

ONE STEP AT A TIME

A compass for developing
organisational strategy
with young people



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A compass for developing organisational
strategy with young people

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PREFACE

Running an organization is kind of like bringing together a bunch of friends for an adventure. We all come from different backgrounds, each with our own thoughts about where we're headed and what we want to experience along the way. Some folks are super eager to help move things forward, while others jump in when topics that matter to them pop up. But what ties everyone together is that they all play a part in shaping the community and how things run day by day.

Such a journey can be quite surprising: new challenges pop up, situations shift, new friends join us, and some leave, some for a little while, and some for good. That's why it's so special when we take a moment to pause, look around, and ask ourselves together: Where are we headed? Why are we going there? And how will we make this journey together?

Strategy development gives us a chance to do just that! It helps to highlight what really matters to the organization, the values it stands by, the goals it aims for, and the ways it can reach those goals. But remember, strategy development isn't just about putting together a document — it's more like a journey where everyone involved gets to know each other better, creates a shared language, and learns more about how their organization operates.

In the project called Inclusion Without Borders, three partner organizations – GYIÖT, the Future-Friendly Association, and the Iuventus Ventus Association – joined forces on this exciting journey. The aim of this process went beyond just organizational growth. The project fostered a learning space where leaders, staff, members, and young volunteers from the organizations could come together to brainstorm about the future.

While working together, it became obvious that young people are not just participants; they also play a big role in shaping the life of organizations. They let us know when things aren't going smoothly, bring fresh ideas to the table, and with their feedback, help the organization really meet their needs.

This publication is based on the experiences gathered throughout this process. We want to offer youth professionals and youth communities some helpful tools that can support strategy development and can be easily adapted to fit any organization.

The methods we're sharing aren't brand new, but we've made them super easy to grasp for anyone who might be new to strategic planning. We're really focusing on how to use these methods while getting young people involved!

The publication is a great resource to use as a toolkit: each chapter stands on its own, or you can follow the whole journey from analyzing the situation to creating an action plan. Along with the tools, we also share helpful tips on how to engage young people, what to pay attention to, and what pitfalls to steer clear of.

We really hope this publication helps organizations come together, plan together, and create a strategy that truly reflects what young people need.

A shared journey works best when everyone feels like they have a say in the direction and can help shape how we reach our destination.

INCLUDING YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE STRATEGY-MAKING PROCESS

Let's kick things off with the basics: when we think about young people and strategy, the first question that pops up is whether they are truly important, engaged players in this — or just numbers we use to carry out a process? It doesn't really help if someone is just sitting in a meeting without anyone actually caring about them or what they have to say. In a youth organization, getting young people actively involved in creating strategies is a must — after all, they should be the ones shaping the activities, the programs, and the future! This not only helps young people feel more connected to the strategies but also encourages lasting and positive effects.

But what does it really mean to be involved or to take part? We can get a clearer picture from Roger Hart's Youth Participation Ladder (1992, Children's Participation: From Motive Participation to Citizenship), which is inspired by Sherry Arnstein's work from 1996. This participation ladder illustrates the different levels at which young people can (or can't) join in on planning together, like when creating strategies.

Here's a glimpse of what this ladder looks like, along with a few handy examples.

The bottom line – Let's find a better way to do this!

The first three levels fall into the "let's steer clear of this at all costs" category. There's not much real involvement here; it just looks like there is, or it might not even be there at all.

1. Manipulation — This happens when young people are brought in just to make things look good. For instance, they might be asked to read something at an event, but they don't really have a connection to it and don't understand why they're doing it. They just go along with it because someone asked them to. It's like saying, "You look great, so just smile for the camera!"
2. Decoration — It's kind of the same thing: the young folks are present, but just for appearances. Imagine a few young people sitting in on a strategy workshop, but no one really asks for their opinions — it just looks like "they were there too."
3. Tokenism — It's like pretending to include you. They might ask what you think, but then they just brush it aside. It feels more like a trick to look good than actually being involved. This is what really makes young people lose interest.

INCLUDING YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE STRATEGY-MAKING PROCESS

The midfield – It's starting to come together, but there's still space to make it even better.

There's already some genuine involvement happening at two levels of the midfield, but it's not quite there yet. Once we reach that point, we might not get a big cheer just yet, but we can definitely say we're heading in the right direction.

4. Designated and informed participation — This is a step up! Here, you have a clear role that's explained to you beforehand. For instance, if you're involved in creating a strategy, you understand what's expected of you, what your part is, and why your contribution matters. You might not be making the decisions, but you get to see how everything unfolds.

5. Consulted and informed participation — This is a step further. In this stage, they really want to hear what you think — like your thoughts on the challenges young people face — and they consider your input when making decisions. They don't just listen; they also take action based on what you share.

The higher levels – This is important involvement

This is the moment you truly deserve a big round of applause for joining in! You can feel really proud if you're able to (and of course want to) put your strategy creation process into action at these levels.

6. Adults start the process, but we make decisions together — In this approach, adults kick things off (since they are the ones with the strategies), but after that, all the big choices are made as a team. Young people are seen as true partners. For instance, we all decide together what topics should be part of the strategy, how to work on them, and in what way to share them, and so on.

7. Youth-led and youth-initiated participation — This is what we call true participation! Young people take the lead on projects, bring up important topics, and organize their own ideas. Adults are there to support them, stepping in when needed, but they don't take charge.

INCLUDING YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE STRATEGY-MAKING PROCESS

8. Youth-led and shared decision-making — This is the highest level. In this stage, young people not only start initiatives and projects but also make decisions at every step alongside adults. This is the best approach, especially when creating a youth strategy, as it ensures that the interests, knowledge, and experiences of everyone involved are taken into account.

So, what can we learn from this?

Participation isn't just a simple yes or no. It's not just about whether to include young people — it's all about the how. The aim is to climb as high up the ladder as we can — but that doesn't happen in a flash. It takes trust, learning together, and the bravery of those in charge to take a step back and create chances for everyone.

Young people are more likely to stay engaged in a strategy-making process when they feel heard and see that they can make a difference. If they notice that their input is reflected in the final outcome and can see the real results of their efforts, they're more likely to stick around. And let's be honest, it's also important that it's a fun experience—nobody enjoys sitting through dull conversations!

The biggest mistake you can make is to "invite" them to help create the strategy but not actually give them a real role. Young people will pick up on this quickly, so don't be surprised if they choose not to join in next time. The Youth Participation Ladder is simply a great way to involve young people step by step, ensuring they're not just present but truly engaged — in their thoughts, feelings, and ideas. If you can achieve this, then the strategy and action plan will be truly effective and meaningful. Plus, the process will be fun too!

What can we do to make this happen? What ways should we try?

If we truly want a strategy that goes beyond being just words on a page and becomes a vibrant, working plan, it's super important to include young people. But not just as a "decoration" or a reason to say we did it; they should be genuine, active participants.

INCLUDING YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE STRATEGY-MAKING PROCESS

It's super important to make sure everyone knows right from the start what our common goal is and where young people can have a say, make decisions, and take on responsibilities. The biggest mistake is when making a strategy turns into a really formal and distant process, filled with fancy words that nobody uses in their daily lives. This can make most young people lose interest after the first round or just join in passively while their minds drift off – and that's totally understandable! That's why it's a great idea to create a language, space, and vibe from the very beginning that says, "This is about us now, and you really matter here." For instance, if we're working on a strategy for an organization, city, or youth program, we should ask young people during the planning phase: What do you see? What do you think is important? What do you deal with every day? And not just in broad terms – but really specific ones. Where do you hang out? What are the challenges? What are the good things? Where do you feel at home?

Of course, it's super important not to just dump a bunch of Excel spreadsheets and SWOT analyses on them right away. Instead, let's give them some fun, interactive tools to share their ideas! This could be something visual and creative, like a video, storytelling, or even a game or simulation. It's a way that feels natural for them!

It's super important to take some time to really grasp what they're up to. A lot of young people might not jump in, not because they don't want to, but because they're a bit confused about what this whole strategy thing is all about. If we don't break it down clearly, we can't really expect them to get involved seriously. So, let's kick things off by figuring it out together: what is strategy? Why is it useful? How can it make a difference in our daily lives? What can we accomplish together?

And you know what? It really doesn't matter how flexible the process is. Young people don't think in formal ways, like spreadsheets or deadlines. Instead, they focus on experiences, connections, meaningful causes, and opportunities. If we let them help shape the process together – even by coming up with new ideas and topics – they can connect so much better. You don't always have to stick to the usual working group meeting format. It could be a fun workshop in a park, a cooking class together, or a pop-up event!

INCLUDING YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE STRATEGY-MAKING PROCESS

When it comes to staying motivated, it's super important to remember that the journey is just as important as the end result. We need plenty of feedback and recognition along the way. It should be obvious that their thoughts and ideas are being included in the plan. Instead of surprising them with a finished product at the end, they should be able to see the whole process: how something ordinary comes to life from their ideas and suggestions. And finally, let's not worry that young people have different thoughts than we do. That's totally okay because it's important for them to be involved. If we allow them to express themselves in their own way, using their own tools, and if we see them as partners instead of just teaching them, we can learn together and achieve amazing results!

You really don't need to push young people – if we give them the room to express themselves and don't just include them for appearances, most will show up, engage, and be genuinely interested. It's important to ensure that their involvement is meaningful. They shouldn't just be there as background characters; they should be co-creators. This way, a strategy won't just sit in a drawer collecting dust, but will actually reflect their contributions – and that makes it truly theirs.

What can we do to really connect with young people?

1. Clarify goals and expectations. It's super important for young people to understand the goals of the process, their own role, and what is expected from them. This helps boost their commitment and sense of responsibility.

2. Building skills and empowering young people means giving them the right training and resources so they can take part in the process. This could involve teaching them how to assess situations, communicate well, and manage projects effectively.

INCLUDING YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE STRATEGY-MAKING PROCESS

3. A fun and adaptable approach Use methods and tools that match what young people like and enjoy. For instance, think about interactive workshops, theater activities, team challenges, simulations, and creative brainstorming sessions.

4. Ongoing feedback and appreciation Make sure to regularly share feedback on the young people's contributions and celebrate their efforts. This boosts their motivation and helps them feel like an important part of the team.

5. Foster a safe environment Encourage a space where young people can share their thoughts openly and feel confident that their voices will be valued.

6. Give fun and exciting tasks! Provide activities that connect with what young people enjoy and are good at. This boosts their excitement and involvement in the project.

7. Fun and hands-on ways Strategy development can be a lot more exciting than just staring at papers. Try using playful, visual, and hands-on tools like collaborative mind mapping, colorful visuals, poster making, online polls, creative brainstorming, and role-playing games. These activities can help young people share their ideas more easily and enjoy the process!

INCLUDING YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE STRATEGY-MAKING PROCESS

8. Flexibility and adaptability Let's embrace the idea that things can shift as we go along. Young people's lives can change in the blink of an eye — with school, exams, jobs, and personal matters — so it's super important that the participation process can adjust accordingly. Instead of sticking to strict rules, let's create a flow for our meetings and tasks that works well for everyone involved.

In this publication, we see organizational strategy as a guiding compass that helps the organization function in a thoughtful, aware, and adaptable manner over the long haul. Strategy is both a written plan and an ongoing process: it outlines our goals and assists us in figuring out how to reach them.

The heart of strategy is all about building on the values and main goals of the organization. It lays out the organization's vision (where we want to go), its mission (why we do what we do), and the goals we aim to achieve. The strategy looks at both the outside and inside factors needed to reach those goals and pinpoints the steps and milestones that help with long-term growth.

However, we don't see all of this as just a document. Making a strategy is way more than just writing something down: it's a team effort where everyone in the organization – leaders, staff, volunteers, young people, and partners – can share their thoughts, offer ideas, and work together to shape the future of the organization based on how involved they are. A well-organized planning process can gather and compare different viewpoints and help create a shared understanding.

When it comes to civil society, youth organizations, and groups of young people, having a solid strategy is super important. These organizations usually work in environments that are always changing. The needs of young people can shift quickly, resources are often tight, and a lot of the work relies on the enthusiasm of volunteers. So, strategy isn't just about reacting; it's also about planning thoughtfully. We consider the situation, listen to what young people have to say, and think about the strengths and challenges of the organization.

Strategy development also helps organizations become more sustainable over time. It provides a clearer view of which direction is worth pursuing, what decisions align with the organization's goals, and how young people can take part in shaping the processes that impact them. With strategy in place, responsibilities, tasks, and priorities become clearer, making daily operations easier to predict.

WHAT'S THE STRATEGY?

Strategic thinking is a professional framework and a learning journey where the organization gets to know itself better. It doesn't have to be tricky! What really matters is that the organization uses tools that are easy to understand, practical, and can be adjusted to fit its own way of working. In the following section, we'll help you get familiar with some common terms you'll see.

Situation analysis: in the situation analysis, the organization takes a good look at where it is right now: what its strengths are, what it needs to work on, what outside factors affect its operations, and what opportunities it can count on. This step is super helpful for understanding what helps and what gets in the way of reaching the organization's goals. A solid situation analysis reflects the true state of the organization: it reveals the real situation, not just our thoughts about it.

Problem identification is the way an organization looks at the difficulties, challenges, or ongoing roadblocks that are stopping progress or reaching goals. It's not just about fixing things, but a chance to really understand what's causing the issues and what happens because of them. When we identify problems well, it helps us see clearly what needs to be changed or improved.

Vision: the future outlook of the organization. It paints a picture of where it hopes to be in a few years, the kind of impact it aims to make, and how it envisions itself and its community. A vision is uplifting, encouraging, and offers a clear path for the long haul. It helps everyone share the same goal and feel that working together towards it is truly worthwhile.

“In 3 years, the Future-Friendly Association will be a well-known, self-sustaining group that keeps a safe and welcoming community space for young people with KRÉM available all the time.”

Mission: the core mission of the organization, which is the reason it exists. It explains how it supports the community, what activities it engages in, and why those activities are important. The mission helps the organization stay focused in its daily tasks and always keeps in mind the reason for its work.

"All young folks in Vojvodina can enjoy a mentally healthy life by supporting those with mental health challenges and helping them grow through fun, community programs in a friendly and welcoming environment."

Strategic goals are the specific results or changes that an organization aims to achieve within a certain timeframe. Great goals are clear, attainable, measurable, and in harmony with the organization's vision and mission. Goals serve as the "steps" of strategy: they help to break down the big picture into manageable actions.

Action plan: a clear outline that explains who will do what, when, and how to reach the goals we've set. This turns the strategy into a practical, doable process. A solid action plan is easy to understand, aids in dividing tasks, and keeps daily operations running smoothly — it's like a map that guides us on our next steps.

Competency map: highlights the skills, strengths, and areas where team members or community members can grow. It helps us understand who excels in what and where we might need some extra learning, support, or new faces to join in. A thoughtfully created competency map plays a big role in helping the team grow together and in making sure tasks are shared in a practical way.

Risk is the chance that something might happen that could make it harder to reach our goals or slow things down a bit. It's not always a bad thing; it just shows us what we should be ready for ahead of time. By recognizing and handling risks on purpose, the organization can be more adaptable and stay prepared for any challenges that come its way.

WHAT'S THE STRATEGY?

Stakeholders are the people or groups who are directly impacted by what the organization does, its choices, or its programs. This can include young people, volunteers, staff, supporters, parents, and even local institutions. Stakeholders play a vital role because their thoughts, experiences, and needs guide the organization in effectively reaching out to those it aims to help with its efforts.

Stakeholders are those individuals or groups who have an impact on how the organization runs or are significantly affected by its activities, whether directly or indirectly. This can include decision-makers, supporters, partners, local institutions, professionals, financiers, or any groups that influence the organization's objectives. The core idea behind the stakeholder approach is that the organization understands its operations are shaped by many different players, and it's important to build a thoughtful, collaborative relationship with them.

The ideas we've talked about lay the groundwork for creating strategies and make it easier for us to grasp and use the methods we'll explore in the upcoming chapters. These concepts have been explained based on how they were applied in the Borderless Inclusion project.

In the upcoming chapters, we'll share some handy tools and methods that help the organization turn strategic thinking into action, not just on paper but in daily operations too. These methods are designed to make planning together easier, engage young people, and create a solid framework for the organization's long-term growth.

WAYS AND TOOLS FOR CRAFTING A STRATEGY

Now, let's dive a bit deeper: we'll explore what the strategy-making process looks like, step by step, especially if we want young people to not just be there, but to really help shape the process.

And yes, it's not just about "what" we do, but also "how" we do it together. The whole process of making strategies is a chance for young people to see that their thoughts, experiences, and creativity really count and can make a difference in our shared future.

Making a strategy is a journey. It's not just about an organization creating a big document and then leaving it to gather dust on a shelf. Instead, it's like embarking on an adventure together: we start off as a team, we discover the landscape together, we choose together where to go next, and everyone contributes something essential to make the journey whole. Young people aren't just along for the ride; they're also the ones drawing the maps, making decisions, and planning the routes.

To really think about the future together, it's super important that the strategy-making process is clear, easy to understand, and something we can all work with. We won't kick things off with complicated charts; instead, we'll start with some questions:

- Where is the organization at this moment?
- What do young folks go through?
- What kinds of situations make us feel down, and which ones lift our spirits?
- What are the thoughts that truly help us get closer to what we all want together?

At the start of our journey, we always take a moment to pause and look around: Where are we right now? This is the stage where we assess the situation, and we work together with the young people to understand how the organization is currently functioning. This is where the empathy map comes into play, helping us explore how the young people perceive the organization from the inside. What do they feel and think? What makes them feel at home, and what creates distance? The empathy map often reveals fresh perspectives, especially when both the adult team and the young people collaborate on it. We also create a resource map here, which highlights what the organization is made of: the people, knowledge, relationships, spaces, and motivations that are available.

WAYS AND TOOLS FOR CRAFTING A STRATEGY

Part of figuring out the situation involves putting together a SWOT analysis, which is a team effort to think about strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. It's super important that not just the organization's employees share their thoughts: without the insights from young people, a key piece of the SWOT would be left out. They really bring these categories to life with their own stories: "strengths" aren't just about professional successes, but also include feelings like "it's great to be part of this," while "weaknesses" often include little things that only young people seem to notice.

The situation assessment leads us into problem exploration, which helps us dive into real strategic thinking. This is where the problem tree comes into play, helping us organize the challenges: what's the root problem, what are its consequences, and how do they connect? Young people often feel very engaged at this stage because they can finally express what they've been sensing. The problem tree transforms into the goal tree: we flip the same logic "positively" and explore what goals we could achieve if we tackled the problem. The "Why?" method (asking "why is this important?" over and over) works wonders here, guiding us to uncover the deeper connections that give rise to genuine, long-term meaningful goals.

Once we get a good grasp of the problems and opportunities, we can really dive into shaping our strategy. This is the moment when we start asking, "What's going to happen?" We need to think about where we want to go together. What kind of organization and community do we picture in a few years? This is where our vision comes to life, which is simply a hopeful yet achievable image of the future we're creating. Along with the vision, we also define our mission: what is the heart of the organization, why does it exist, and what does it aim to accomplish in the lives of young people? Crafting these ideas together with young people isn't just a nice democratic touch; it's also a smart approach. When young people are involved, we end up with much more realistic and believable visions than if the whole process was left to just the professionals.

WAYS AND TOOLS FOR CRAFTING A STRATEGY

After the vision, we move on to the priority points, which are the key areas where the strategy takes shape. At this point, young people are already stepping up with confidence: they grasp the issues, the goals, and can identify what they believe is truly important. Working together to prioritize empowers them with the understanding that their voices help guide the organization's path.

Once we've figured out our priorities, the next step in our strategy is the action plan, which is not only practical but also pretty exciting! This is where we'll explore how to turn our big dreams into specific tasks. A key part of the action plan is the competency map, where we think about the tasks ahead and the knowledge and skills we'll need to tackle them. It's important to ask who excels at what, who wants to grow in certain areas, and how we can share the tasks in a way that's both challenging and doable.

The action plan also comes with a resource map because we need to know about the tools and resources we have to bring our ideas to life: money, people, time, and connections. All of these things play a big role in whether our strategy stays just on paper. At the same time, we prepare a risk analysis that outlines potential challenges: what could put our plans at risk and what can we do to avoid them?

At the end of creating our strategy, we take a moment to reflect: where did we begin, and where have we arrived? A strategy isn't just a finished paper; it's a dynamic system. That's why we include monitoring and measuring our impact in the process. This helps us see what's going great during implementation, where we might need to rethink our steps, and how all the effort that young people and our colleagues have put in is paying off. Monitoring isn't about control; it's more like a chance to learn together: a shared look back that helps us understand how we're growing as a team.

Strategy-making isn't just a straight line or a simple checklist; it's a collaborative space for ideas. In this space, young people get to share their thoughts and also play a big role in shaping and creating the organization's future. Maybe the best part of this whole process is that it helps build a community where everyone can make decisions together, take action together, and share the responsibility for the future they've dreamed up together.

WAYS AND TOOLS FOR CRAFTING A STRATEGY

SITUATION REVIEW

The first big step in making a strategy is situation analysis. This is the time when we figure out where the organization stands right now, what strengths we can use, where the hiccups are, and what kind of environment we're working in. Situation analysis is really like a team reality check: before we plan anything, it's super important to know our starting point.

Situation analysis isn't just about gathering boring data; it's more like a fun, collaborative chat about how the organization works. Young people play a crucial role in this because they share their everyday experiences, which really help paint a vivid picture of the situation. Without their insights, the analysis could end up feeling pretty one-dimensional.

Situation analysis usually includes a few key parts: getting to know our target groups (like using an empathy map), figuring out our resources, and spotting any problems. When we put all these pieces together, we can create a clear and shared understanding of the kind of organization we want to build next, rather than just making guesses.

SWOT assessment

SWOT is a really popular way to assess a situation because it's straightforward, clear, and makes it easy to get everyone involved.

SWOT analysis is super important when making plans because it helps us understand what the organization and young people see in their daily lives, even if we haven't called it by that name before. It shows us what we're really good at, where we might be stuck, what exciting opportunities are popping up around us, and what challenges we need to get ready for.

It also explains why it's a great idea to define strategic directions at this moment: a well-crafted SWOT reveals the strengths the organization can build upon, where improvements are necessary, and which areas deserve attention in the upcoming years.

WAYS AND TOOLS FOR CRAFTING A STRATEGY

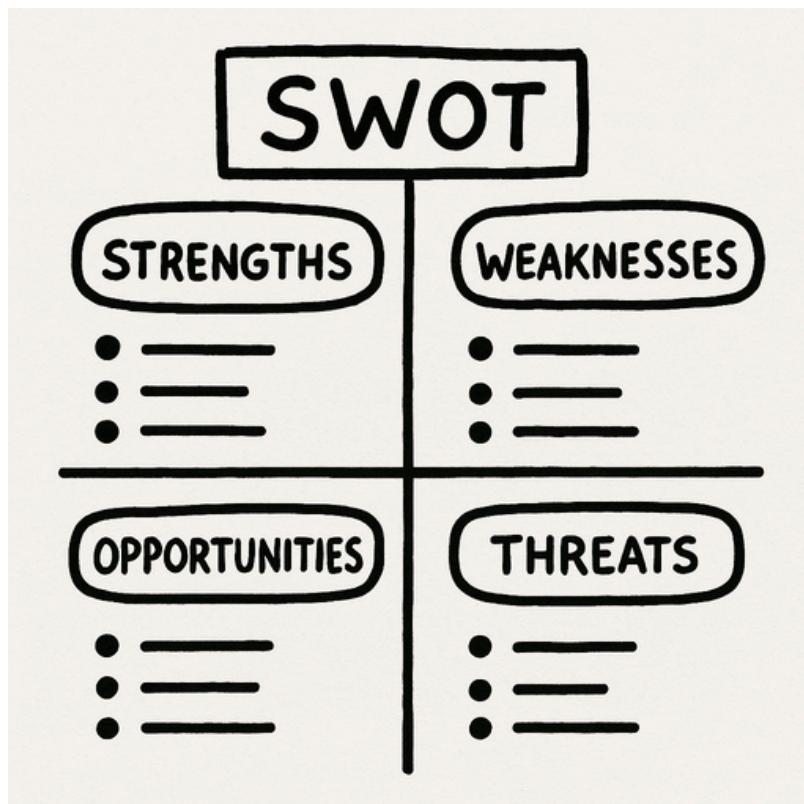
SWOT element	What are you trying out?	What does it really mean in everyday life?
Strengths	What does the organization excel at? What values, skills, and operational aspects can we develop further?	Expertise, a supportive community, a positive vibe, appreciation, successful endeavors, or personal and impactful experiences that are mostly felt by young folks: for example, "they truly pay attention here."
Weaknesses	What areas can we work on to get better? Where do you think the community, especially the young folks, feels like things aren't going quite right?	Challenges in operations that encourage genuine self-reflection. It's really important to have a safe space where young people can share their thoughts openly.
Opportunities	What outside things can help the organization grow?	New trends like digital spaces, partnerships, bids, local happenings, and social movements are creating fresh opportunities and growth paths for young people.
Threats	What outside risks could get in the way of our operations?	Financial worries, lack of space, new laws, and tricky community vibes... Young folks usually feel these outside pressures or changes first.

When we do a SWOT analysis with young people, we often find that they view strengths in a unique way ("a safe space matters more to us than programs") and point out different weaknesses ("the issue isn't a lack of time – it's that we don't get enough feedback"). These differences aren't problems; they're what help us think strategically and move forward.

WAYS AND TOOLS FOR CRAFTING A STRATEGY

A SWOT analysis:

- helps to keep the strategy from being based on wishes or routines and instead focuses on actual hands-on experience;
- it highlights the strengths that the organization relies on, often the ones that young people notice first;
- it shows weaknesses without pointing fingers, making it easier to find ways to grow;
- it uncovers fresh chances in the environment, which we pick up on much quicker thanks to the energy of young people;
- It highlights the dangers and risks, and without being aware of them, the strategy can easily become weak.



WAYS AND TOOLS FOR CRAFTING A STRATEGY

Here are some fun ways to make preparing a SWOT analysis easy to understand and exciting for everyone:

“SWOT Field Game”: With Stations and Movement Instead of just sitting in a room and chatting, let’s make SWOT into a fun little “field game.”

Set up the four SWOT areas as different stations in the room: use posters, items, colors, or symbols to represent each one.

Young folks travel between stations in little groups, and at each stop, they come across a fun, creative challenge (like “draw a metaphor for a strength” or “write a short story about a weakness”).

Moving around adds some fun to our chats and makes everything feel a lot more lively!

“Young People’s Stories”: Storytelling as the Foundation for SWOT Young people often feel more comfortable sharing their experiences rather than discussing abstract ideas.

Question beginnings:

“Share a moment when you thought this place was really thriving.”

“Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you felt a bit uneasy?” → Weakness

“What chances do you notice around you that other groups are making the most of?” → Opportunity
Dangers

You gather the stories and sort them into SWOT categories. This way, there’s a real experience connected to each part.

WAYS AND TOOLS FOR CRAFTING A STRATEGY

“SWOT with emoji wall”: A fun and colorful way to engage! Set up a big wall or a digital board where everyone can vote, share their thoughts, or sort things out using emoji stickers.

Strengths: 💪☀️🧠

Weaknesses: 😬❓💣

Opportunities: 🚀🚀⭐

Dangers: ⚠️💣🕒

Participants use emoji stickers to show which statement is true for them or their organization.

This is fun, quick, and super easy to see: you can instantly tell which fields are being filled out. Younger folks really enjoy this solution!

WAYS AND TOOLS FOR CRAFTING A STRATEGY

Empathy map

Empathy mapping is such a fun and hands-on tool for understanding situations, especially when you're working with young people. This approach not only gathers information about the group you're focusing on, but it also allows you to step into the shoes of young people: how they feel, what challenges they face, what drives them, and what hurdles they come across. Empathy mapping is really about tuning in together to the reality of young people, and without this perspective, it's tough to come up with a solid strategy.

An empathy map is a fun visual tool that helps us gather the experiences, feelings, and thoughts of a specific group. It's typically split into six (or sometimes four) sections, and each one looks at how a particular young person or group of young people views the world.

The timeless fields:

What do you notice?

What kind of surroundings does he/she live in? What programs, people, and situations does he/she encounter each day?

With echo?

What do his friends, teachers, parents, and youth workers say to him? What voices, expectations, and pressures is he facing?

How do you feel about it?

What are you thinking about? What worries you, and what do you really want? What emotions are pushing you forward?

What does he say and what does he do?

How does he act on the outside? What does he express? What does he engage in, and what makes him feel unsure?

Challenges (Struggles)

What challenges are you dealing with? What things are bothering you?

Motivations and Rewards

What sparks your inspiration? What brings you joy? What pushes you ahead?

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We work on these questions together, in a fun way, so that the map turns into a "living document" where the thoughts, experiences, and voices of young people shine through.

An empathy map is a detailed look at the target group. Creating a strategy is meaningful only when the organization's goals and actions genuinely align with the needs, life situations, and motivations of the target group.

The empathy map:

- helps keep us from making assumptions;
- it highlights more clearly what is currently on the minds of young people;
- uncovers hidden needs – these are often what push strategic directions ahead;
- creates a shared way to communicate between kids and grown-ups;
- turns participation into a reality in the initial step of the strategy.

When we make an empathy map with young people, we often find that what adults think is a problem is actually not the main issue, and the other way around: young people sometimes see a totally different situation as a challenge. That's why this method is so important for creating strategies.

Here are some fun ways to use the empathy map with young people successfully:

"Moodboard Empathy Map": a collective insight from emotional collages

- This approach is based on the idea that young people frequently share their experiences through visuals, capturing moods and atmospheres. Rather than simply discussing what a young person sees, hears, feels, or thinks, we put together a collage of emotions for each area.
- Create 6 "mood stations" (based on these areas: What does he see? What does he hear? What does he feel? What does he think? What does he say/do? Challenges & Inspirations).
- These can be easy A3 sheets or big posters.

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Provide the kids with plenty of magazines.

Everyone should pick from the collection of images, shapes, colors, and words that they feel represent an empathy theme. There's no need to explain anything at first; just go with your gut!

The young folks place the selected elements side by side in the right box, making the group's emotional and visual patterns start to show.

Once the “moodboard empathy map” is all set, you take a moment to chat about it together: “What’s the story behind this image?” “What does this mood say about the people we’re focusing on?” “What emotions or challenges do you see in it?” “What caught you off guard about the collage?”

“I’m the target group”: A quick role-playing warm-up

Invite everyone to take a moment to imagine themselves as a “typical participant.”

How do you feel when you step into a public space?

What are you thinking about?

What does he talk about, and what does he like to keep to himself?

- Then, in this role, they complete the sentences or share stories.

Role-playing attunement helps build stronger empathy and works really well when the group is made up of different people.

“Sounds on the Map”: Utilizing audio or video inputs

The tool can work really well, especially when the method includes multimedia.

Allow me to present:

short video clips featuring young people sharing their experiences;

voice messages that young people sent to one another;

short snippets from chats or surveys.

The goal is to put together the things you heard or saw on the empathy map. This approach is great because it brings the real experiences of young people into the conversation, rather than just relying on assumptions or adult viewpoints.

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Resource map

The resource map is a super important tool for understanding the situation: it shows what the organization currently has to work with. But remember, resources aren't just about money and equipment. From the viewpoint of young people, the true strengths of the organization often come from different places. This can include all sorts of things: people, skills, knowledge, relationships, spaces, and online presence. Community energy, positive practices, excitement, imagination, technical tools, helpers, collaborators. The aim is to recognize: we are not beginning with our weaknesses, but from what is already valuable to enhance.

Three friendly tips for making a resource map with young people:

"Visible and invisible treasures": exploring resources for treasure hunting

In this approach, resources are seen as "gems" within the organization and the community. How does it function?

Young people get two kinds of cards: "visible treasures" and "invisible treasures."

"Visible treasures" are things you can see and touch, like tools, buildings, and technology.

"Invisible treasures" are those things that can be a bit tricky to see, but they really matter a lot! Think about good friendships, having a helpful mentor, fun times in the community, being open, sharing a laugh, and what drives us from the inside.

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Young folks embark on a "treasure hunt" in little teams: they get to explore the organization's areas, chat with one another, and see what goes on during a typical day.

- It's fun, active, and full of creativity, making it easier for young people to explore what the organization is all about.

"Resource portrait": when we picture the organization as a person

In this visual approach, we picture the organization as a person who has skills, a personality, tools, and connections.

How does it function?

The team receives a big sheet of paper featuring the outline of a person.

Young folks can jot down or sketch in various areas:

knowledge, ideas, experience → values, community forces, motivations ability to act, activities, programs → stability, sustainability, "what keeps us going?" existing tools, equipment, supporters → partnerships, network of contacts Young people easily visualize resources in this way, and this metaphor helps them to connect emotionally with the organization.

"Resource Market": Community Swap Map

Resources really shine when we notice how they link together. The "resource market" approach makes this clear.

How does it function?

You're going to set up a "market" in the room! Each stand will show different types of resources, like human, material, knowledge, relational, creative, and digital.

Young people receive cards where they can jot down the resources they think are important.

- They head over to the booth where they believe their card belongs.

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The facilitator might sometimes ask:

“Is there a card that can work for several booths?” “Which table had the most people? Which one had the least?” “What if we linked these together – how do these resources support one another?”

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SPOTTING THE ISSUE AND SETTING GOALS

The next step in creating our strategy is figuring out the problems. This is where we dive deeper than just a quick look at the organization and start to really analyze things: we want to understand what's stopping us from working the way we'd like. This part isn't about pointing fingers; it's about openly discussing and shining a light on the challenges that young people and the organization face every day.

Spotting problems naturally leads us to set goals. When we understand the challenges that make our work tough and the relationships that influence our current situation, we can start dreaming about the future: how do we want our organization, community, and the lives of young people to thrive? The aim isn't just to come up with nice phrases. It's really about building a common vision for the future, where everyone involved, especially young people, can express what a successful organization looks like to them.

When we set goals, we want to make sure they are clear (so you know exactly what needs to be done to reach them), achievable, and inspiring. They should connect to the issues we've identified and align with the organization's values and the real needs of young people. This is how we turn problems into goals: what once seemed like a barrier or a lack now becomes a chance for growth. We change the negative way we talk about problems into something positive and express the future state we want to achieve.

So, the goal isn't just a boring administrative task; it's actually one of the most exciting parts of creating a strategy! Together with the young people, we get to decide what kind of community we want to build, and with that, we've already taken our first steps toward making it happen.

In the next parts, we'll explore some handy tools (like the problem tree, goal tree, and the "Why?" method) that help us sort out challenges and find paths that can eventually become real strategic goals. This is the moment when the organization and the young people come together to say, "We're here, and we want to move forward from this point."

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Problemtree

When we're putting together a strategy, one of the key questions we need to ask is what we really want to change: what challenges are we facing, and what goals can we set to make a real difference? Often, problems only show up on the surface, while underneath, there are complicated cause-and-effect connections. The problem tree and goal tree method can really help with this: it uncovers the deeper layers of the situation, so we don't just address the symptoms, but also dig down to the roots.

A problem tree is a helpful visual and conceptual tool that makes it easier to understand the nature, structure, and causes of a specific problem. This method guides our thinking through three connected levels, much like a tree's structure, where the roots show the causes, the trunk stands for the main problem, and the branches illustrate the consequences.

The first level is all about the consequences, which are the noticeable effects of the problem – these are the first things that young people see in their own lives or in how an organization works. This can include things like feeling less motivated, losing interest, pulling away from the community, having internal conflicts, or feeling less trust in community processes. But remember, these signs are just the tip of the iceberg, hiding deeper, less visible factors underneath.

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At the second level of the problem tree, right at the trunk, lies the central problem. This is a clear and universally understood statement that captures the heart of the situation. It's important to note that this isn't a goal or a suggested solution; rather, it's a carefully crafted negative statement that reveals the deeper nature of the problem. By grasping the central problem, we can direct our focus not only on addressing the symptoms but also on discovering the root causes that lead to them.

The third and deepest level uncovers the roots of the problem, which are the causes. These background factors play a direct or indirect role in how the problem develops. When working with young people, we often see reasons like not having enough information, being overwhelmed with tasks, conflicts from unclear roles, or even limited chances for participation and input. These reasons contribute to the heart of the problem, leading to the consequences we've already talked about.

When we work together with young people to create a problem tree and a goal tree, the method really starts to come alive:

teaches them to think about the big picture;

helps them understand that problems aren't just caused by one person;

It shines a light on fresh viewpoints: often, what looks like personal challenges can really be linked to bigger issues in the organization, community, or environment.

Here are three fun ideas for using the problem tree method with young folks:

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Storyline method: when we create a story that explains the problem

- Young people begin with a common scenario ("X isn't joining in the programs").

Then we ask in a row:

- What took place earlier?
- Why?
- So, what was the reason behind that?

The answers quickly form roots, leading to consequences at the other end of the chain.

This approach is really effective when young people share their personal experiences; their stories help to reveal the depth of the issue.

Card arrangement: clear layout, quick outcomes

- The facilitator jots down plenty of problem ideas on individual cards, or the young people can write them out themselves.

The job:

sort the cards into groups of "cause," "main issue," and "result."

- Then link them with logical arrows.
- The way young people move around in space makes the system easy to see; it's like they're almost creating a tree right in front of them.

Emotional Thermometer + Problem Tree: We understand the system level through our feelings.

- Participants begin by sharing their feelings about the situation being looked at: for example, "I feel frustrated," "I don't feel important," or "I feel insecure."
- We link the question to emotions:
- "What makes us feel this way?"

"What does this feeling lead to in the group/organization?" → outcomes

A really honest problem tree is created from feelings, which often uncovers layers that might stay hidden with other approaches.

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The goal tree

The next step after the problem tree is the goal tree, which helps us think positively about the issues. The goal tree is like a reflection of the problem tree, where the negative parts are swapped out for positive goals. We create intervention goals based on the causes we discover at the roots, like saying, “information flow is improved.” The main problem gets transformed into a forward-looking main goal, such as “participation is strengthened.” Lastly, the negative outcomes are turned into desired effects, like “engagement is increased” or “dropout is reduced.”

The goal tree not only helps us imagine a bright future, but it also gives us a clear plan for making changes: it shows us where we begin, what changes we need to make, and where we want to end up.

Here are three ideas for making the target tree:

Let's turn it around!: a cheerful take on the problem tree

This is the easiest and clearest way.

- We show the finished problem tree to the young folks and flip it over together:

What good things are we hoping to get from the results?

- what main goal are we setting?

what development paths or intervention goals come next?

- The great thing about this method is that it helps young people realize that every challenge has a positive side they can aim for. It's easy to grasp, quick to understand, and super motivating!

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Vision cards: beginning with the desired state

- Participants receive a blank card where they can write: "What would this situation look like if everything went perfectly?" It can be a word, a sentence, a drawing, or a symbol.
- The cards are then laid out on a big sheet and organized together:

Which one is part of the main goal?

- What are the clear and doable sub-goals?
- What are the good things that come from it?
- This approach works really well with young people because it begins with their imagination instead of focusing on the problem. As a result, the goal tree feels much more vibrant and motivating.

Change spiral: creating the target structure through small steps

- The young folks create a spiral (from the outer circle to the inner center).
- The main goal is at the center, and then, as you move outward, you can answer these questions:
 - What little changes brought this about?
 - What signs and actions would show us that we're heading in the right direction?
 - What would our community feel like if these came to life?

The layers of the spiral change into the levels of the target tree like this:

- - intervention points instead of roots,
- - main goal instead of trunk,
- - instead of branches, anticipated good outcomes.
- This method works really well in groups where young people like to focus on processes instead of hierarchies.

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The "WHY?" approach

The “Why?” method might look really simple at first, but it’s actually one of the best tools for digging into a problem and finding out what’s really going on underneath. The main idea is to keep asking one important question about a situation, event, or challenge: “Why is this happening?” This straightforward question kicks off a thought process that helps us move away from just the surface issues and explore deeper into the real causes. As we go along, after each answer, we ask again: “And why is this so?” We keep this going until the group or person arrives at an answer that can’t be broken down any further, which we call the roots.

The method is especially effective when engaging with young people because:
encourages the growth of thoughtful and reflective thinking;
promotes friendly chats and open, honest conversations;
helps to express the hidden factors that aren't obvious at first;
and it allows us to focus not on finding mistakes, but on noticing how everything is connected.

- This technique also helps young people understand that most problems don’t come from just one person or event. Instead, they often arise from many different backgrounds that overlap. For instance, behind a challenge, there might be a lack of information, poor communication, an organizational issue, or even a feeling of emotional insecurity. Recognizing these factors not only fosters understanding but also encourages compassion.

The “Why?” method isn’t just a logical puzzle; it’s a way to dig deeper into understanding. It shows that figuring out the root causes is key to discovering solutions that really work and last, whether we’re looking at things from an individual, community, or organizational perspective. When young people uncover these links through their own experiences, they can build the groundwork for real change.

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CRAFTING THE MISSION

For an organization, creating a mission isn't just a box to check off; it's a heartfelt way to define who we are. The mission helps us answer the big questions: why do we exist, who are we serving, and what do we find meaningful in our everyday work? This statement reveals not just what the organization aims to do, but also its values, beliefs, and the path it wants to take. A thoughtfully crafted mission can bring people together, set a clear common goal, and spark inspiration for both daily choices and future plans.

A mission statement is more than just words; it's the soul of an organization. It reflects the kind of change we want to create in the world, how we help improve the lives of young people, and the values we uphold in everything we do. When an organization engages with young people, it's super important for this statement to be clear, emotionally relatable, and honest. It should use language that young people can easily understand and connect with. So, a mission statement shouldn't be vague or overly complicated, nor should it just come from the leaders. It truly shines when it comes from shared ideas, where everyone involved, especially young people, can express what they believe is the organization's most important mission and its real meaning.

The mission is filled with the core values that steer the organization's activities. These might include principles like participation, acceptance, creating a safe space, providing equal opportunities, encouraging active citizenship, and allowing freedom of self-expression. These values aren't just a backdrop to our work; they should also shine through in the mission statement, whether directly or indirectly. This sentence will have real impact if it not only explains what we do but also how we do it, highlighting our approach, values, and the intention we have for our community.

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Having a clear and easy-to-understand mission statement is super important! It doesn't need to be lengthy; sometimes just one or two short sentences do the trick, as long as they capture the main idea perfectly. Plus, it's essential for the statement to be actionable: it should not only tell "who we are" but also explain what we do and the kind of change we want to create. This focus on action brings the mission statement to life, making it useful and inspiring for everyone in the organization, supporters, and young people.

When the first version of the mission is ready, it's a great idea to share it with the young people so you can make it even better with their feedback. If they can't relate to it or if it feels strange or far away from them, then the mission won't really do its job. It becomes truly genuine when it resonates with those for whom the organization exists.

The mission that really works:

Short: Just a couple of sentences that really get to the point, showing there's some deep thinking behind them.

Clear: avoids using technical terms or complex ideas.

It's all about action: we don't just "be," we "do."

Inspiring: encourages, motivates, shows why it's great to join or support.

Authentic: it really shows what you do, not just what "sounds nice."

Questions and a template for working together to create the mission:

Creating a mission statement is all about coming together to answer some important questions: why we're here, who we're serving, and what we hope to accomplish in our everyday work. This statement isn't just about what you do; it's also about how and why you do it.

1. What is the heart of our organization?

Why were we brought into being? Why does it matter that this community is here?

What was the need, circumstance, or reason that we came into the world to address?

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2. Who are our partners and what's the reason?

Who are the folks (like young people, groups, or communities) we want to connect with?

What challenges, wishes, and questions are we looking to address?

3. What change are we hoping to make?

How do we hope the world will change if we do our job right?

What gives our work its special meaning?

4. What leads us?

What values do we want to focus on? (like acceptance, participation, openness, safety, equality) What principles do we think are important when making our decisions and creating our programs?

Crafting a mission statement, one step at a time:

After chatting about those questions, let's gather the keywords together:

Who are you? Who do you team up with? What do you stand for? What do you hope to accomplish?

Next, come up with a mission statement that's easy to understand and only 1-2 sentences long. You can even follow a template for this!

- “We're here to help the lives of... [who you work with]... [in what way, along what values].”
- “Our mission is to create a... [space, program, experience] where... [young people can have fun and learn].”
- “We're a community that... [shares values] and... [aims for change].”

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For examples:

"By engaging in community experiences, we support young people in discovering their unique voice and place in society."

"We build a welcoming and secure environment where all young people can grow, connect, and take part."

"We strive to make sure that young people not only get to share their voices but also have the chance to help create the future they want to live in."

Overall, the mission isn't just a strict strategy; it's a clear and practical expression of what our organization believes in. It highlights our starting point, the people we support, what we stand for, and the future we aim to create. A well-crafted mission not only sets you on your way but also brings you back: it keeps reminding you why this journey is so important.

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CRAFTING THE VISION

A vision is simply a picture of the future that the organization dreams up: the ideal place we aim to reach if we do our work right. It helps us express the kind of community, the type of young people, and the environment we hope to see in a few years. This picture serves not just as a guide for our goals and plans, but also as an uplifting, shared dream that brings together everyone in the organization.

A great vision is uplifting, optimistic, and encourages us to look ahead. Instead of dwelling on current challenges, it paints a picture of what a little piece of the world could turn into if we join forces. This vision should spark inspiration in everyone involved, helping us remember our beginnings and what we aim to accomplish. It's key that it's simple to recall and grasp, especially for younger folks, so they can connect with it and envision their own dreams within it.

Creating a vision starts with thinking together. It's a great idea to kick off the conversation with questions that ignite creativity and help uncover the pieces of the future we want. For instance, you might ask: "What would our community look like if everything ran smoothly?" or "What kind of experience do we want young people to have when they interact with us?" You could also ask: "What do we hope others will say about us in five years?"

When the answers to these questions start coming in, the facilitator or team gathers them up and looks for common threads and themes. Some might emphasize the power of community, while others might point out the significance of safe spaces, and still others might focus on the chance for participation or personal growth. These ideas gradually shape the way we can discuss the future.

These answers, keywords, and ideas come together to form a vision statement that clearly and beautifully captures the organization's long-term dreams.

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The sentence should create a bright image that inspires, brings hope, and highlights why it's valuable to do this every day. It's important to craft a sentence that the team will happily support and that will touch the hearts of those who encounter the organization for the first time.

The last step, and maybe the most important one, is to share the vision with the young people it's all about. We should ask them what they think and how they feel when they hear it. Do they see themselves in it? Do they believe in it? Can they picture this as the future they want to strive for? If they say yes, then the vision won't just be a sentence; it will turn into a real, shared path forward.

Questions for building a common vision:

These questions are great for sparking conversations, working in groups, or thinking on your own. They help young people create a vision of the future based on their own experiences and dreams.

Simple questions about what's to come

- If everything went just the way we hoped, what do you think our community would look like in a year? And how about in five years?
- What would a place or program be like where young people can truly feel happy, grow, and be themselves?
- What sort of folks would be around? How would the vibe feel? What would it be like to be in this place?
- If someone from outside were to take a look at how our organization works, what special things would they notice about us?
- If a young person were to reflect on their time in this community, what do you think they would say? What kind of impression did we make on them?
- Along with feelings, beliefs, and experiences
- What emotions do you hope the organization will spark in young people? (like safety, inspiration, freedom)

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- What values would you love to see put into action every day? (like acceptance, participation, respect)
- What words or pictures pop into your head when you think about your perfect future?

Assistance in creating your vision statement:

Once you've gathered the answers, it's a good idea to look for common themes together: what words, wishes, and pictures keep popping up?

Then, let's work together to come up with a shared vision statement from these ideas. Here are some helpful templates to guide you in crafting it:

- “We're creating a community where... [key idea]”
- “We believe that young people... [future possibilities, strength]”
- “We create a space where everyone feels welcome and happy...”
- “The future we create together is a place where... [action and value come together]”

For example:

- “We imagine a community where young people can share their thoughts confidently and make a difference together.”
- “Our aim is to create a motivating space where all young people can feel heard, get involved, and grow.”
- “We imagine a future where young people not only get to speak up, but also help create the world around them.”

TIP:

Make a fun poster or “mission wall” with a catchy sentence, important words, pictures, and colors that show off your mission. This way, your mission will be more than just words; it will be something everyone can see, remember, and feel proud of!

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CHOOSING WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT

Once an organization has figured out its mission, crafted its vision, and pinpointed the social issues it wants to tackle, it moves on to the next important step: setting priorities and goals. This is the moment when the organization decides where to direct its attention and resources, and what specific outcomes it hopes to accomplish.

Strategic thinking isn't about tackling every problem all at once. It's really about making thoughtful choices about what matters most and what will make the biggest difference. When we focus our efforts wisely, it guides how the organization works, helps us use our resources better, and clearly outlines the specific changes we want to see in society.

Setting priorities always starts with careful analysis and thought. First, it's a good idea to look back at the problems we've already identified and understand their causes. The problem tree method can be a great way to see which areas need attention and where we can make a real difference. After that, it's helpful to compare how things are right now with the vision we've created. What's the biggest gap between what's happening and what we want to see? Where can we take our first steps to move closer to our goals?

When figuring out what to focus on, we shouldn't overlook how doable things are. It's really important to take a look at what resources we have – like people, money, skills, and partnerships – and see how they can help us make changes happen. A great priority isn't just important; it's also something we can actually achieve. So, it's best to start where the organization can truly make a difference.

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A key part of the process is that young people get to be involved in setting priorities and goals. This can happen through group discussions, brainstorming sessions, voting, or even fun visual methods like creating a goal pyramid. This way, decisions are made together, and young people really feel like the process and goals belong to them. When decisions are made in a democratic and open way, it boosts motivation, responsibility, and a sense of community.

How can a group figure out what's most important to focus on?

Priorities are the key areas that an organization pays attention to because they spot the biggest chances for change. Choosing these priorities is a thoughtful choice based on careful analysis, feedback, and strategic thinking.

1. Take a look at the problem and figure it out.

It's a great idea to use the problem tree or situation analysis you made earlier as a starting point.

Let's figure out which problems are buried the deepest in the system.

Let's take a look at which causal chains really make a difference for the target group.

Let's pick the spots where we can truly make a positive impact.

2. Assessment based on the mission and vision

It's a good idea to look at what the organization is doing right now and see how it lines up with its long-term goals.

Where is the biggest difference between what we have now and what we dream of?

In which areas can we get the closest to reaching our mission?

This analysis helps you see which areas of intervention match your organization's identity the best.

3. Making decisions based on data and feedback

- When figuring out what's most important, it's a good idea to think about what young people, partners, and stakeholders have to say.

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Let's gather some thoughts: what issues do you see as the most pressing?
How about we set up some focus groups, send out questionnaires, or have online chats?

- We look at the areas where young people think change is most needed.

4. Review of resources and abilities

- A priority really comes to life when the organization has the right knowledge, enough people, a strong network of partners, and the financial resources to back it up.
- Let's take a look at the resources we have on hand for both the short and long term.
- Let's consider if the intervention we have will last in the future.
- Figure out which areas will give you quick, noticeable results and which ones need a bit more time and dedication.

5. Making an impact feasibility chart

- A straightforward yet powerful tool to assist you in prioritizing:
- Areas that fall into the "high impact-high feasibility" category should be prioritized.
- "High impact-low feasibility" areas should be planned for later or boosted with partnerships.

Steps and tools for setting strategic goals

Once we know what the main focus areas are, the next step is to set some strategic goals. Having goals helps the organization know exactly where to head in the upcoming time. A good goal is clear, matches the mission, is achievable, can be measured, and has a deadline. This is the heart of the simplified SMART approach, which is easy for everyone to grasp: specific, measurable, relevant, realistic, and time-bound.

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Goals link our daily tasks to a bigger vision for the future. They aren't just random activities; instead, they form a thoughtfully planned journey where each step helps us make a bigger difference in society. This method follows the familiar SMART principle (Specific – Measurable – Relevant – Realistic – Timed). Goals make sure that what the organization does every day isn't just a bunch of separate tasks, but rather a meaningful journey toward lasting impact.

The SMART method: how to set goals that you can really achieve?

One of the key steps in planning for an organization is to clearly define goals. Sometimes, goals can be too broad, unclear, or just too ambitious to realistically reach. The SMART method is a great way to make goals specific, achievable, and measurable, ensuring that both the organization and the young people understand exactly where they're going and when they can proudly say, "We did it!"

The acronym SMART means Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound, and each part stands for an important idea. These help make sure that goals are clear, sensible, and easy to follow.

S – Specific

A goal is great when it can be clearly expressed and everyone understands what it means. Steer clear of broad, unclear statements ("we want to make things better for young people"); instead, specify exactly what you want to accomplish, with whom, where, and how.

Next school year, we're excited to host youth forums at three local high schools where young folks can share their thoughts on taking care of our environment.

M – Manageable

Always connect a goal to a metric or indicator that will help you keep an eye on your progress. This could be a number, ratio, percentage, or any other specific piece of data. Being able to measure it is super important because it lets the organization check its own results and tweak its strategy if needed.

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At least 150 young folks join the forums, and at least 60% of them share positive thoughts about the program.

A - Attainable

A goal is only believable if it's set in a way that's realistic. Goals that are too big or unrealistic can quickly lead to disappointment and a drop in motivation. It's important to think about the resources, time, partners, and skills you have. Achievability doesn't mean thinking small; it means the goal is tough but still possible.

Instead of saying, "Involving all Hungarian youth in one year," a more achievable goal could be: "Involving 200 young people in the program across three cities within a year."

R - Relevant (Connected, meaning it aligns with the mission)

A goal becomes truly valuable when it ties in with the organization's mission, vision, and core values. A meaningful goal always responds to the question: "Why does this matter to us?" If the goal doesn't align with the organization's path, even if it's successfully carried out, it won't help you achieve real social impact.

For instance, if the organization's mission is to boost youth involvement in the community, a fitting goal could be: "Getting young people engaged in local decision-making activities."

T - Time-limited

Every goal needs a deadline. Having a time frame gives you motivation and helps you plan and schedule your tasks. Without a deadline, a goal can easily slip away or get lost in the shuffle. A time frame not only encourages discipline but also allows the organization to check on progress and make adjustments based on what they've learned.

We're aiming to roll out the program by June 2025 and carry out the impact assessment by September.

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A SMART goal could be something like this:

“By June 2025, we aim to engage at least 200 young people across three cities in a variety of programs designed to boost environmental awareness. As a result, 70% of those who participate will commit to starting a sustainability initiative in their own school.”

This goal is clear (three cities, 200 young people), measurable (count of participants, percentage outcome), attainable (feasible with the right resources), meaningful (aligns with the organization's mission), and has a deadline (will be completed by June 2025). Setting priorities and goals isn't just about managing tasks; it's a way to build community and set a clear direction. When an organization can clearly identify what matters most to it, especially by working alongside young people, it becomes more effective and creates a shared future where everyone feels included and empowered.

Here are some fun ways we can easily get young people involved in this process:

Importance/impact: a matrix with voting

This approach relies on teamwork and thoughtful discussion. At the start of the process, young people come together in small groups to brainstorm topics, challenges, or development ideas that they believe are worth exploring for the organization. Each topic is written on its own card, and then the group arranges them on a big board or poster along two axes: one axis shows how important the topic is, while the other indicates the potential impact of putting it into action.

The resulting matrix displays four sections: in the top corner, you'll find topics that are both important and have a big impact, and these will be our main priorities. Areas with low impact or less urgency are ranked lower.

While working together and chatting, young people discover how to create arguments, find common ground, and think ahead. In the end, the group can also decide by voting on which areas they want to tackle first.

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Creating a goal pyramid: a fun and visual way to set your goals!

The goal pyramid is a fun, visual tool that helps young people understand the problem and explore possible solutions in a clear way. In this activity, they work together to create a pyramid on a big piece of paper or cardboard, which has three levels.

The bottom level includes the issues or needs that young people see as the most crucial. Figuring these out helps to make clear what they truly want to change. The middle level explains why it matters, like the social, economic, or community importance of the issue. Here, you can discuss the causes, effects, and the values that the target area embodies.

At the peak of the pyramid is the clear goal that responds to the two levels below. The young people work together to decide what concrete outcome they want to reach and how this aligns with the organization's mission.

Ballot box method: a way for people to make choices together in a democratic way

In this method, the organization gathers the priorities and goals that came up in earlier chats and group activities, and then shows them in a way that's easy to see, like on a wall or a board.

Young folks can vote using stickers, markers, or colorful pins on the topics they believe matter the most. Each person receives a specific number of votes, so they need to consider what they truly think is important. Voting can be done openly or anonymously, depending on the vibe you want to set.

What's really cool about this method is that you can see the results right away! The wall clearly displays which topics got the most love, helping everyone in the community come together to choose the areas that deserve attention in the future.

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MAKING A PLAN OF ACTION

The most thrilling and practical part of developing a strategy is making the action plan. This is when the vision we've created, the problems we've spotted, the priorities we've set, and the ideas shared by the young folks turn into real actions. The action plan acts like a bridge, turning our thoughts and intentions into actual steps we can take, complete with specific tasks, responsibilities, deadlines, and results we can measure. A well-crafted action plan makes sure that the strategy isn't just a piece of paper, but turns into a true guide for daily activities. The more young people take part in the planning, the more dedicated they will be to putting it into action, since their own thoughts, ideas, and responsibilities are included too.

1. Splitting goals into clear tasks

Once you have your strategic goals all figured out, the next thing to do is think about how to reach them. This means taking those big goals and breaking them down into smaller, doable steps. It's super important that these steps connect in a way that makes sense and are easy for everyone to understand.

When you're planning, it's a good idea to ask questions like:

- What's the first step we should take?
- What do you need to have ready?
- Who can join in on this?
- Where might we run into trouble during the process, and how can we avoid that?

2. Choosing the people in charge, with genuine participation

A plan only succeeds when there are people who genuinely handle the tasks. So, assigning responsibility isn't just about "putting someone's name on a list," but about giving them the real power to take action.

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The person chosen for the job should have the right tools, knowledge, and support, and they should feel trusted by the community. If young people are part of the team, it's really important that their roles are clear and that they get help, feedback, and guidance along the way.

Small, clear responsibilities give them a cozy spot to grow: they get to feel what it's like when something really happens because of their own hard work.

3. Planning time and setting milestones

An action plan without a timeline is like a map without any markers: it's tough to know where you are. Having timing and milestones makes it easier to follow the process, measure progress, and stay motivated.

It's important to decide when we want to reach our goal and what the first big milestone will be to show us that we're heading in the right direction. Milestones aren't just check-in points; they also give us energy, feedback, and a feeling of accomplishment.

It can be really motivating for young people if the process feels like a game, where they need to reach different levels, and every milestone they hit gives them a boost of energy.

4. Planning resources

Putting great plans into action needs resources, and it's not just about money. You also need time, knowledge, connections, tools, and people. This can mean volunteers, professional partners, places to hold events, digital platforms, ways to communicate, or even chances to learn new things.

When we're planning, it's super important to consider what we'll need for putting everything into action and where we can find those resources. What do we already have, and how much of it do we have (check out the resource map made during the situation analysis), and what do we need to get new?

It's really important to get young people involved in this part too, because they often spot opportunities that the organization might miss. They can bring in local connections, use community spaces, tap into online tools, or even come up with their own creative ideas!

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5. Understanding outcome and impact indicators

An action plan is only truly finished when we understand what results we will be looking at. Results can be numbers, like how many young people we've reached, but because of the special nature of youth work, the changes that are harder to measure often matter the most: better teamwork, more independence, increased involvement, fewer conflicts, or even a stronger feeling of community.

Getting young people involved in figuring out what success means to them not only inspires them but also makes sure that their goals really match their experiences and values.

6. Picture the plan so everyone can see it and stick to it.

An action plan really comes to life when it's easy to see and follow. Using a visual tool like a timeline, Kanban board, project tree, or a task map with fun icons makes it super clear for everyone to know where we are in the process, what's coming up next, and how all the tasks connect with one another.

Visuals play a big role when we're working with young people. They help us see connections, keep everyone engaged, and build a feeling of shared responsibility.

The action plan is all about making the strategy come to life! This is the part where the big ideas turn into real steps, goals turn into actions you can see, and plans turn into teamwork. When young people take part in this journey as creators, organizers, managers, or evaluators, the strategy not only becomes real but also turns into a shared experience and a chance to learn together.

On the next pages, we've got a sample template to help you create an action plan. We suggest you make it your own by customizing the template before or while using it, like adding extra content (rows, columns, questions) to fit your needs.

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ACTION PLAN (example)

1. Big plans

What bigger goals is this action plan connected to?

2. Particular tasks / steps

What do you need to do to reach your goal? It's easy! Just break it down into simple, clear steps.

Task / Step	Why does it matter?	Connected aim	Comment
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3. People in charge

Who's going to handle the task? Does he have a buddy? What kind of help does he need?

Task	Responsible	Supporters	Necessary tools

4. Schedule and key moments

When do we kick things off, when will it be all done, and how can we keep an eye on our progress?

Milestone	Deadline	What shows us that we've made it?

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5. Resources

What do we need in terms of knowledge, connections, tools, location, and money?

6. Anticipated outcomes and effects

What will we see in a new way? How will the lives of young people, the community, or the organization be different?

7. Way to evaluate

How can we see if it worked out well? (For example: quick feedback sessions, a questionnaire for young people, group reflection talks, a visual kanban board to check the status, and so on.)

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Here are a few fun ideas to make the design process more exciting for young folks:

Community project planning template (Youth Action Template)

- The “Youth Action Canvas” is an easy-to-use planning tool for young people that follows the ideas of project-based learning. On a big visual board or poster, young people work together to answer the key questions of project planning:
 - What are we aiming for?
 - Who are the partners or stakeholders?
 - What steps bring about the result?
 - What will the real impact be?
 - What resources do we have, and what else do we need?
- The canvas works really well because it’s both clear and visual: young people can easily grasp the process, see how everything connects, and collaborate on the project together.

The approach is fun, engaging, and focused on growth: it not only helps to grasp the strategy but also teaches young people how to plan, take charge, and work together. A thoughtfully crafted Youth Action Canvas can even serve as an addition to the organization’s official action plan, showcasing what the organization stands for, created by young people, for young people.

Project Lab, a mini-hackathon

A “project lab” is a fun, focused workshop where young folks team up in small groups to tackle specific tasks or projects that connect to big goals. It’s a bit like a mini-hackathon: each group picks a goal or topic and then collaborates to come up with ideas on how to make it happen.

The young folks decide what steps they think are important, how much time they’ll need, what roles they’ll play in making it happen, and then share their plan with the other groups.

At the end of the project lab, everyone gets together to look at each group’s ideas, and the top ones might even be included in the organization’s official action plan.

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Participation Kanban Board

A kanban board is a handy visual tool that helps you keep an eye on how tasks are doing. The board is made up of three (or more) columns: typically “To Do,” “In Progress,” and “Done,” with each task shown on its own card.

Young people get to place and move these cards as they work through a task. They can do this in person, like on a big wall board with post-its, or online using tools like Trello, Miro, Asana, or Notion.

The heart of the method is all about making the work clear for everyone: everyone knows where the community stands, what tasks are on the to-do list, and who is working on what. When things are visible, it sparks motivation, and the whole process feels more open and like a team effort.

3x3 choice grid

The decision matrix is a handy tool that helps young people figure out what's most important. The group looks at task or project ideas by asking three main questions:

How important is this topic?

How doable is it with the resources we have?

How much does it help reach the goal?

Based on the feedback, the ideas are arranged in a 3x3 grid. This matrix also clearly highlights which suggestions land in the “high impact – high feasibility” area, meaning these are the ones that deserve a spot in the action plan.

First step circle

The “first step” circle is a straightforward yet meaningful activity. Everyone sits in a circle and takes turns saying, “What is one small, specific step I can take to reach my goal?” This approach boosts our sense of personal responsibility. It turns the strategy from just a distant plan into a personal promise to take action. Each commitment shared becomes a new connection in our shared journey.

The exercise is particularly effective during group wrap-ups, at the conclusion of workshops, or when kicking off a new phase. Words spoken hold great power, and young people discover that change begins with small, personal actions.

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TOOLS REQUIRED FOR AND ASSISTING WITH IMPLEMENTATION

The journey of creating a strategy doesn't stop once you've finished a polished, thoughtful document. Actually, that's just the start of the real challenge: figuring out how to make sure that the goals, ideas, and visions you've laid out don't just stay on paper but become a part of daily life. This calls for practical tools that help with putting things into action, keep the progress steady, and allow for feedback.

Implementation tools are super helpful because they show us what skills, people, and money we need to reach our goals. They also help us spot any bumps in the road and challenges early on, so we can come up with ways to tackle them.

Having the right tools for regular monitoring and evaluation is super important! They help us see if we're hitting our goals and if we're on the right path, making sure our efforts are truly guiding us toward the impact we want. When our monitoring and evaluation tools work well, they allow us to spot when changes are needed and encourage learning and growth throughout the organization.

Getting young people actively involved is super important when it comes to planning and keeping track of how the strategy is put into action. This is the moment when their role goes beyond just sharing ideas or brainstorming; it's about stepping up and taking real responsibility. Here, they get to see that they're not just sharing their thoughts, but they also play a part in making everything happen. By including them in the implementation, we help them build skills, strengthen their connection to the community, and give them a chance to learn from their experiences, all while making a real difference in shaping our shared future.

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For the organization to thrive, it's important to offer the right tools and frameworks that help young people in this role. This means having clear task assignments, regular feedback, shared measurement points, and chances for everyone to make decisions together. The aim is to turn strategy into something that isn't just for the leaders, but a shared journey where everyone, no matter their age, can join in and contribute.

Competence map: charting the human resources for execution

Strategy isn't just about setting goals and making plans; it's also about the people who can turn those ideas into reality and the knowledge and skills they have. The competence map is super helpful for this! It gives a clear view of the resources, knowledge, experience, and skills that everyone in the organization—especially the younger members—brings along, and shows how these connect to the tasks that need to be done.

One of the best things about the competency map is that it shows off the knowledge we already have and helps us spot where we can grow. It not only helps with the resources needed for strategic plans but also boosts the confidence of young people. It sends a clear message that what they know is important and truly adds to our shared efforts.

The competency map is a great way to help everyone understand their roles and responsibilities in the team. Who shines in which area? Who would enjoy which task? Where can they grow? These questions not only help the organization run smoothly but also encourage personal growth and self-awareness.

When we work with young people, it's super important that mapping out their skills isn't just a boring list. Instead, it should be a fun and engaging journey that honestly reveals what each person has inside them. There are lots of creative ways to do this that encourage open thinking and learning together.

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The journey of making a competency map

Competency mapping isn't just a technical task; it's also a way for the community to learn and grow together. The goal is to identify the knowledge, skills, and roles that exist within the community, as well as to spot areas that could use some improvement. Here are the steps involved in the process:

1. A look at our big goals and what we need to do to achieve them

Before we dive into mapping competencies, it's super important to have a shared understanding of the specific goals and tasks of the strategy. This step helps us see clearly what kinds of activities will need what kind of knowledge. The aim here isn't to figure out every little detail, but to outline the "knowledge areas" that are connected to implementation, like communication, organization, creative design, technical execution, liaison, or administration.

2. Collecting current skills

Next up is the most important part: along with the young people and other participants, we gather all the skills, experiences, and knowledge that are already present in the group. To do this, we can use fun and creative methods (like a "skills market," role cards, or pair interviews) that let everyone share what they feel good at with confidence and honesty.

It's really important to think about these skills in a wide way. It's not just about formal knowledge, like saying, "I'm great at presentations." We should also think about personal strengths, like "I make friends easily," "I help keep the group united," or "I'm good at organizing events."

3. Organizing and categorizing skills

In the next step, we gather the collected knowledge by themes and link it to the tasks tied to our strategic goals. This helps us see where the team already has strong skills and where there might be some gaps.

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You can also organize things visually, like on a big sheet of paper or a digital board, where you connect names, examples, or roles to specific skill areas. This clear layout not only makes planning easier but also shows young people that they are important and capable players in the process.

4. Finding gaps and figuring out what we need to grow

Once we have everything organized, it becomes super easy to spot where we need to add or grow new skills. This opens up the chance for us to plan focused training, mentoring, or outside help, or even bring in new team members if there's not enough knowledge in a specific area.

This step is super important for making sure that the strategy we're putting into action is both realistic and can last over time. We don't expect "everyone to know everything," but instead, we want to thoughtfully create our shared resources together.

5. Wrapping up and putting the competency map to use

The last step is to write down and agree on the competency map. This could be a colorful poster, a digital spreadsheet, or an internal document – the important thing is to see it as a helpful tool that you can look at whenever you need.

It's a good idea to refresh the map every now and then, especially when new members join or when someone takes on a new role. This way, tasks can be shared thoughtfully and efficiently during the process, and everyone can feel that they have a spot, a purpose, and something to offer.

The competency map is more than just a tool; it's a chance for young people to gain support, recognition, and a genuine role in making the strategy come alive. When used effectively, it kicks off a journey that boosts self-confidence, enhances teamwork, and strengthens the community's functioning over time.

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How can we get young people involved? Here are three fun ways to make the process more exciting.

“Prepared market” method

Participants bring their “skills” to a pretend market. Everyone notes what they excel at and what they want to add to the strategy. Others can “purchase” these skills – this is how the shared competency map comes to life.

Role cards

We offer ready-made role cards (like communicator, project manager, community organizer, creative designer, and technical assistant) and young people can pair these roles with their own strengths.

Uncovering hidden “knowledge”

In pair interviews, young people chat with one another, asking: What experiences do you have that you haven’t used in the organization yet? This often uncovers extra skills that can really help with getting things done.

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Risk analysis, or getting ready for surprises

When we're setting goals, figuring out resources, and planning our actions, it's super important to think about the bumps we might hit on the road and how we can handle them. That's where risk analysis comes in! It helps us spot the things that could get in the way of our plans and lets us get ready for them ahead of time.

This step isn't about making anyone feel scared or imagining bad situations. Instead, taking a thoughtful look at risks actually brings us strength and stability. It helps us avoid surprises and keeps the process adaptable. The clearer we are about the possible challenges, the better we can handle them and keep moving toward our goals.

This process is super helpful for young folks because it boosts their design and systems thinking skills, teaching them how to work in a responsible and thoughtful way. Instead of getting stuck when things get tough, they learn that problems can be anticipated and tackled – and that it's perfectly fine if everything doesn't go perfectly right away.

Why is it important to do a risk analysis?

- It makes the strategy feel more practical and grounded.
- It lowers the likelihood of a problem completely stopping the process.
- It gives you the chance to create B-plans, helping the organization to adapt more easily.
- It helps with learning: young people discover that good planning isn't just about dreaming big, but also about thoughtfully handling challenges.

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Steps for analyzing risks

1. Let's take a look at our goals and activities! First up, we should go over the key goals of our strategy and the actions tied to them. What events, programs, and developments do we have in the works? This starting point helps us pinpoint where we might face some risks.

2. Collecting possible risks

Then, let's brainstorm together about what things might make it hard to put this into action. These could be:

internal risks: like not having enough time, feeling unmotivated, having too many tasks for too few people, and not knowing enough;

external risks: like technical issues, challenges in working with partners, legal or financial hurdles, and shifts in society;

Organizational risks: miscommunication, unclear responsibilities, and low engagement.

It's a great idea to make this part fun and engaging! You could try writing "danger cards" on a big poster or come up with ideas in small groups.

3. Figuring out and ranking risks

Once we have our list ready, it's super important to figure out which risks are the biggest deal and which ones are the most likely to happen. We can use a simple matrix that shows this on two axes:

chance (how likely is it to happen?)

impact (how much harm can it create?)

Taking all this into account, we focus on the areas that need a little extra care.

4. Creating ways to prevent and respond to issues

After weighing, the next step is to think about what we can do to avoid the risk, and if it happens, how we should respond.

This might be:

preventive step: like setting aside some extra time, bringing in more team members, or getting help from a mentor;

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response (plan B): for example, if an event gets canceled, there should be a backup plan; if an important person can't make it, there should be someone else ready to step in. It's a good idea to jot all of this down in a clear risk management plan.

5. Getting young people involved and giving them the power to make a difference

It's really important for young people to be more than just bystanders; they should be active players in the risk analysis. For one, they often pick up on the organization's vibes first, and they can also learn from their own experiences about thinking ahead in a responsible way. This part is also a great chance to chat about: who does what if a problem pops up? Who steps in to react, who makes the calls, and who shares the news?

6. Adding risk analysis to planning

At the end of the process, it's a good idea to link the results of the risk analysis with the strategy implementation plan. When we identify which activities carry more risk, we can allocate extra resources, flexibility, or support to those areas. This not only boosts our sense of security but also helps ensure that the strategy stays strong even when challenges arise, allowing it to learn, adapt, and discover a new way forward.

The matrix of probability and effect

The probability-impact matrix is a straightforward yet incredibly helpful visual tool that makes it easy to see which risks should be tackled in a strategic process. A risk is something that could stop us from reaching our goals. These can come from inside (like issues within the team) or outside (such as technical glitches or shifts in the outside world) factors.

The matrix sorts these risks by asking two key questions:

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The matrix of probability and effect

The probability-impact matrix is a straightforward yet incredibly helpful visual tool that makes it easy to see which risks should be tackled in a strategic process. A risk is something that could stop us from reaching our goals. These can come from inside (like issues within the team) or outside (such as technical glitches or shifts in the outside world) factors.

The matrix sorts these risks by asking two key questions:

1. What are the chances of the risk happening?

This shows how real of a threat the problem actually is:

Low probability: happens infrequently, more like a special situation (e.g. power failure, illness spread).

Medium probability: it could happen, but it's not allowed (like a team member getting too tired or a mix-up in communication).

High probability: super likely to happen, maybe it's happened before (like missed deadlines or low participation).

2. What kind of effect would it have on us if it actually took place?

This looks at how serious the results of a certain risk could be:

Low impact: small hiccup, can be fixed quickly (e.g. printer stops working).

Medium impact: leads to some hassle, takes time and effort to fix (e.g. a program is postponed or needs adjustments).

High impact: there's a big chance of not reaching an important goal, halting a process, or missing out on an opportunity (like if a key person leaves or there's no funding).

When we just look at a list of risks, it can be tough to figure out which ones really matter and which ones are not as big of a deal. The probability-impact matrix is super helpful because it guides us to respond thoughtfully instead of reacting to everything the same way. This way, we can choose where to focus our attention, time, and energy.

This helps us spot things more easily:

which risks need quick action (like high impact + high probability),

which ones to keep an eye on and get ready for (like medium impact + high probability), and which ones are low priority but still deserve a little attention.

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Picture a group of young people putting together a fun event!

Possible dangers:

A few volunteers decide not to join in → likelihood: medium, effect: high

It looks like it's going to rain on the day of the outdoor program → chance: high, effect: medium

The graphic material isn't finished on time → chance: low, effect: low

With this in mind, planning becomes a breeze:

where a different option needs to be created ahead of time,

where it's important to stay attentive and adaptable,

and where a simple backup plan in the background is all you need.

- The probability-impact matrix is a simple yet super effective tool for handling risks thoughtfully, not just when issues pop up. It's especially helpful when working with young people, as it encourages them to think ahead, share responsibility, and develop strategic thinking all at once.

- Structure of the grid:

Picture a straightforward 3x3 or 5x5 square, where:

The X-axis displays the likelihood (like small – medium – large),

The Y-axis displays the effect (like weak – moderate – severe).

- So, the fields of the matrix are created like this:

	Gentle impact	Moderate impact	Big effect
Very likely	Let's focus on it.	Let's keep things friendly!	Quick action
Fairly likely	Acceptable	Let's focus on it.	Let's keep things friendly!
Unlikely chance	Acceptable	Acceptable	Let's focus on it.

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We take a look at the risks here, checking them out one by one using two main criteria. You can do this with a simple “post-it” method on a flipchart, or you can create a digital version too.

- Looking at the matrix, make your choice:

What risks should we tackle right away, and what actions can we take to prevent or respond to them?

Which ones should we keep an eye on, but don't need any action right away?

- And which ones can be seen as low priority but still need to be remembered.

BRINGING THE STRATEGY IN LINE WITH POLICY GUIDELINES AND REQUESTS FOR PROPOSALS

Most youth and youth work organizations function in a setting where resources are scarce, and a big chunk of their funding comes from tenders. Because of this, many organizations naturally aim to align with national or European-level guidelines, programs, and expectations—like the European Youth Strategy or the priorities of the Erasmus+ program. These documents and expectations outline the key directions of European youth work and help clarify the values and goals that shape the profession and policy at the European level.

It's quite common to accidentally focus on application needs when setting goals instead of considering the local situation. The strategy-making journey will feel genuine if the organization begins with itself: by looking at the true needs of young people, the local surroundings, and its own strengths and challenges. Bigger documents, whether they come from national or international sources, can enhance the work only if there's already a solid strategy rooted in local reality that can be connected later on.

This chapter is part of the publication because we want to help organizations confidently find their way between local and European aspects. The aim isn't for an organization to simply follow European documents, but to see how these frameworks can fit nicely with their own genuine goals. By doing this, they can not only connect effectively to European objectives for funding but also create operations that are more sustainable over time and focused on the needs of young people.

European and national youth policy documents give organizations a wider view. They point out important trends happening all over Europe, like: helping young people get involved in democracy, encouraging inclusion and equal chances, building digital skills, teaching about sustainability, and taking care of young people's mental health.

BRINGING THE STRATEGY IN LINE WITH POLICY GUIDELINES AND REQUESTS FOR PROPOSALS

These documents are great for understanding the social changes they aim to promote across Europe and how youth work can play a role in that. They can also spark new ideas for organizations, offering fresh program concepts, methods, or frameworks that can enhance their own efforts.

While higher-level documents can offer helpful advice, an organization's strategy isn't just about following them like a recipe. If a group focuses only on creating its own path to fit certain applications or to please others, it might end up losing what makes it unique. Goals could drift away from what young people truly need, the strategy might become hard to maintain, and daily activities could turn unpredictable and reactive.

Tips for creating a proposal:

- Instead of creating your strategy based on the call for proposals, flip it around: let your own strategy guide the proposals.
- Connection points should be found, not created.
- Documents can make it easier to understand and create strategies in a clear and professional way.
- Always highlight that the organization's own reality comes first—everything else is just an addition to it.

The strength of the strategy lies in the organization's ability to truly understand itself: its own situation, its own challenges, and its own community. With this understanding, it can set goals that are not only achievable but also sustainable over time. When local realities and European guidelines come together in the right way and at the right time, they can support each other beautifully.

The organization's strategy lays the groundwork. Higher-level documents make sure that this groundwork is solid, well-established, and clearly shared — whether in applications, professional partnerships, or general communication with the outside world.

ALL ABOUT THE BORDERLESS INCLUSION PROJECT

The Erasmus+ project called Borderless Inclusion was all about helping two youth organizations – the Iuventus Ventus Association from Vojvodina (Serbia) and the Jövőbarát Association from Hungary – to grow into more aware and sustainable groups over time. GYIÖT took the lead in coordinating the project, offering the organizations professional support, guidance, and mentoring every step of the way.

One of the key values of the project was that we included young people at every step of the process. They weren't just participants; as members of the target group for both organizations, they played a crucial role in shaping the strategy. Their feedback, ideas, and experiences had a significant impact on how we developed our strategic directions.

Because of the process, both organizations have created their own strategic document. This document includes a situation analysis, target group definition, vision, mission, long-term priorities, and a short-term action plan. The organizations now work in a more thoughtful and open way, laying their daily activities on a stronger foundation.

Another great outcome of the project is this publication, created from the experiences of the partnership. The goal was to help any organization that wants to include young people in important decisions, even if they don't have the usual practices or resources to make it happen.

The effects of the almost two-year project extend beyond just the three partner organizations. The training sessions and collaborative efforts helped to build stronger connections among the participating organizations, professionals, and young people. They sparked inspiration and played a part in enhancing the quality of youth work in community spaces. This publication offers a chance for these experiences to be shared with other organizations.

The Borderless Inclusion project has demonstrated that creating strategies with young people is not just possible, but also a valuable, inspiring, and rewarding journey that lasts a long time.

ONE STEP AT A TIME

A compass for developing organisational strategy with young people

This publication offers practical guidance for youth organisations and communities on how to develop a thoughtful organisational strategy that truly reflects the needs of young people. The process is made accessible through easy-to-understand methods, user-friendly tools, and shared experiences from partnerships. The aim of this publication is to guide readers through the key steps of strategy development – from situation analysis and defining vision and goals to action planning and risk assessment. Special attention is given to the importance and added value of involving young people as active contributors to shaping the organisation's development. This publication is intended to support professionals, volunteers, and young people who wish to build a more conscious, stable, and sustainable organisation in the long term.

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