

GROWING STRONGER: A LEARNING JOURNEY





Editorial team

Editor in Chief – Allan Päll
Editor – Alfonso Aliberti & Alix Masson
Author – Alfonso Aliberti

Design and creative direction – www.dougdawson.co.uk

European Youth Forum
10, rue de l'Industrie,
1000, Bruxelles
Belgique – Belgium

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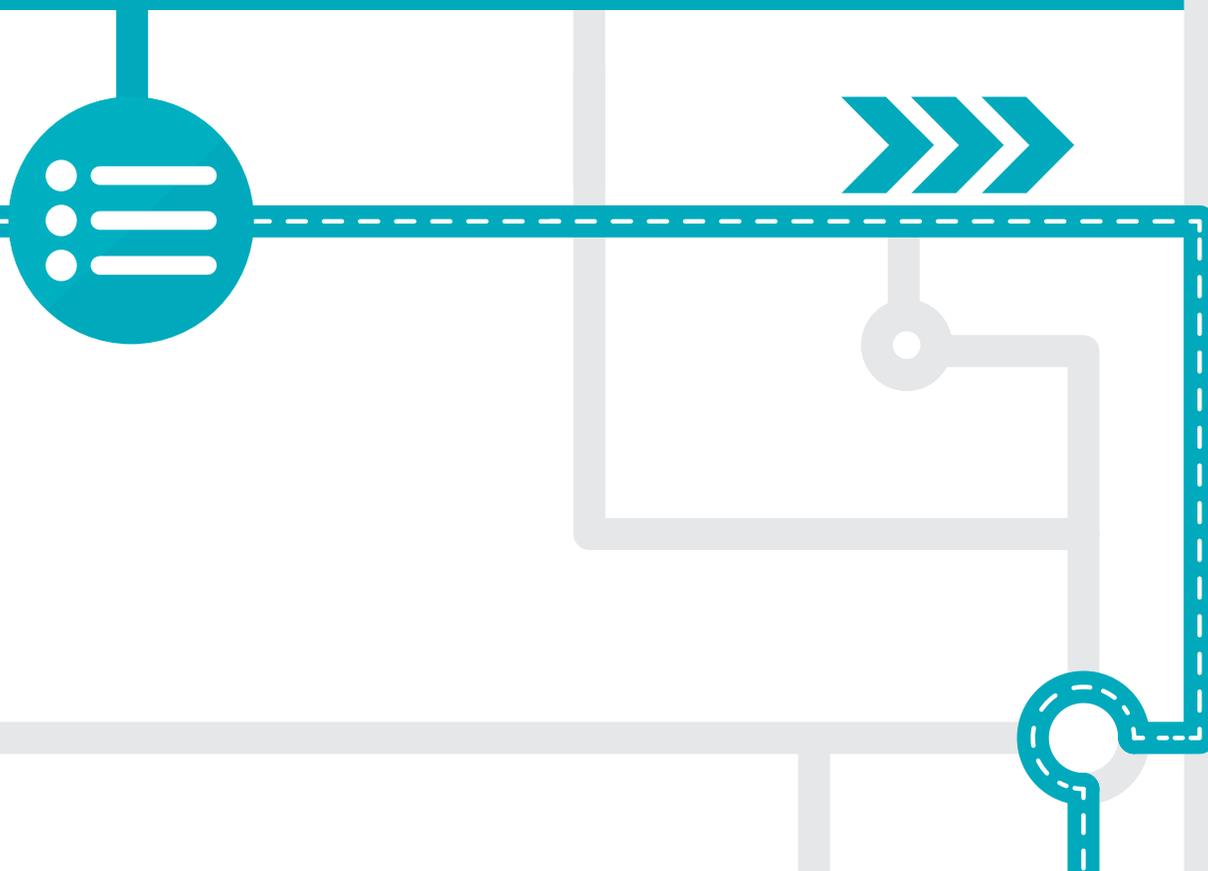


***If you don't change the direction you
are going, you're likely to end up where
you're heading...***

John C. Maxwell

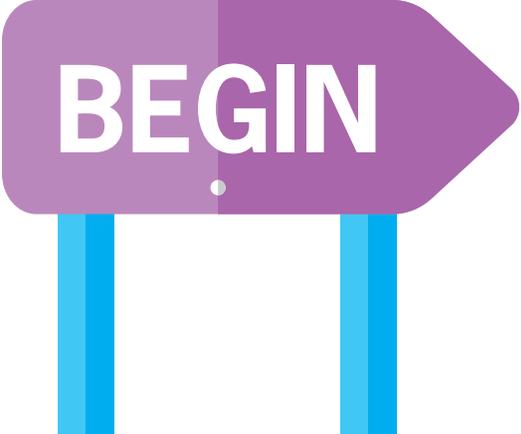
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PREFACE

Youth organisations represent a key component of the civil society in Europe and as such they address a full range of societal challenges, including social and environmental problems, participation, education, social inclusion etc.. Recognising their values and contribution to the wellbeing of our democracies means ensuring healthier societies. However, despite many successes, youth civil society needs to grow stronger to further highlight and streamline the



BEGIN



We wish to promote a long-term vision of the change we wish to see in society, where young people and their organisations continue to play a central role and are recognised for their achievements.

added value they bring daily to the development of young individuals, communities and societies. They face some key challenges that can be addressed by questioning their current organisational strategies. More holistic and innovative approaches are required in the development of the sector's sustainability in order to fulfill its role of helping young generations to meet contemporary challenges. This publication offers a holistic framework to go towards that change developed on the longstanding experience of the European Youth Forum in contributing to building stronger youth civil society in Europe.

We wish to promote a long-term vision of the change we wish to see in society, where young people and their organisations continue to play a central role and are recognised for their achievements.

Ultimately, this short publication – presented as a learning journey – invites our members and other civil society organisations to think more strategically on how we can jointly contribute to a better change in young people's lives in Europe and across the world.

INTRODUCTION

This publication is meant for membership-based organisations that want to make their organisation grow stronger, their members more engaged and their leadership more effective. In the following pages we will aim to inspire readers with new ways and methods to cope with challenges such as the loss of motivation and engagement in the organisation, and to rethink their role, perception and engagement, as well as the organisation's structures, references and pedagogical approach.

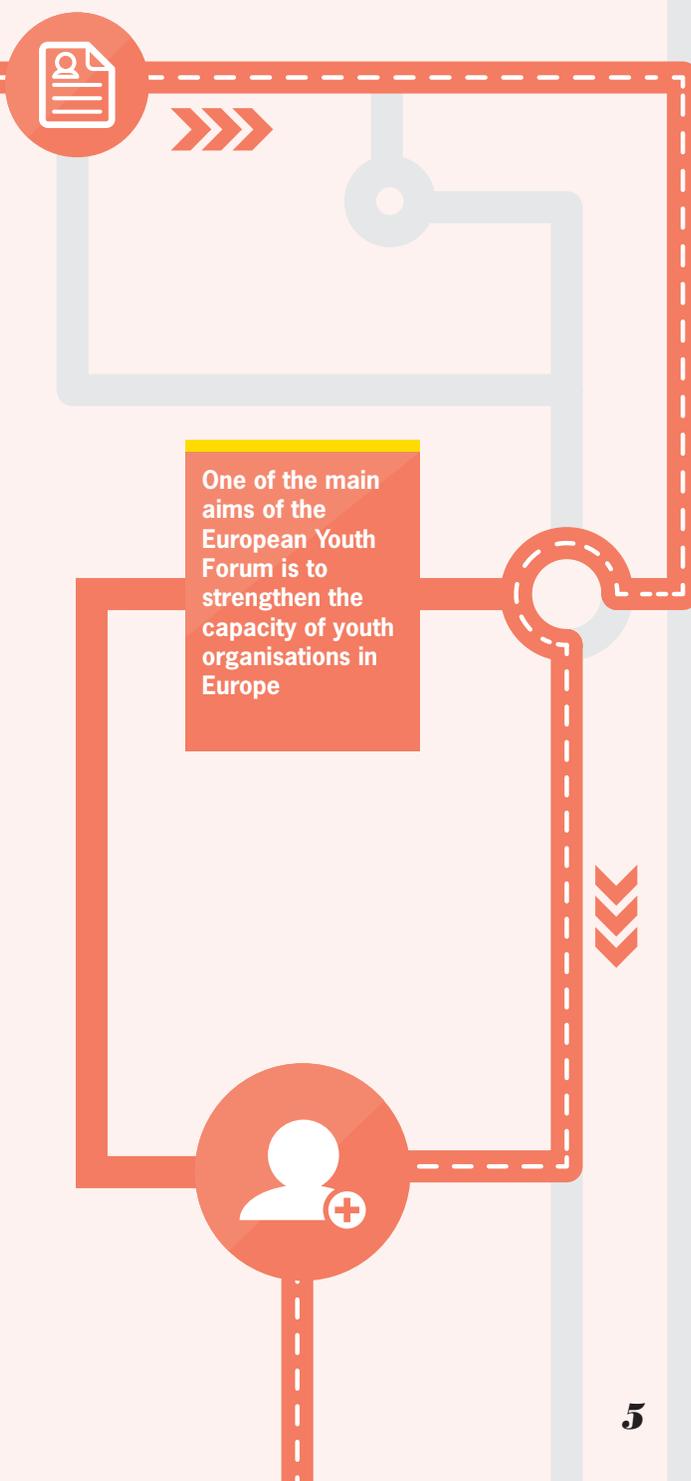
One of the main aims of the European Youth Forum is to strengthen the capacity of youth organisations in Europe to work on relevant issues and reach out to more young people and partners. In order to do so, the Youth Forum has developed in the last 10 years a structured approach towards organisational development, capacity building and sustainability of youth organisations, both at the local, national and international level.

The publication is especially developed to support membership based youth organisations but the core learning elements can be applied to membership based civil society organisations in general. Moreover, it specifically targets youth leaders in charge of managing and leading youth organisations to enable them to develop new approaches to sustain their NGO. Our aim is not to tell readers what they need to do to improve the sustainability of their organisation but rather to push them to become engaged with learning and try new approaches to organisational management and development.

To do so, we propose a learning journey approach that has been inspired by the participants of a project carried out by the European Youth Forum during 2013 and 2014. The project, called Membership Growth Project, involved 4 members of the Youth Forum and a number of their local branches. Its primary objective was to ensure that the membership strategies of participating organisations was sustainable, however, it soon evolved from a pure membership growth approach towards a more holistic organisational development approach.

The European Youth Forum Experience in organisational development

The European Youth Forum has many years of experience in supporting national youth councils¹ and youth organisations across Europe, helping them develop and be recognised as key stakeholders in our societies.



A learning journey is a process that you undertake, together with your organization and your colleagues

The Learning Journey towards organisational growth

A learning journey is a process that you undertake, together with your organisation and your colleagues, to grow stronger as an organisation and as an individual. This is how the participants of the Membership Growth Project described their 18 months experience in the pilot project. Deciding to undertake this journey entails thorough preparation; getting familiar with how to use the tools you may need during the journey, identifying people and organisations that could support you along the way and realising that your initial destination may completely change during the trip! Rather than providing you with a list of pre-prepared proposals, the Youth Forum wants to be a guide, ensuring that you have all the information you need to gather tips along the way.

All of the activities implemented in this regard aim at empowering members' capacity to be stronger, more sustainable recognised actors in the society. The European Youth Forum has a holistic approach in its capacity building activity capitalising on the extensive experience developed so far. As a result of the increasing success of the capacity building activities carried out in recent years, the Youth Forum has developed a more integrated approach that allow its members to grow stronger, as well as inspire leaders of civil society organisations in Europe to become more sustainable.

Developing successful capacity building activities means that on one hand, a more holistic approach must be introduced that recognises all of the different elements of capacity building provided by the platform; and on the other hand, introducing a process-based approach and structured initiatives aiming at genuine change within its own members and other youth organisations, capitalizing thus on the existing know-how of member organisations to broaden the area of expertise of the entire platform.

Together with the participants of the Membership Growth Project, we were able to present this complex process is through a learning journey.

You may find that after two years you realise that what was thought to be very important at the beginning is less so, and that over time you develop new and unexpected priorities. You also need to be flexible with your approach to the process, designing a strategy that will allow for regular updates every six months. Make your plan but assume it will change!

Organisational development

During your learning journey you will be using organisational development tools. Organisational development is the process of exploring, identifying, adopting, and fully utilising the practices, principles, and programs that drive and sustain a purposeful,

productive, and powerful organisation so it can better adapt to new information, technologies, markets, opportunities, and challenges. In short, organisational development enables an organisation to fulfill its mission and program objectives. These resources will help your organisation become all that it can be².

Organisational development is also meant to ensure the sustainability of an organisation, as without sustainability it is hard to create the necessary capacity to have a real impact and reach the organisation's goals. Key elements involved in securing a sustainable organisation are a good understanding of the organisational goals as well as active planning and communication.

Sustainability is the capacity of organisations to administer their own resources and remain independent in working towards their own objectives, meaning that they will be able to work without endangering their financial, political or membership independence. Reaching full sustainability can prove challenging due to the frequent exchange of people involved and often the lack of stable financial resources.

Getting started

If you want to undertake an organisational development journey and learn how to make your organisation stronger, more sustainable and more engaging for your members, you need approach it like any other journey, and get prepared!

A learning journey is not a short trip and you should commit to a long-term process that will hopefully lead you and your organisation to unexpected, but positive results. In order to reach your full potential, co-workers should all agree to commit fully to the process. In this publication you will follow the different steps of the learning journey undertaken by the participants of the Membership Growth Project. You should use it as a tool and inspirational reading to create your own learning journey.

Fasten your seatbelt because the adventure is starting!



The Membership Growth Project

The Membership Growth Project (MGP) is a 18 month pilot project implemented by the European Youth Forum with its member organisations and their local members, looking at ways to ensure sustainability in the membership strategies of participating organisations. The MGP was not looking at providing tools to attract new members but rather at changing the structures, references and pedagogical approach of the involved organisations.

The main aim of the project was to find ways to create qualitative growth and to diversify the membership base of the involved organisations. The main outcome of the project was to develop new models for membership development in youth organisations in Europe.

For the implementation of the project the Forum worked with 4 member organisations: AEGEE, ACTIVE, YEU and YWCA. These organisations decided to engage in this journey together with a number of local branches.

LEARNING
METHODS



LEARNING METHODS

Before starting the journey it is important to understand the main methods that will be proposed in order to better understand all the steps of the path that we will be discovering together in the next pages. In our journey with the participants of the Membership Growth Project we used a number of methods that could be re-used in your specific learning journey.

Those methods proved to be effective and contributed to the development of the organisations involved and to the personal development of their representatives and leaders. They also proved to help enable both individuals and organisations to achieve their full potential. Regardless of the specific learning method used in the different steps of our learning journey, our approach has always been participant centered and we have been building every learning component of our journey with participants' help and contribution.

Below you will find an overview of the main methods we used. However, it will be up to you to assess and decide which combination of these methods will be most useful to your specific situation. The European Youth Forum has been relying on the expertise of its Pool of Trainers (PoT)³ to support identifying the best methods to be used in each specific moment of the journey.

Face to face meetings

Face to face meetings are an essential part of your learning journey. Organising regular meetings to exchange ideas and get feedback on the developments of your journey are of utmost importance to acknowledge your progress and the progress of others as well. It is an important moment to reassess your objective and to learn from the others.

Having regular face-to-face meetings allows participants to feel part of the project and to live the



Spending time with the other participants stimulates informal learning processes that contribute to their personal and organisational development

journey. In the experience of the participants of the Membership Growth Project, face to face meetings have proved to be one of the most efficient tools to learn and become inspired by other organisations and to develop the curiosity to experiment with new practices.

Peer to peer

As a result of the face-to-face meeting, the participants involved in the process have the possibility of learning in an informal way from their peers. Spending time with the other participants stimulates learning processes that contribute to their personal and organisational development. Moreover, it contributes to an overall understanding of the developments made by the others and the other way round, contributing thus to a personal awareness of the improvements achieved. Peer to peer learning should be accompanied and stimulated in between face-to-face meetings using online tools. Peer to peer learning can come in different settings and should be constantly promoted.

Mentoring

When you start a learning journey it is very important to identify mentors that would assist, motivate and encourage you in all the learning steps. Make sure that each person or group of persons involved is assigned with a mentor. Mentors could be peers from other groups or facilitators, trainers, and organisers of the learning journey.



Mentoring is a process entailing regular informal communication (face-to-face, online etc.) over the duration of your journey. Mentors will assist you in all the steps of the process and advise you when needed and take an external look at your developments.

As a person supporting another to achieve something, a mentor is giving help and support in a way that will empower the mentee to move forward with confidence towards what they want to achieve. The mentor should create an informal environment in which the mentee can feel encouraged to discuss their needs and circumstances openly and jointly defines the more appropriate support.

Coaching

The International Federation of Coaching defines coaching as partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential. Coaching is a process that enables learning and development to occur and thus aiming at improving performance.

There are many similarities between coaching and mentoring but they are still very different. Coaching helps individuals, and thus organisations, to build their competence and confidence through experiential learning. The coaching aims at unlocking the potential in every individual to play a central role in the development of their organisation. Coaching contributes to critical reflection on current practices regarding approaches and behaviors in the way the organization is managed. It can help to develop a set of skills and practices that support the development of competence and confidence of leaders, staff and volunteers of the organisation.

There are many similarities between coaching and mentoring but they are still very different.

GROWING STRONGER: GETTING STARTED



Through coaching it is possible to learn about the importance of creating a supportive environment with your colleagues, members and partners where their self-confidence and self-esteem is increased. It inspires leaders to set challenging goals and work with energy and passion to realise these goals.

Facilitation of the Pool of Trainers

The Pool of Trainers (PoT) of the European Youth Forum has been one of the main resources for our capacity building activities and specifically for our organisational development support. The PoT is part of the support the European Youth Forum provides to its member organisations. It is a resource group ready to undertake the challenge of voluntarily working within the European Youth Forum framework. The purpose of the PoT is to deliver training or facilitation aiming at contributing to the development and sustainability of the Platform and its members.

The PoT was in charge of facilitating the face-to-face meetings of the Membership Growth Project. The presence of the PoT allowed participants to be at the center of the learning process and at valorising their experiences and knowledge.

Working alongside the Pool of Trainers and using their expertise to facilitate your meetings and develop the overall learning path through non-formal education will be a big asset for the success of your journey.



GROWING STRONGER: GETTING STARTED

Growing stronger is not easy and requires a genuine interest in questioning organisational practices and keeping an open mind to change them. One should consider that this process may require change that occurs in all aspects and levels of your organisations. In addition to that, if you are looking for a real impact, you need to involve the whole organisation, in particular its key leaders.

Who you are: understanding your organisation

The first step on this journey is to understand who you are. It sounds a bit strange, but defining what your organisation is doing and what it stands for in a clear and understandable way can be very difficult.

Imagine explaining to your mum what your organisation wants to achieve in a very simple and concise way. Believe it or not it can be a very hard task!

The participants of the Membership Growth Project experienced similar difficulties. At the start of their journey they were faced with the challenge of describing a clear description of their organisation. It was a true test that allowed participants to question things that they thought very well defined.

An important step for any organisation is to define its purposes and ways to achieve those ideas. The process of doing this can offer a good opportunity to build consensus within the team as well as with partners, volunteers, members, beneficiaries and other stakeholders.

If you define who you are you can understand your vision and mission and therefore better present yourself to stakeholders, partners and new potential members. To start this process follow these steps:

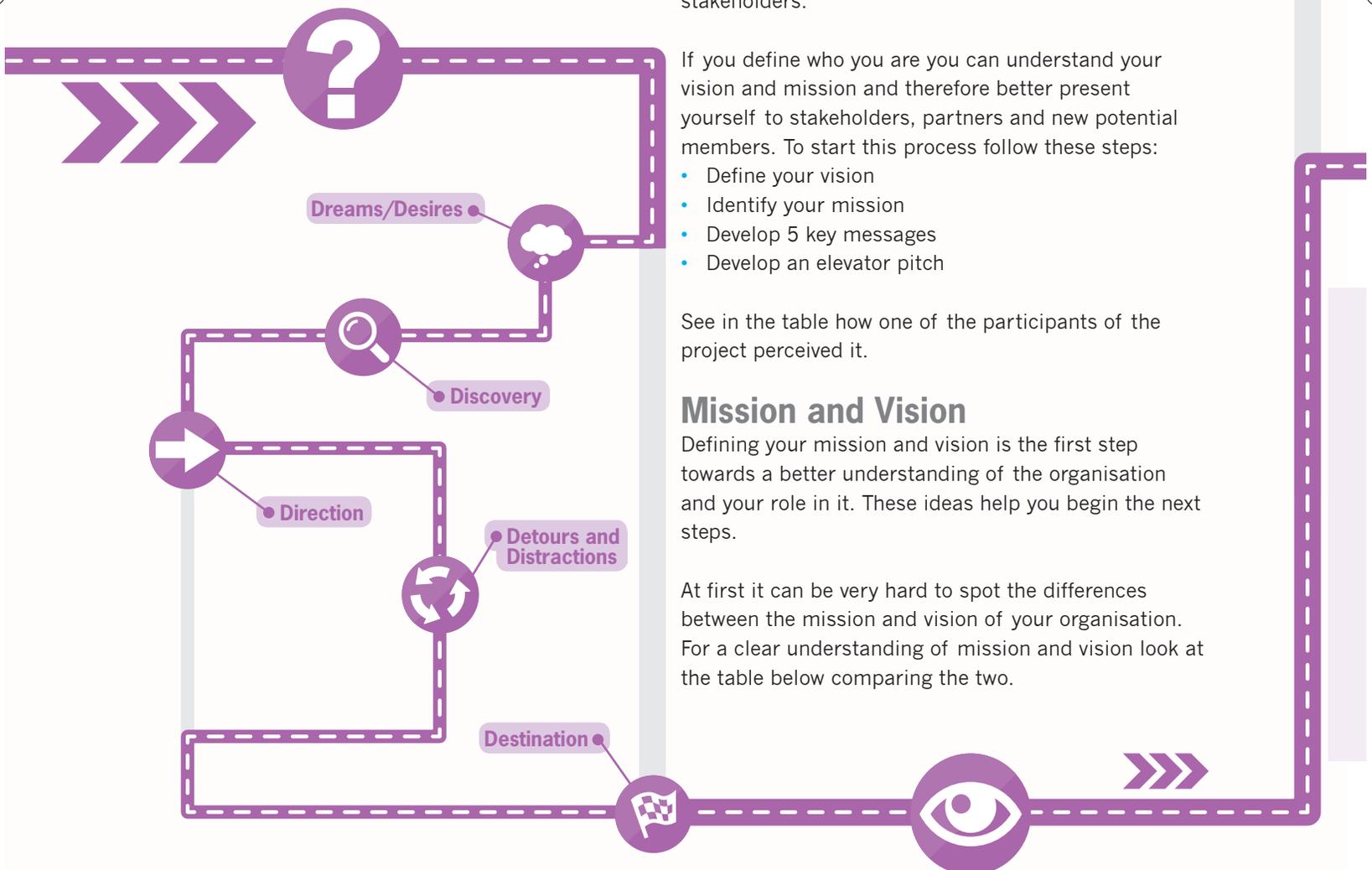
- Define your vision
- Identify your mission
- Develop 5 key messages
- Develop an elevator pitch

See in the table how one of the participants of the project perceived it.

Mission and Vision

Defining your mission and vision is the first step towards a better understanding of the organisation and your role in it. These ideas help you begin the next steps.

At first it can be very hard to spot the differences between the mission and vision of your organisation. For a clear understanding of mission and vision look at the table below comparing the two.



	Mission	Vision
What is it about?	The mission is about how you will get to where you want to be. Defines the purpose and primary objectives related to your target needs and to your core values.	The vision outlines where you want to be. Communicates both the purpose and values of your organisation.
Which question does it answer?	What do we do? What makes us different?	Where do we aim to be?
Time frame	A mission talks about the present leading to its future.	A vision statement talks about the future only.
Function	It lists the broad goals for which the organisation is established. Its primary function is internal; to define the key measure or measures of the organisation's success and its primary audience, the leadership, team and stockholders.	It lists where you see yourself some years from now. It inspires you to give your best. It shapes your understanding of why you are working here.
Change	Your mission may change, but it should still tie back to your core values, target needs and vision.	As your organisation evolves, you might feel tempted to change your vision. In either mission or vision explain your organisation's foundation, to avoid a large change.
Developing it	What do we do today? For whom do we do it? What is the benefit? In other words, Why we do what we do? What, For Whom and Why?	Where do we want to be? When do we want to reach that stage? How do we want to do it?



5

Testimony

Thanks to this process we realized that it is very important to fully understand our organisation and our role in it. There are very useful and important tools to create the vision, mission and 5 key messages of our organisation. More importantly we realized the need to truly believe in them. We recognised that the mission and vision of our umbrella organisations were not exactly reflected in the work of our local organisation and this was one of the reasons we were not using them. Thanks to this process we changed our perception of the organisation. We started to build our own identity as members of the same organisation.
AEGEE Bratislava

5 key messages

The 5 key messages are the most important things that you want other people to know. Therefore, it has to be based on the main interests of the organisation, the current topics it covers and what it can offer to other people. In other words they need to be based on your mission and vision.

To create your 5 key messages you have to identify the main interests of your organisation, your co-workers and members. Consult them and create short but realistic messages that can grab someone's attention. These can be used when presenting your organisation, either on paper, website, social media or talking to people.

Elevator pitch

An “Elevator Pitch” is a concise, carefully planned and well-practiced description about your organisation that everyone can understand in the time it would take to ride up an elevator. It is mainly a communication tool and it will help you articulate your organisations’ mission and vision in a marketing style.

The point of an elevator pitch is not to get into every detail of your organisation. Instead, all you want to do is to make sure the audience understands what you are talking about and what is in it for them in a very short time.

When developing your elevator pitch make sure it sticks to the 9 Cs principles:

1. Concise
2. Clear
3. Compelling
4. Credible
5. Conceptual
6. Concrete
7. Customised
8. Consistent
9. Conversational



The point of an elevator pitch is not to get into every detail of your organisation. Instead, all you want to do is to make sure the audience understands what you are talking about and what is in it for them in a very short time.



Example of who you are

ACTIVE (NOM – Slovakia)



Vision: Thanks to NOM young people will be empowered in Slovakia to lead a healthy lifestyle – free from alcohol and other drugs and to be proactive in society.

Mission: NOM empowers young people in Slovakia to lead healthy lifestyle – alcohol and drug free, and to be proactive in society.

5 key messages:

1. We promote: alcohol-free lifestyle-it’s cool!
2. We create: free, safe and inclusive environments for young people.
3. We do: we build self-esteem in young people to change society.
4. We give: get more friends – Europe wide!
5. We care: be healthy, be inspired, be proactive!

Elevator pitch: NOM Slovakia gives you space for self-realisation, opportunity to be proactive, the chance to meet young people from all around Europe and the possibility to be part of a free, safe, inclusive, alcohol and other drugs free environment.

What make us different? Parties and a lot of fun without alcohol.

Once you have identified the challenges and the causes you can start developing the action plan

Identifying your organisation's challenges

Once you have clearly understood the nature of your organisation and defined who you are, you need to look for the challenges that are actually preventing your organisation from reaching its full potential. In order to identify the challenges your organisation is facing it is important to undertake different action that will lead you to an overall understanding of the challenges and hopefully of the causes. Once you have identified the challenges and the causes you can start developing the action plan as a way to strategically respond to those challenges.

Below you will find a number of tools that might help you and your organisation analyse in detail how your organisation is functioning, as well as identify specifically what to tackle in order to face your organisational challenges.

SWOT analysis

The first step to assess the challenges your organisation is facing is to undertake a SWOT analysis. It is a structured planning method used to evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats involved in the development of your work. When carrying out a SWOT analysis you should start with your organisation's objectives and mission in order to identify the internal and external factors that are favorable and unfavorable in achieving your objective.

In the Membership Growth Project case we focused on the factors that were preventing the organisations involved in gaining new members and retaining existing ones. However, the participants realised that the factors involved were mainly linked to the organisations' inner workings and structure. Therefore, the results of the SWOT analysis were mainly about re-thinking the structure and inner workings of the organisation.



Here you have a more specific explanation of the 4 elements composing a SWOT analysis

Users of SWOT analysis need to ask and answer questions that generate meaningful information for each category (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) to make the analysis useful and find their competitive advantage. The initial identification of SWOTs is important as they will serve as a reference point in the later planning stages to achieve the objective, so keep always an eye on your SWOT!

Observation phase

Another important step to identify the challenges your organisation is facing is through the development of an observation phase. Observing the work of your organisation over a period of time with specific tools will help you identify them. The observation phase should be undertaken over a reasonable period of time to make sure that you analyse in detail the work your organization does.

An action plan is a way to make sure your organisation's vision and mission is made concrete.

When developing an action plan it is important to start thinking outside the box and then focusing on the aspects that can be actually implemented.

Assessment

The assessment of the observation phase represents the basis for the development of the action plan since you should put in place a set of practices and activities that would help you to overcome the identified challenges. To proceed with a quality assessment of your observation phase you could utilise a combination of the methods presented above, such as a face-to-face meetings and peer to peer feedback. As aforementioned, this is a crucial part of your journey, and it is where you actually start realising what your needs are and how your organisation can become more sustainable. Be prepared for surprises, you may realise that you need to change practices you would consider well consolidated.

Developing an action plan

An action plan is a way to make sure your organisation's vision and mission is made concrete. It describes the way you will use strategies to meet objectives and also to face the challenges identified during the observation phase. When developing an action plan it is important to start thinking outside the box and then focusing on the aspects that can be actually implemented.

In Annex I you find the list of observation tools developed within the MGP and that could be adapted to your specific organization and the link to download them. Those tools are meant to inspire readers to develop their own tools. In addition to the proposed tools, you can conceive and add other tools that would help you to monitor the implementation of your journey, especially when it comes to comparing your initial expectations of this process with what you actually achieved at the end.

TIPS

An action plan should meet several criteria identified as follows:

- **Complete?** Does it list all the action steps or changes to be sought in all relevant parts of the communities (e.g. youth centres, other youth organisations, municipality, other local NGOs, schools etc.)?
- **Clear?** Is it apparent who will do what by when?
- **Current?** Does the action plan reflect the current work? Does it anticipate newly emerging opportunities and barriers?

Start building your dream action plan as though you had all the resources you could need and then, in order to come out with more concrete ideas, apply the SMARTEC⁴ methodology to your dream action plan. The result can be quite impressive!

When conducting the development process, involve the people who will be responsible for implementing the plan. Use a cross-functional team to ensure the plan is realistic and collaborative.

To ensure the plan is realistic continue asking planning participants “Is this realistic? Can you really do this?”. Make it clear who is doing what and by when.

Remember that your action plan is always a work in progress. It is not something you can write, lock in your file drawers, and forget about. Keep it visible! Display it prominently. As your organisation changes and grows, you will want to continually revise your action plan to fit the changing needs of your organisation.

When you develop the action plan make sure you want to tell your story.

In the Annex you can find a template to for the action plan, adapt it according to your needs.



Implementing, monitoring and evaluating the action plan

Your action plan should not be a document that ends up collecting dust on a shelf. With your action plan you should be able to communicate the organisation’s goals, the actions needed to achieve those goals and all of the other critical elements identified during the development exercise.

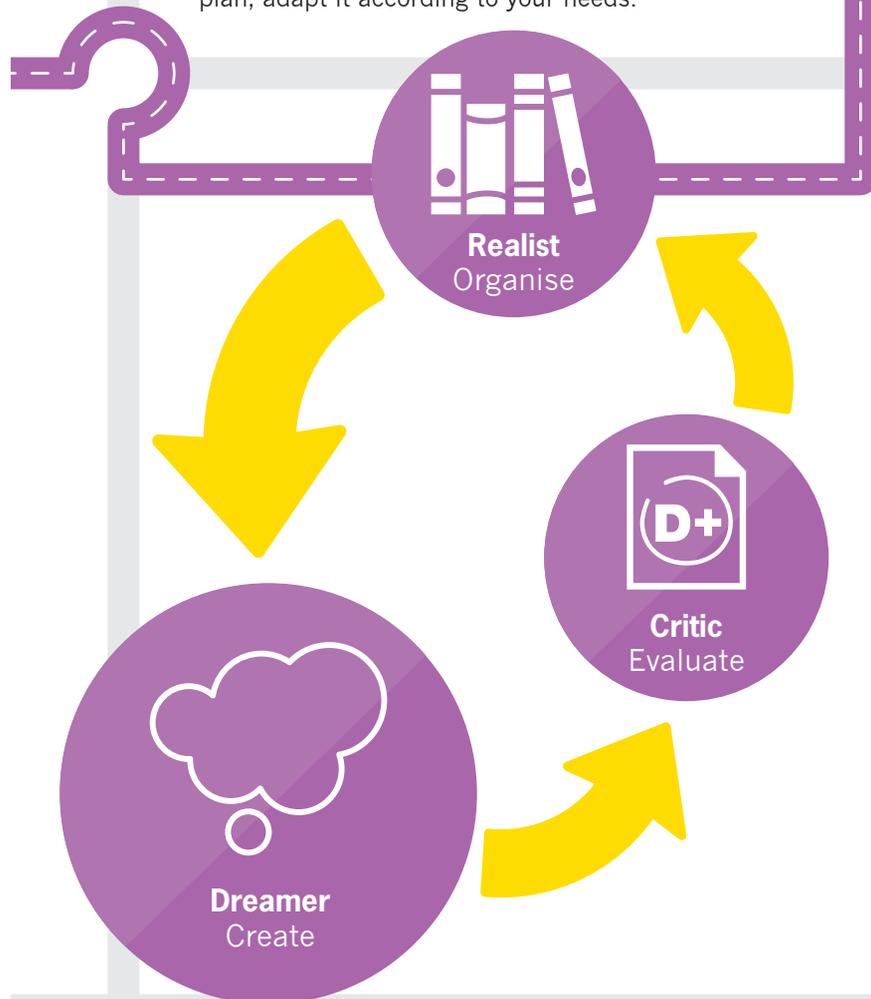
The whole process of creation, implementation and evaluation of the action plan is meant to educate, prompt you to identify mistakes and successes, and how to learn from them.

It is important to review the action plan every time you realise something can be improved and therefore learn how to plan better in the future.

The key for a successful action plan does not lie necessarily on the perfect choice of activities you propose but rather on how involved people are in the planning process and on how open they are to changing their initial plans.

You will probably realise that what works for others most likely does not work for your organisation and therefore you should always adapt the feedback and inspiration you get from others to your own specific situation. Try to repeat the successful events and add new activities to your action plan. Try new things and keep the ones that are working well.

Monitoring and evaluating the planning activities as well as the implementation of the plan is as important as identifying a clear mission and vision of the organisation. It would be consequently strategic to build in regular reviews of status of the implementation of the plan. For this purpose you can adapt some of the tools proposed above in the observation phase.



NEXT STEPS

This short publication calls on leaders of youth organisations to reconsider current strategies and practices. It points to a number of recommendations to help achieve a more holistic approach towards the development of youth organisations to become strong CSOs contributing to the development of our societies.

We hope the learning journey proposed will inspire and stimulate the debate in the youth civil society sector and beyond. However, the practices put in place by the European Youth Forum on organisational development, strategic planning and other capacity building activities for our members have laid the foundation to contribute to strengthening youth organisations in Europe. The purpose of this publication was to inspire the reader to come out with more questions on how to contribute to develop practical ways towards strong youth organisations.

After two years of conducting the learning experiment with the Membership Growth Project and several years of developing capacity building experience for youth organisations, the European Youth Forum's work on organisational change and development is a milestone in achieving its mission. The next challenge will be to explore how we can broaden our engagement beyond our membership and into the wider civil society sector promoting a more holistic and systemic change to their development strategies. An additional challenge will be how to better communicate to institutions and decision makers the importance of supporting CSOs, and specifically youth organisations, as key stakeholders playing a crucial role in the development of our societies.

The Youth Forum believes that together we can become a driving force in making this happen and building strong youth organisations in Europe.

The purpose of this publication was to inspire the reader to come out with more questions

We hope the learning journey proposed will inspire and stimulate the debate in the youth civil society sector and beyond.

The next challenge will be to explore how we can broaden our engagement beyond our membership and into the wider civil society sector promoting a more holistic and systemic change to their development strategies.

- 1 European Youth Forum, *Everything you always wanted to know about National Youth Councils, but were afraid to ask*, 2014 – <http://www.youthforum.org/assets/2014/11/YFJ-NationalYouthCouncils-WEB-2P.pdf>
- 2 <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/for-professionals/organizational-development>
- 3 <http://www.youthforum.org/about/meet-the-pot/>
- 4 S: specific; M: measurable; A: achievable/ attractive; R: realistic; T: time-bound E: ecological/respecting the community and the environment/ sustainability/ ethical; C: control /under control



RESOURCES

<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/structure/strategic-planning/develop-action-plans/main>

<http://coachfederation.org/index.cfm>

<http://www.capacity.org/capacity/opencms/en/topics/organizational-development/>

<http://www.fao.org/capacitydevelopment/capacity-development-home/it/>

<http://elevatorpitchessentials.com/essays/ElevatorPitch.html>

<http://www.youthforum.org/claims/stronger-youth-civil-society/>

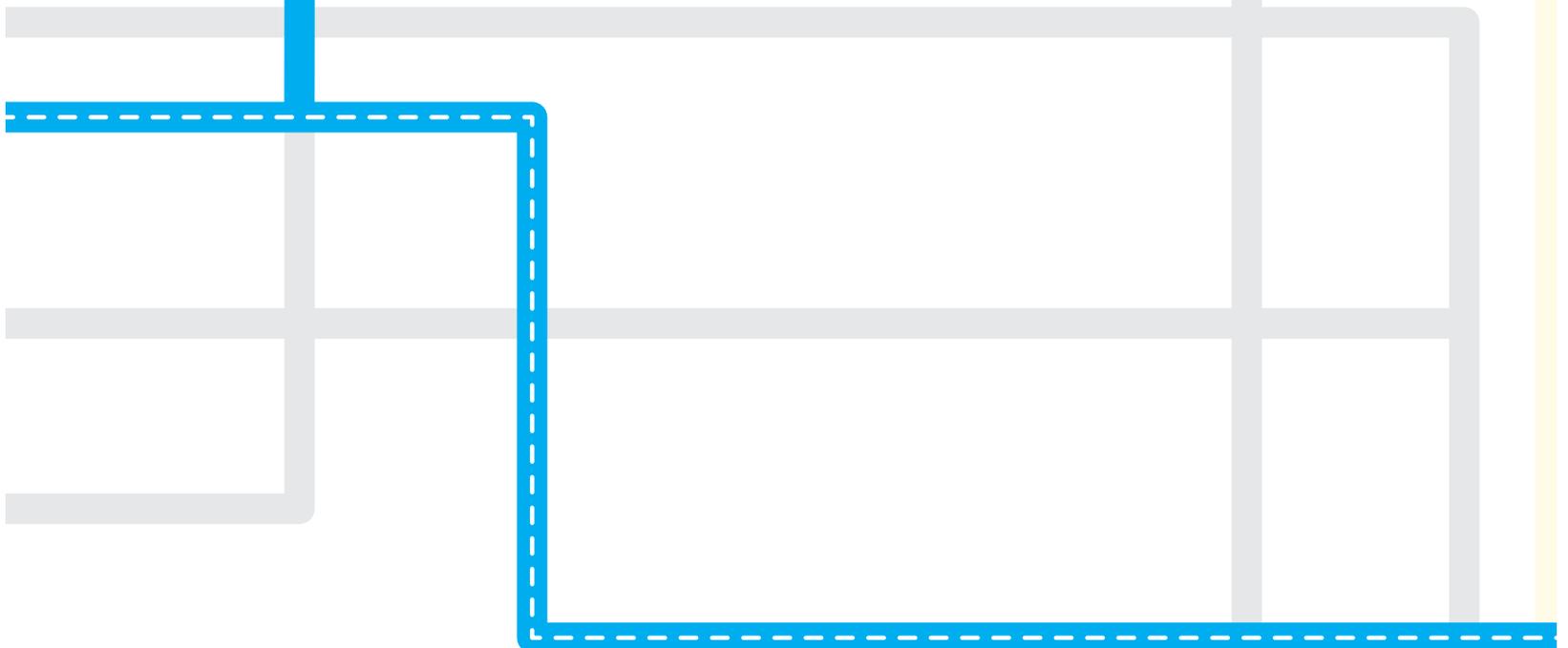
<http://www.youthforum.org/about/meet-the-pot/>

<http://www.youthforum.org/assets/2014/11/YFJ-NationalYouthCouncils-WEB-2P.pdf>

<http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/for-professionals/organizational-development>

http://www.diffen.com/difference/Mission_Statement_vs_Vision_Statement

<http://managementhelp.org/strategicplanning/#anchor1243528>



ANNEX 1 – TOOLS FOR THE OBSERVATION PHASE

All the tools are available online on the website of the Youth Forum in the Library section.

Action/work plan template

This tool is meant to keep track of all the activities your organisation undertakes and to monitor its implementation.

Communication

This tool helps you to assess the quality and impact of your communication tools and messages.

Events monitoring

This tool is developed to keep track of all the elements in event management including allocation of resources and evaluation of the events.

This includes information on the kind of events organised, who is in charge of what, who participates etc..

Evaluation of the leadership

This tool focuses on assessing the quality of leadership in your organisation.

Interview with the members

This tool helps to better understand the way members perceive the organisation and their expectation towards it.

