 young P/CVE activists reviewed six projects from the RAN Collection of inspiring practices.* The practices utilised a range of approaches, working through formal and informal education, counter-narratives and counselling to counter hate and extremism and build the resilience of youth in Europe.. A description of each project can be found in [Annex 1](#).

The reviewers worked in small groups of four to five with each group forming one 'panel' focused on a single project. In their panels, the reviewers evaluated each project based on project documents, a short presentation from the practitioner and a series of discussions. Using this information and drawing from their own experience, each review group performed a SWOT analysis,¹ extracting strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, which they presented back to a member of the project team with actionable advice for how they could leverage their work with young people most effectively. A list of general lessons learned from these discussions is highlighted below.

Highlights of the discussion

Insights and recommendations from the RAN YOUNG review panel

Young reviewers can offer unique and important insights for youth-oriented projects. Firstly, as young professionals, youth activists are closer to the project's target audience and can offer youth insights that are nuanced with knowledge of P/CVE. Their reflections can help practitioners understand how young people interpret their messaging, engage with their content and how likely they are to join their activities or use their resources. Secondly, youth are a key partner for innovation. In addition to bringing new ideas, young people are often more aware of trends in content and can help practitioners better leverage social media and enhance participation online.

¹ A SWOT analysis is a basic, analytical framework that assesses what an entity can and cannot do, taking into account both internal and external factors. Using this framework, reviewers consider a practice's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats to determine what might help the initiative accomplish its objectives, and what obstacles it must overcome or minimize to achieve desired results. In short, it says where the project is today, and where it may go.

Strengths

- **Art can facilitate communication between teachers and students** and gives students the opportunity to express emotions and feelings which they normally might not express in the classroom.
- **Only one lesson to talk about controversial issues is not enough:** it should be incorporated in all aspects, such as school leadership and staff, school ethos, the curriculum, mentorship, students voices, parental engagement, risk management and school visits.
- **Story telling and narratives are an empowering and inclusive entry to serious topics** like racism, police violence, and discrimination.
- Sharing experiences from ex-members and other young people who were part of radical groups **adds credibility**, and makes the target group feel understood.
- Content should encourage self-reflection among young people rather than just offering passive viewers an alternative narrative.

Opportunities

- Involve students in the development of new P/CVE activities – potentially involve **a board of youth**.
- As family is a crucial part of a young person's life, it is believed to be important to **make parents part of the experience, involving them in projects**.
- COVID-19 has been a serious test of a project's adaptability, and the young reviewers all came with suggestions for how the projects could **utilise online platforms** to take advantage of distance learning and be more engaging virtually.
- The youth reviewers emphasised **the importance of scaling effective models, making materials more widely available and sharing best practices across the EU** to help enhance resilience of its young citizens.
- It might be interesting to look into **new and creative ways on how to address the children vulnerable to far right-wing extremism**. This could be through sport; soccer, boxing, basketball, or street dance.
- **Create opportunities through social media for youth** to share their concerns and ideas, organise regular meetings with students in schools, and develop materials specifically for youth to build their capacity as partners.
- **Pay attention to the content's Look & Feel:** it should resonate with the target audience by creating social media content that resembles popular youth culture (i.e. music, rap or memes).

Weaknesses

- **Don't push students** to get out of their comfort zone if they do not feel comfortable to share their story.
- Be aware that controversial issues in the classroom **can clash with what a student learns at home**.
- Be aware that controversial opinions may trigger provocative (even aggressive) speech in the classroom.
- Projects that ask too much or depend entirely on volunteerism could struggle to find full engagement, or might unintentionally restrict themselves to certain segments of a population.
- It seems like there is **a lack of first-perspective knowledge**, which can only be acquired by engaging for example former right wing extremists.
- To make content for young people relatable, it should not be outdated and should **include recent developments in society (Black Lives Matter, Covid-19, elections) and online hypes**.

Threats

- **Teachers need training** in order to avoid escalation of controversial issues.
- **Be aware of students' parents that see your project as illegitimate**.
- Be aware that expansion of a project to other countries can come **at the expense of credibility and the authentic look and feel of the 'original' country**.
- **The rising and rapidly evolving conspiracy theories (such as QAnon) cause people to live in different realities**, and represent a real threat to the efforts of projects focused on young people.
- **Many current projects should take into account the influence of Covid-19**. Involve young people in newly arising challenges for your project: How to deal with students that receive less support outside the classroom? How to modify projects in light of the social distancing and larger exposure to fake news and social media? How can young people help to safeguard teachers?
- **Pay attention to the rapidly evolving language style of young people:** modify according to age group, social media platforms popular in the country and avoid policy or academical language.

2. Organising a Youth Review Panel

A practical guide towards youth engagement

To facilitate cooperation, Review Panels should be organised as a meeting that brings the reviewers and practitioner together for a structured exchange. A Review Panel event involving multiple projects offers additional learning opportunities as reviewers and practitioners can hear the outcomes of the other panels, as well as networking opportunities. It is important that panels are separate, with a single panel reviewing one project at a time so reviewers can stay focused.

RAN Young's Review Panel included five steps for gathering processing and presenting information during the review. These steps are detailed below:

Step 1: Preparation

Reviewers need adequate time to familiarise themselves with the project they will be reviewing. Give them access to all public material about the project at least two weeks prior to the review panel event.

This preparation period gives the reviewers time to build up basic knowledge about the project, prepare key questions, and get a sense of how the project is presented publically. This will not only aid the review process during the event, but will also allow the reviewer to assess a project's communications and branding for consistency and clarity. If the majority of materials are not available in the reviewer's primary language, consider translating a set of key resources.

During preparation period, give reviewers adequate time and clear instructions to:

- Review public materials, including websites, social media pages, media appearances, feedback forms and evaluations, content and reports.
- Prepare a list of questions for the practitioner based on their research.
- Review any questions the practitioner has prepared in advance so they can give more detailed answers during the interview and discussion.
- Interview a person that is representative of the project's target audience to find out if they would be receptive to the project's activities, content and communications.²

Step 2: Practitioner Presentations

Practitioners should be directly involved in the review process so they can provide additional information that may not be available publicly and offer additional context. Give practitioners a chance to present their project to the review panel.

Practitioner presentations should highlight:

- The history of the project and the challenge they are working to address. If the panel is international, as RAN Young's was, remind practitioners to give special care to contextualise their approach. They should also note if they had tried different approaches in the past that were not successful, so the panel does not waste time with suggestions that have already been proven ineffective in that environment.
- Their goal and objectives, along with their strategy and a clear explanation of their theory of change should it be available. They should present where the project is currently and a vision for the future so the reviewers can focus on suggestions that are relevant to the project's long-term objectives.

² While this step is good practice for reviewers, it may not be possible if the project's target audience includes individuals who are potentially dangerous or particularly vulnerable, such as extremists, former extremists or survivors. Consider all possible risks and mitigate any potential harm before including this step.

- An overview of their deliverables and how they form a cohesive campaign. Advise practitioners to focus on their method for each deliverable, rather than listing all the particulars
- Any data that supports their approach, including research and the outcomes of project evaluations. Again, advise them to focus on key learnings rather than large amounts of data.
- Any notable limiting factors that the organization cannot address so that the reviewers' suggestions are reasonable and actionable for the project team.

Presentations should be brief, concise and carefully structured. T. Practitioners should prioritise information that builds on what the reviewers have seen already and focus on method and approach, rather than the granular details of delivery. *To help the practitioners stay focused and concise, offer them no more than 20 minutes to present their project.*

Step 3: Practitioner Interview

The practitioner interview is an important part of gathering and processing information about the practice to ensure reviews are accurate and can be delivered with confidence. Following the practitioner's presentation, give reviewers ample time to interview the practitioner about their practice.

This discussion will help the reviewers clarify any remaining gaps and test their own understanding. In this way, the practitioner interview serves as a means for gathering information, as well as for processing that information through discussion. Not only will this contribute to a richer review, but it can also help build a reviewer's confidence that they have properly understood the project and are therefore well placed to share their own insights. *This session is key for building both understanding and confidence; allow for a minimum of 30 minutes.*

Allow the youth reviewers to moderate the interview themselves so they get everything they need from the discussion and maintain ownership over the review process. To help facilitate a productive discussion, ask the reviewers to prepare some initial questions based on their research and to compare these questions as a group before the Review Panel begins so they can jointly identify gaps, duplications and inconsistencies and thus build on each other's questions.

Step 4: Group Discussion and Review

Once the reviewers have finished gathering information about the project, they can begin the review. Give the reviewers a clear structure for how they should do the review that will result in concrete and actionable outcomes.

The reviewers need ample time to perform their review as a group. *Give them at least two hours to perform a structured review that emphasises actionable recommendations.*

A clear review structure is especially important when working with youth who have limited experience with project reviews. RAN Young used a **SWOT analysis**: a basic, analytical framework that assesses what an entity can and cannot do, taking into account both internal and external factors. . In short, it says where the project is today, and how it may progress. An advantage of the SWOT approach is that while it provides a clear framework, it still offers a great deal of flexibility in how reviewers interpret and use it.

Choose a review framework that has enough structure to guide reviewers toward clear, actionable recommendations and enough flexibility to promote creativity. The framework should also be simple enough that inexperienced reviewers can begin using it immediately and, ideally, versatile enough that they can utilise it in the future. A Youth Review Panel is an important training opportunity and as such, you should prioritise knowledge, skills and resources wherever possible to help build their capacity more sustainably.

Step 5: Youth Presentation

To ensure the reviews are actionable, the youth reviewers should present their results in writing through a structured review form, and through a presentation. Give time at the end of the Review Panel for the panel to present their findings to the practitioner, followed by a Q&A.

Give the reviewers *at least 1 hour* to organise their review into a simple presentation, including actionable recommendations for how the practice can improve its current delivery and grow into the future. If your Review Panel event includes multiple panels and practices, organise it as a shared session so all the participants can hear the outcomes of all the reviews. This will allow the youth and practitioners to hear and learn from different approaches to P/CVE programming all the recommendations. If this is the case, ask the youth to include a brief overview of the project in their presentation, including goal, objectives and key deliverables.

Let the youth determine as a group how they will prepare and deliver their presentation. Rather than giving them a template, set clear objectives and advice for the kinds of information they should include. *Give each review group 3-5 minutes to present their review to the group, and an additional 5 minutes for Q&A, including time for the practitioner to respond.*

Take the challenges into account

- 1) The youth on the panel may not represent the views of the youth in your target audience. Young people who are already active in the field of P/CVE have the knowledge and experience to offer valuable strategic insight; however, if they are likely outside of the project's key target audience, they may not speak to how the project is experienced on an individual level.
- 2) Involving youth from a variety of backgrounds and locations will bring a rich mix of perspectives that can ensure a well-rounded and more representative evaluation. However, take into account that a mixed review group may have less in-depth knowledge of a project's particular context, approach or even topic
- 3) Ensure the young reviewers have enough time to prepare their evaluation. This should include adequate time to prepare before the panel, to speak with the practitioner and any other relevant stakeholders during the review and to perform their analysis.
- 4) Young people who are still studying or early in their careers may undervalue their own opinion or struggle with the confidence to tell more experienced practitioners their opinions. Take time to ensure the young reviewers understand why this event is important and why their analysis in particular is so valuable.
- 5) Practitioners may not immediately appreciate the value of a youth review panel, especially if they have only ever experienced working with youth as beneficiaries. In addition to explaining what the panel is, take time to discuss the role of young people as leaders in P/CVE and the unique value of their insights.

Conclusion

Recommendations | Potential Pitfalls

There is no singular way to organise a review panel. The steps presented in this paper are merely guidance, but however you organise it, make sure you leave time for reviewers to gather information, process it, and present clear actionable recommendations. It can be built around existing evaluation frameworks, or something new you have developed.

A Review Panel can be arranged in a single day, or over two days. However, **make sure you give adequate time for discussion between the reviewers and the practitioner and amongst the reviewers.** Discussion is a critical time for both gathering and processing information. It will help the reviewers bridge gaps in their understanding and build their confidence so they can deliver a richer and more accurate review.

Keep groups small to make sure everyone has a chance to participate fully. Should a panel be too large, it may inhibit full participation and result in less focused outcomes. Work with small panels of 4-5 and curate them to ensure the group has diverse and complimentary experience.

Allow the youth reviewers to moderate the discussions themselves. This will help them maintain ownership over the process, engage critically and creatively, and give them space to gather and process the information they need. Rather than moderating the process, provide structure through a well-organised event in which each session has clear objectives and a review framework that can support inexperienced reviewers toward tangible outcomes without restricting innovation.

Do not take for granted that either youth or practitioner fully understand or appreciate the value young people bring to P/CVE. Youth, especially those who have had less experience in P/CVE, may not have the confidence in their own opinion they need to conduct a strong critical review, while practitioners may not immediately appreciate the value of the advice they are getting. When you are explaining the exercise, take the time to ensure everyone understands their role and the value they bring to it.

Leave time for discussions between all the participants during, and especially after the event. To make sure the reviewers get the most out of the process, create time for them to talk about their experience with the Review Panel together.

Further relevant reading

[Ex Post paper \(2018\) – RAN YOUNG Review Panel](#)

[Ex Post paper \(2018\) - Youth Engagement in the City of Leicester](#)

[Ex Post paper \(2018\) - Empowering young people to successfully participate in PCVE](#)

[RAN Issue Paper \(2018\) - A Nimble \(NMBL\) Approach to Youth Engagement in P/CVE](#)

Annex 1

Reviewed practices in 2020

1. Cultural and Spiritual Heritage of the Region (CSHR)

Goal: Improve social relationships in post-conflict societies in Croatia by familiarising children in multicultural and multi-ethnic communities with the culture and customs of 'others'.

Location: Croatia and Serbia

Target Audience: Students aged 11-15 (grades 5-8)

Methods: In-school workshops, cultural initiatives, handbooks and resources

This school-based programme is currently being implemented in 23 multi-ethnic schools in Croatia and one multi-ethnic school in Serbia, all in areas that were heavily affected by the 1990s conflict. In multi-ethnic schools, Croatian and Serbian students attend classes and extra-curricular activities in their own language, and therefore have very few opportunities to mix with students outside of their own ethnic group. Furthermore, the curriculum tends to focus on a group's own heritage (language, history and culture), neglecting that of other groups in the country and the region. This gap between groups is particularly worrisome in the context of the region's history. Between 1991 and 1998, Croats and Croatian Serbs had almost no contact. The border separating them was practically sealed, and a strong feeling of mistrust persisted, even after the peaceful reintegration of eastern Croatia. Even today, some children are still exposed to extremist and nationalist points of view in their families, particularly in cases where their relatives fought on opposite sides during the 1990s, or where family members died in the conflict.

CSHR works to bridge these parallel societies by providing alternative ways of thinking and expression, demonstrating how different ethnic groups can find common ground coexist peacefully as one people, and creating opportunities for Croatian and Serbian students to come together and cooperate in a joint activity.

CSHR leverages fun, cultural activities to engage students. Some examples include: trips to Serbia (or vice versa), creative workshops, a competition in forgotten games, and sightseeing tours hosted by students. Each activity is designed to educate and sensitise students through immersion in a cultural activity in order to help children consolidate a more open-minded perspective, which would prevent them from adopting extremist or nationalist points of view once back with their communities

2. Athena-Syntax Where Art and Education Meet

Goal: Enhance young people's resilience to extremism through education, critical thinking and human-rights based values

Location: Belgium

Target Audience: Students and Teachers

Methods: Education and alternative narratives

This school-based initiative seeks to translate human rights-based values of mutual respect, freedom of choice, freedom of the individual, freedom of speech, gender equality, secularism and dogma-free scientific research into an educational structure, through which they explore a multitude of subjects to promote pluralism and co-existence. Athena-Syntax was developed in a school in Antwerp and is delivered both as part of the formal curriculum to help students gain additional perspective on difficult subjects, and through projects organised in the classroom with support from professional artists. It is an educational structure rather than a one-off project, and therefore is rolled out throughout the school year in the form of lessons, lectures, workshops and arts-based extra curricular activities that leverage the diversity within the teaching staff and honour the school's multicultural student body.

Athena-Syntax is an enriching experience for students and teachers alike that draws on what is shared, rather than what is different to empower students to be involved in a pluralist society where science, art religious and philosophical approaches can co-exist. This practice employs interreligious and philosophical dialogue, debate, art and active citizenship projects to engage students and promote pluralism and co-existence while enhancing critical thinking that may heighten a student's resistance to radicalisation. Projects have included: exhibitions of student-made art, debates, presentations, excursions and workshops.

3. JUMP: Exit Work Located within the Social Space

Goal: Reduce far-right extremism amongst young people in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany

Location: Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany

Target Audience: First responders or practitioners; Youth; Violent extremists;

Methods: Exit strategies; Community engagement and empowerment

JUMP is working to address far-right extremism amongst young people in Germany by building the capacity of first responders and practitioners (such as teachers, social workers, and education students) to identify youth who are vulnerable to or actively embracing far-right ideologies. The project enhances a practitioner's sensitivity to the needs and challenges of those far-right extremists and young sympathisers of similar ideologies who are showing potential to withdraw from this scene and become formers. JUMP's approach leverages education and counselling through which trained practitioners cause 'constructive irritation' and foster situations that will encourage young people to voluntarily disengage from far-right extremism. Practitioners will also work with youth to identify and help resolve social issues such as employment or substance abuse that may make the individual more vulnerable.

Additionally, JUMP provides 'exit assistance' for far-right extremists and sympathisers who want to leave the movement. This includes practical support like social security and housing, as well as psychological support to help them reflect on their experience and plan a path forward out of hate. It can also help formers identify 'trigger mechanisms' like music or social situations and develop coping mechanisms to prevent a relapse into an extremist mindset.

By reinforcing and advancing practitioner and first responder reactions to (de)radicalisation, reaching young people before they enter the scene and offering exit assistance to those willing to leave the scene, JUMP aims to counter radicalisation (physically and mentally) and to shape a professional local environment that exerts a preventive influence with a long-term perspective.

4. Managing Controversy: Developing a Strategy for Handling Controversy and Teaching Controversial Issues in Schools

Goal: Strengthen the role of education in promoting the core values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law and advancing the role of education in countering social ills

Location: Based in the UK; Implemented EU-wide

Target Audience: Educators; youth; Civil Society

Methods: Training for educators and front line practitioners

A training pack for educators designed to help them handle controversial issues by reflecting on the way controversy is managed in their schools/settings and offers practical suggestions on how it might be handled more proactively and strategically. The training pack offers theoretical background on controversy management, as well as school-specific lessons dedicated to an area of school life. Each lesson includes an explanation of that area's role in relation to the handling of controversial issues, a case study from a European school and a practical suggestion for application in schools/settings.

The pack helps strengthen the role of education in promoting the core values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It also advances the concept of education being on the frontline in countering social evils such as violent extremism and the radicalisation of youth, xenophobia and discrimination, as well as violence and hate-speech.

While the pack is designed specifically for teachers and heads of schools, it can also be used by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community organisations.

5. Jamal al-Khatib – My Path!

Goal: Disrupt and counter jihadist propaganda and ideology targeting young people in Germany and Austria through authentic alternative narratives

Location: Vienna Austria; Online campaign in Germany and Austria

Target Audience: Violent extremists; youth; first responders or practitioners

Methods: Alternative narratives; Community engagement/empowerment

Jamal al-Khatib is an alternative narrative project countering jihadist narratives in Germany and Austria. Told over 15 short films and several autobiographical texts, the project is inspired by the personal story of a young

prisoner who left the jihadist subculture in Austria and documented his experiences in a book to help prevent other young people from making the same mistakes. From this starting point, the project united a number of diverse individuals who had the same aim: youth workers, scholars of Islamic studies, filmmakers, digital content managers, and (most importantly) other young people from a Muslim background wishing to take a stand against violent jihadist fanaticism. Some of these young people had also left the jihadist movement, and they provided additional content directly based on their life experiences.

The films were disseminated on social media as part of an 'Online Streetwork' campaign through which the team and a group of young people staged online discussions with different target groups about the films. Traditional street work/social work tries to connect with hard-to-reach groups of potential clients, and 'Online-Streetwork' sets out to transfer this methodological approach to the Internet, the virtual places that represent an important place in young people's lives.

6. The Tolerance project

Goal: Prevent the recruitment of young people to extremist organisations and combat intolerance and racism in general

Location: Sweden

Target Audience: Students

Methods: In-school training; Multi-agency approach

A school-based programme led by a multi-professional team of teachers, social workers and youth workers that delves into racism and xenophobia in order to build students' critical engagement skills and heighten their resilience to extremism. The programme works with 25 students at a time from different social-, ethnic- and educational backgrounds, and usually from different schools within the same municipality. Oriented to long-term engagement, participating students attend 7-13 whole day sessions, every two weeks throughout a school year. The project wraps up with an excursion, most commonly to Holocaust memorial sites in Poland. Throughout the project the students are faced with the task of comparing thoughts and ideas from Nazi-Germany to modern day issues about anti-Semitism, racism and intolerance.

The focus is on the creation of a safe environment for students to express their ideas, even the controversial ones, and enter into dialogue with the teachers and with other students. The teacher's role then becomes to educate rather than to engage in debate with the students in the group. Rather than focusing on teaching students what is right and wrong, the Tolerance Project aims to give the students both historical and philosophical tools to ask themselves the right questions.