

BEST PRACTICES

for inclusive and
participatory activities
with adolescents



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Every project has a before and after.

The before is usually that moment when we look at an empty room, an incomplete list of registrants, or a neighbourhood that does not yet recognise us. Sometimes it is when someone timidly approaches a poster stuck on a shop window and thinks,

"Could this space be for me too?"



The after comes when, unexpectedly, a group of adolescents speaks up, transforms the energy of the space, and reminds us why we do what we do. Between that before and that after, there is something fundamental: the way we invite, how we listen, and the intention with which we open a space for them to enter, stay, and feel like they belong.

This guide was born from those moments.

From all the workshops that did not turn out as we expected, from the calls for participation that did not go so far, from the methodologies we had to reinvent, but also from the laughter, surprises, and lessons that only emerge when we dare to co-create with them.

It also stems from one certainty: inclusion is not a list of requirements, it is a daily practice. It is looking at the community with different eyes. It is asking ourselves who we are not reaching. It is understanding that participation is not about filling a room, but about opening a space where every voice counts.

That is why this illustrated guide does not tell you what is missing. It is here to show you what you are already doing well to give you clues about what you could strengthen, and above all, to remind you that you are not alone on this journey. Every recommendation here was born in community. From real experiences, with real teams and real adolescents.



These are not fancy theories: they are practices that have been lived, tested, adjusted and shared in the hope that they will be useful to you where you are.

This guide to good practices for improving adolescent participation and inclusion stems from the conviction that inclusion is not a luxury or a fad: it is a necessity for projects to work better, be sustainable over time and be truly relevant. It also stems from the certainty that we are often already doing this, but we do not call it 'inclusion'. We want this guide to be like a conversation between colleagues, like a notebook that collects the voices of those who have walked before, like a compass that does not point to "what should be," but rather to the decisions that make projects more humane, fairer, and more relevant to those who experience them.

We hope that as you read these pages, you will also remember your own story: that first workshop, that first group, that first doubt, that first "yes, it worked!". Because inclusion does not begin in a document: it begins with you, with your team and in every adolescent who decides to enter the space and stay.

BEFORE WE BEGIN...

This guide is also your story.

And like any book that has an author, there is also a space for you here: your photo, your drawing, your way of seeing the world.

That's why we invite you to do something special:

- In the box on the left, draw yourself as you were 10 years ago.
- In the box on the right, draw yourself as you are today.

It doesn't matter if you can draw or not; the important thing is to recognise yourself over time.

Then, in the lines below, write:

- What things you were passionate about
- What was your favourite sweet
- What was most important to you at each of those stages

This activity will help you remember who you were, who you are now, and what part of you will accompany the adolescents in this process.

DRAW YOURSELF AS YOU WERE 10 YEARS AGO	DRAW YOURSELF AS YOU AS TODAY

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is based on a simple idea: each project has different starting points for better including adolescents. Through a self-administered questionnaire, you will be able to identify areas where your team could strengthen its work and receive practical recommendations aligned with that diagnosis. Along the way, you will also be able to recognise and value things that you already do well, even if we do not always recognise them as good practices, and which can be a solid foundation for further growth.

The questionnaire is organised into six dimensions. Each one contains between two and four statements that invite you to reflect on your usual practice. For each statement, select how often it occurs in your project.

THE RESPONSE OPTIONS ARE:

I don't know / Never	_____	1 point
Almost never	_____	2 points
Sometimes	_____	3 points
Almost always	_____	4 points
Always	_____	5 points

At the end of each dimension, add up the points you have earned and calculate your average by dividing by the total number of questions. That will be your score per dimension (out of 5).

After calculating your score for each dimension, look at both the areas with low scores and those with high scores. The former may indicate areas where your project faces challenges or where there is more room to try new ideas. The latter reflect important strengths that are worth recognising, sharing and sustaining. In the recommendations table, you will find best practices aligned with each dimension. You may already be applying some of them, even if you don't call them that, and others may inspire you to continue strengthening your work.

This guide does not seek to provide unique solutions, but rather to help you identify where to start, what to maintain and what to enhance, according to the needs of your context.

It is not about getting the highest score in everything, but about discovering what works in your context and how you can continue to improve from where you are.

DIMENSION 1	I don't know/ Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost always	Always
In your project, when a new call for applications is launched, it is usually the same adolescents who show up, and it is difficult to reach diverse groups (women, indigenous people, LGBTIQ+, people with disabilities, people with reduced mobility, etc.). How often does this situation occur in your team?					
When you want to reach remote communities or neighbourhoods, your team manages to effectively circulate information among adolescents in those contexts.					
In the calls for applications, the team works with local partners (such as schools, community radio stations, or neighbourhood leaders) to disseminate information and accompany those who register.					
Add scores	_____ x 1 +	_____ x 2 +	_____ x 3 +	_____ x 4 +	_____ x 5 +
Final score	Total sum	_____ / 15 =			

Add scores _____ x1 + x2 + x3 + x4 + x5

Media indicator _____ Total suma / 15 =

DIMENSION 2	I don't know/ Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost always	Always
<p>Your communications team creates posters, videos, or publications to encourage participation. Sometimes, after disseminating them, you realise that the messages did not connect well with adolescents: they sound too institutional or unattractive.</p> <p>How often does this happen?</p>					
<p>At times, the team notices that the language, images, or examples they use do not feel relatable to the adolescents in the area. They would like to adapt the materials to their style or way of speaking, but they do not always do so in a timely manner.</p> <p>How common is this in your practice?</p>					
<p>When working in areas with local languages or forms of communication (such as Kichwa, Shuar, or urban dialects), the team identifies the need to adapt the messages, but sometimes lacks the resources or support to do so.</p> <p>How often does the project manage to adapt its messages to these local forms?</p>					
<p>Add scores</p>	_____ x 1 +	_____ x 2 +	_____ x 3 +	_____ x 4 +	_____ x 5 +
<p>Final score</p>	Total sum	_____ / 15 =			

DIMENSION 3

I don't know/
Never

Almost
Never

Sometimes

Almost
always

Always

In a recent activity, some dynamics did not turn out as expected: the group got bored, there was confusion, or the instructions were too long.

How often does the team face situations like this during their workshops?

During a workshop, comments or jokes arise that make some people uncomfortable, but no rules of conduct or agreements on care had been discussed at the beginning.

How often does something like this happen in your project?

In several spaces, the team observes that some adolescents participate a lot, while others remain silent or isolated.

How often does the team take action to balance participation?

During some activities, adults (such as facilitators, teachers, or public officials) tend to assume the role of 'teachers', while adolescents remain spectators or executors. However, the ideas, knowledge, or ways of thinking of adolescents are often not heard or given centre stage.

How often does this situation occur in your project?

Add scores

_____ x 1 +

_____ x 2 +

_____ x 3 +

_____ x 4 +

_____ x 5 +

Final score

Total sum

_____ / 15 =

DIMENSION 4

I don't know/
Never

Almost
Never

Sometimes

Almost
always

Always

In some workshops or activities, certain adolescents are unable to attend due to distance, transport costs or lack of family support.

How often does this affect participation in your project?

During long activities, the team notices that several participants arrive without having had breakfast or lunch, which affects their energy and concentration.

How often is this type of situation addressed within the project?

When logistical barriers such as transport, food or materials arise, adolescents may stop attending because of the cost involved.

Does the team have solutions for these types of situations?

Add scores

_____ x 1 +

_____ x 2 +

_____ x 3 +

_____ x 4 +

_____ x 5 +

Final score

Total sum

_____ / 15 =

DIMENSION 5	I don't know/ Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost always	Always
<p>Some families or carers ask for more information about the activities or express doubts about the topics covered with the adolescents.</p> <p>How often does the team maintain clear and constant communication with families?</p>					
<p>During an activity, someone on the team identifies that an adolescent may need specialised emotional or psychological support, but they do not always know who to turn to or how to handle the case.</p> <p>Does your team have a referral pathway or trusted allies for these cases?</p>					
Add scores	_____ x 1 +	_____ x 2 +	_____ x 3 +	_____ x 4 +	_____ x 5 +
Final score	Total sum	_____ / 15 =			

DIMENSION 6

I don't know/
Never

Almost
Never

Sometimes

Almost
always

Always

When conducting surveys or administering forms, the team notices that adolescents' responses are short, repetitive, or insincere.

How often does this happen in your project?

At the end of activities, the team usually leaves an open space to hear how the adolescents felt, what they learned, or what they would change.

How often do you hold these qualitative feedback sessions?

Throughout the project, adolescents propose ideas or offer criticism, but the team does not always manage to integrate them into subsequent activities or decisions.

How often are these suggestions actually taken into account?

Add scores

_____ x 1 +

_____ x 2 +

_____ x 3 +

_____ x 4 +

_____ x 5 +

Final score

Total sum

_____ / 15 =

RESULTS BY DIMENSION

DIMENSION	Score / 5	Good practices we recommend you review
Dimension 1: Call for proposal		<p>Best practice 1: Call for proposals based on inclusion criteria</p> <p>Best practice 2: Collaborate with community partners to reach a wider audience and increase accuracy</p>
Dimension 2: Communication		<p>Good practice 3: Co-creation and validation of call for participation communication materials with adolescents</p> <p>Good practice 4: Communication of the project in local languages</p>
Dimension 3: Methodologies		<p>Good practice 5: Adolescent validation of activity methodologies</p> <p>Good practice 7: Collective agreements to create safe spaces</p> <p>Good practice 8: Adolescent allies to promote inclusive participation</p> <p>Good practice 13: Building spaces where adolescents and adults are on the same level</p>
Dimension 4: Logistics		<p>Good practice 6: Facilitating transport and food to ensure participation*</p>
Dimension 5: External allies		<p>Good practice 9: Continuous communication with families and carers</p> <p>Good practice 10: Refer cases that require specialised mental health care</p>
Dimension 6: Feedback		<p>Good practice 11: Surveys piloted by adolescents</p> <p>Good practice 12: Spaces to listen to adolescents during and after activities</p>

*Requires specific budget

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PHASE 1: Call for participation and planning

GOOD PRACTICE 1: Call for proposals based on inclusion criteria

Who can implement it?

Those responsible for the call for proposals and logistics. Project coordination, MEL Team

What is it and why do we use it?

It is a planning tool that allows us to define how we want the groups to be composed in the activities we implement. This practice allows you to design calls for project activities that ensure diversity without falling into favouritism.

To achieve this, three complementary tools are used:

The inclusion matrix. Built at the beginning of the project, it defines indicative participation percentages for different priority groups (such as indigenous adolescents, Afro-descendants, LGBTIQ+, people with disabilities, people in situations of human mobility, people outside the education system, etc.). These percentages are not fixed quotas, but flexible references that allow us to guide the desired composition of the participating group. They can be established based on:

- **Historical data** from the project or organisation. Example: if in previous editions an average of 10% of adolescents of African descent participated, the team may aim to reach at least 15% in this edition.
- **Demographic proportions of the territory.** Example: if in a rural parish 30% of adolescents belong to indigenous peoples and 12% are outside the education system, the matrix may suggest that these percentages be reflected in the call for applications.

FOR EXAMPLE:

POPULATION	TARGET
Women	50
Indigenous adolescents	30
Adolescents from rural areas	15

— **Registration form with a focus on inclusion.** This form collects basic demographic data—such as age, gender, ethnicity, educational status, and disability—from those who register. Each of these variables is assigned a score, according to the groups that the project seeks to prioritise. For example, if the aim is to reach more indigenous adolescents or those outside the education system, these categories receive a higher score. By adding up the scores, the team can select those who face the most barriers or contribute the most diversity.

— **Interviews to get to know them better.** After reviewing the registration forms, a brief interview is conducted with each pre-selected person. The aim is not to check whether what they put on the form is "true" or not, but to learn more about their history, their reasons for participating and the conditions they face. These interviews help to make fairer and more humane decisions, especially when there are more applications than places available. They also ensure that the project benefits those who need it most, without labelling or excluding anyone. They are an opportunity to listen, accompany and build trust from the very first contact.

What results have you seen?

- Greater participation by adolescents from historically excluded groups.
- More transparent and legitimate selection processes, especially in high-demand contexts.
- Relationships of trust built from the first contact.

What challenges did we face and how did we overcome them?

Challenge: Some people were unable to fill out the online form due to lack of internet access or difficulty using mobile phones or computers.

Response: Paper forms were distributed in key locations such as markets and schools, and then the team entered the information into the digital system to ensure that all the information was complete.

Challenge: Some adolescents marked many priority categories on their registration forms, even if they did not really identify with them, thinking that this would give them a better chance of being selected.

Response: Short interviews were conducted with applicants, not so much to "verify" their information, but to talk to them and better understand their stories, their motivations, and how the project could help them.

Challenge: Several people who were very interested in participating were left out after trying several times because they did not reach the established scores.

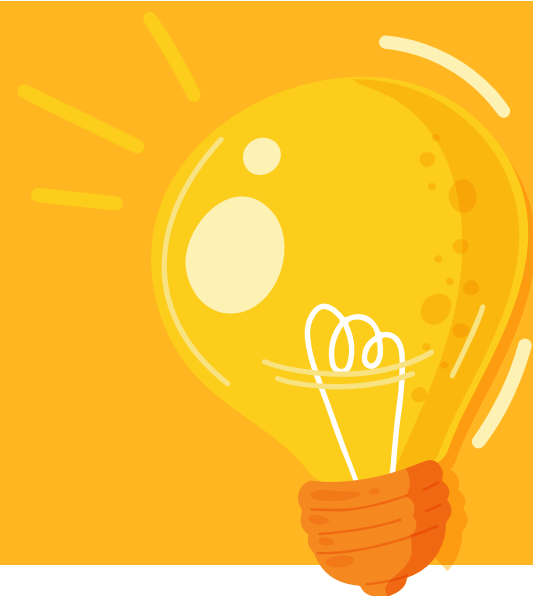
Response: In subsequent activities, it was decided to give more weight to those who had applied before and were still interested, as a way of recognising their perseverance.

Challenge: There was confusion about the inclusion matrix: some people thought that there were "fixed quotas" for each group (e.g., exactly 30% women or 10% with disabilities), which caused discomfort if they were not met.

Response: The team was brought into line by explaining that these percentages are only a flexible guide, not a rigid rule, and that they should be applied with common sense depending on the context.

TIPS

FOR APPLYING THIS GOOD PRACTICE:



- **Prepare a flexible inclusion matrix.** Define what type of diversity you want to see reflected in your group (gender, territory, peoples and nationalities, educational status, etc.) and set percentages as a guide, not as a strict rule.
- **Design a user-friendly form.** Ensure that it collects the necessary variables (age, ethnicity, disability, etc.) without being confusing or lengthy. Inform applicants that the data will help to create diverse groups, not to exclude anyone.
- **Include criteria that recognise whether they have applied for activities before and have not been selected.** If someone has applied before without success and continues to participate, consider giving them additional points or a place in the activity.
- **Avoid going entirely digital if your community does not have access.** If you know that some people have trouble connecting or using online forms, offer printed versions or assist them directly with registration.

GOOD PRACTICE 2: Collaborate with community partners to reach more people and target your outreach more accurately

Who can implement it?

Project coordinators, those responsible for outreach and logistics.

What is it and why do we use it?

It consists of coordinating with local actors, such as community organisations, schools, youth clubs, and public institutions, to help identify, invite, and accompany vulnerable adolescents in the outreach process. This strategy was applied when we noticed that some people could not access our social media posts and that it was essential to have trusted networks that would also accompany them throughout the process, not just at the beginning. In addition to expanding our territorial and population reach, working with partners allowed us to strengthen safe environments, because these people know their community better and can spot situations that the external team cannot identify at first glance.

What results have you achieved?

- We have managed to get more adolescents from excluded contexts to access the activities, even without an internet connection or social media.
- Many allies closely accompanied those who helped to convene during the workshops, which reduced dropout rates.
- Project time and resources were optimised because we did not start from scratch, but rather from already active and legitimate networks.
- In contexts where there are risks (violence, insecurity, etc.), allies were key to creating environments of greater trust and care.

What challenges did we face and how did we overcome them?

Challenge: In some areas, it was difficult to know who to coordinate with, or there were no partners with access to certain profiles.

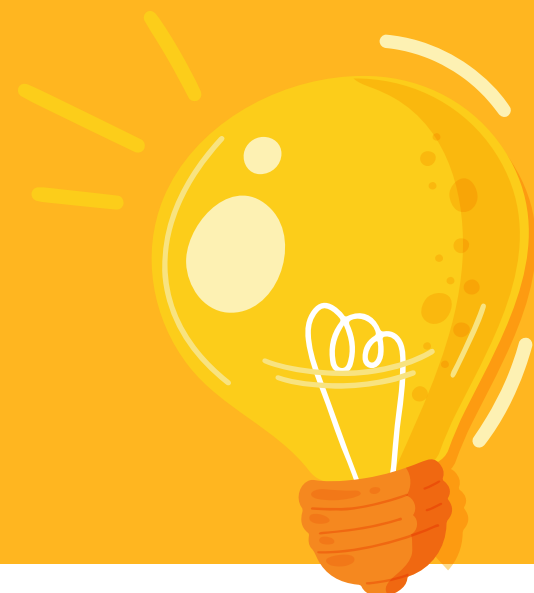
Response: We started with actors we already knew and, through recommendations (a "snowball" strategy), we mapped out new partners suggested by the communities themselves.

Challenge: Some profiles were left out because the partners did not know them or could not reach them (e.g., adolescents outside the education system).

Response: We combined community coordination with other strategies such as visits to local events, schools, or partnerships with social services.

TIPS

FOR APPLYING THIS GOOD PRACTICE:



- Ask the community who their allies are. It is not always a good idea to decide from the outside. It is better to approach local leaders, teachers, social organisations or groups that already work with adolescents and know the area well.
- Be clear about the support you need. It's not just about asking for publicity. Tell your allies what kind of adolescents you are looking for and how they can help: by making recommendations, accompanying the young people or lending their spaces.
- Combine local networks with digital networks. Not everyone has access to the internet or social media. Through schools, neighbourhood organisations or foundations, you can reach those who are not aware of other means.
- Rely on allies to ensure that activities are safe. They can warn you if there are risky situations, help you adapt the dynamics, or keep an eye on the adolescents who are participating.
- Put agreements in writing whenever possible. A letter of commitment or a simple agreement helps to make everything clear and facilitates joint work, especially if institutions such as local councils or health centres are involved.
- Do not forget your allies afterwards. Invite them when you close the project, thank them publicly, or tell them how the process went. This will strengthen the relationship for future collaborations.



GOOD PRACTICE 3: Co-creation and validation of communication materials for calls for participation with adolescents

Who can implement it?

Project coordination, communications team, those responsible for outreach and logistics

What is it about and why do we use it?

Before launching a call for participation, we begin to review or design the materials (messages, posters, videos, social media, etc.) together with adolescents. This helps to make the messages clearer, more relatable, and more attractive to those we want to invite. In some cases, we did quick validations (showing a design and asking for suggestions), and in others, we co-created from scratch with adolescents. For example, a group of adolescents allied with the project chose the colours, slogan, and style of the message. This approach arose because many materials ended up being too institutional or using adult language that did not connect with adolescents. In addition, we realised that involving them in communication strengthens their commitment and improves the reach of the calls for participation.

What results has this had?

- The messages were clearer and more appealing to adolescents, using their language and style.
- Participation in activities increased thanks to co-created and validated materials.
- Adolescents felt like they were an active part of the project when they saw their ideas reflected.

What challenges did we face and how did we solve them?

Challenge: Sometimes we did not have time to carry out validations without affecting the schedule.

Solution: A short space was included in the planning for adolescents to review and make suggestions before printing or publishing.

Challenge: In cities with security risks, it was not safe to disseminate information on social media.

Solution: We worked more directly, disseminating information through trusted individuals and networks, such as teachers and neighbourhood leaders.

Challenge: Some co-created materials strayed from the institutional style of the project.

Solution: The technical team accompanied the process to ensure visual consistency and clear messages, without stifling creativity.

TIPS

FOR APPLYING THIS GOOD PRACTICE:



- Observe how adolescents communicate. Review their networks, ways of speaking, and types of posters they like. Use that style as a starting point. Invite them to create with you. Don't just show them what you've already done: ask them for ideas, phrases, colours, names or illustrations. That way, the message will truly be theirs.
- Protect their image. If you use photos, voices or ideas from adolescents, make sure you have their consent (and that of their families if they are minors) and take care not to expose them unnecessarily.
- Do not forget the final review. Even if the materials are co-created, the technical team must review them to ensure that the message is clear, that there are no errors, and that it maintains the image of the project or institution.

GOOD PRACTICE 4: Communicating the project in local languages

Who can implement it?

Project coordination, communications team, those responsible for calls for proposals and logistics

What is it about and why do we use it?

It consists of developing call for applications materials in collaboration with local speakers, using their language or everyday forms of speech. In areas where Kichwa is spoken, for example, we co-create messages with adolescents and community members so that the communication is not only understood, but also feels respectful and inclusive. This practice shows that the project values cultural identities and seeks to include those who are often left out when everything is communicated only in the official language or in technical language. It can also be applied in urban contexts, adapting the language with idioms or youth expressions, or using icons, colours and visual resources that connect with those you want to reach.

What results has this had?

- The participation of indigenous adolescents increased compared to previous calls for participation.
- It built trust among families and community schools, as they saw that the project recognised their language and identity.

What challenges did we face and how did we solve them?

Challenge: Some people thought that the entire activity would be in Kichwa, which could cause confusion.

Response: It was explained from the outset that the call for applications was in Kichwa, but that the activity would be in Spanish. This avoided misunderstandings without closing the door to participation.

TIPS for applying this good practice:

- Identify the languages and registers used in the territory. Do not assume that everyone understands or feels comfortable with the official language.
- Create messages together with local speakers. Don't just translate: ask how it would be said, what tone to use, and what symbols or references are most familiar.
- Always clarify which parts will be in the local language. If it is only the call to action, state this clearly to avoid misplaced expectations.
- Validate with adolescents in the area. They will know if the message sounds natural, if it connects, or if something is missing.
- Coordinate with bilingual schools or intercultural authorities. This strengthens the process and makes the action sustainable.
- Consider oral or visual formats. In contexts with low literacy, audio, video or icons help to ensure that no one is left out.

GOOD PRACTICE 5: Adolescent validation of activity methodologies

Who can implement it?

Project coordination, facilitators

What is it and why do we use it?

This practice consists of testing activities with adolescents—especially those who are already actively involved as counsellors or representatives—before applying them to the whole group. It arose when it became apparent that some activities prepared by adults did not achieve the expected participation, either because they were unclear, failed to generate interest because they were too technical or boring, or presented barriers to understanding. Validating them in advance helps to ensure that they really work and connect with what adolescents need and expect. This validation is also a way of sharing power, building trust and strengthening their leadership.

The process can follow three simple steps:

- 1. Present the proposal:** explain the activity clearly and briefly (this can be done in a short workshop, a meeting, or via audio/video).
- 2. Gather feedback or do a quick test.** It is important to ensure a space where they can be transparent and tell us if they found it boring, did not understand it, or what ideas they have to improve it.
- 3. Make any necessary adjustments:** refine the instructions, timing, or activities, and thank those who helped improve it.

What results have you achieved?

- The design of activities that previously failed to spark interest was improved.
- The validated agendas had better rhythm and connection with the groups.
- The role of adolescents as leaders and co-creators was strengthened. In some cases, adolescents replicated the methodologies in their communities or schools.

What challenges did we face and how did we overcome them?

Challenge: Avoid revealing too much about the activity ahead of time, especially if those who validate will also participate later.

Response: Adolescents interested in leading or designing were invited and asked to preserve the element of surprise for the rest of the group.

Challenge: There is not always enough time to validate before each activity.

Response: Validation spaces were included in the planning process so that it would not seem like an extra step, but rather part of the design.

TIPS FOR APPLYING THIS GOOD PRACTICE:



- **Incorporate validation from the outset.** Do not wait until everything is defined to ask questions.
- **Ask for feedback on specific points.** For example: Was the instruction clear? Is it too long? Is it fun or boring? Does it work in your community?
- **Publicly acknowledge their contribution.** Thanking them in workshops or including their name in materials is a way of valuing their role.
- **Test the workshop with people similar to the group you will be working with.** This way, you will know if the content is understood and connects with their reality before applying it.
- **Document what you have learned.** A brief report, audio recording or notes will help you to record improvements and replicate them in other places.



PHASE 2: Implementation of activities

GOOD PRACTICE 6: Provide transport and food to ensure participation

Who can implement it?

Project coordination

What is it and why do we use it?

This practice seeks to ensure that adolescents from low-income sectors, indigenous communities, or those with fewer resources can participate on equal terms. To this end, the project covered transport and food during the activities. We found that often the cost of travel or not having eaten were reasons why they could not attend or did not stay for the entire time. Therefore, from the outset, we decided to include these supports as something essential, not as an extra. We also understood that organising this involves additional work: from finding reliable suppliers to anticipating payments, defining safe meeting points and adapting to local conditions. In areas far from the city, for example, it is necessary to anticipate long distances, rain or difficult roads, and seek solutions with local leaders. In some cases, it was useful to offer food that the adolescents were familiar with.

What results have you achieved?

- Adolescents who were previously unable to attend due to lack of resources participated.
- Energy levels and concentration improved during longer sessions.
- Retention and commitment to the programme were strengthened.
- In rural contexts, it helped remote communities to participate.
- At the institutional level, it generated trust and a positive image for the project.

What challenges did we face and how did we overcome them?

Challenge: The initial budget did not cover all the necessary transport costs, especially in areas with long distances or complex conditions.

Response: Some budget items were adjusted and strategic and safe meeting points were defined to facilitate logistics without significantly increasing costs.

TIPS

FOR APPLYING THIS GOOD PRACTICE:

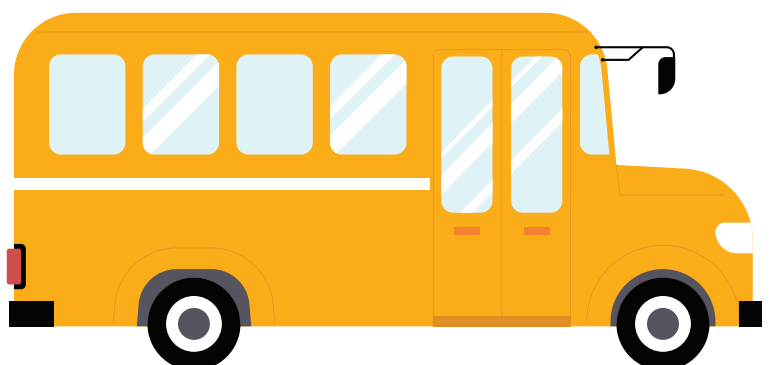


From the planning stage:

- Include these supports as part of the project design from the outset.
- Talk to adolescents and caregivers to adapt schedules, meeting points, and meals to their realities.
- Justify these expenses as measures of equity and accessibility to donors or public institutions.

During implementation:

- Coordinate well with local partners or leaders for transportation, especially in remote or rural areas.
- Consider culturally appropriate food in diverse territories.
- Avoid communicating this support as "aid" or "rewards": these are fair conditions for participation.
- If the budget is limited, prioritise activities where this support is most needed.
- If the project grows or is replicated, consider local partnerships with businesses or transport providers to make it more sustainable.



GOOD PRACTICE 7: Collective agreements to create safe spaces

Who can implement it?

Facilitators

What is it and why do we use it?

Before starting any workshop or activity, the facilitation team opened a space to build some basic rules for coexistence together. These were collective agreements that were drawn up among all participants to ensure a space where they felt safe, listened to, and respected. They started with some examples (such as respect and confidentiality), but the most important thing was that each group could add what they needed: from "do not laugh at others" to "do not take photos without permission". This practice helped to build trust from the outset, especially in spaces with adolescents who have experienced exclusion, discrimination or violence. It was also used with teachers and other community actors.

What results have you achieved?

- The adolescents felt more comfortable, secure and willing to participate.
- Several people said in interviews that defining the rules helped them feel safe.
- When tensions or conflicts arose, the agreements allowed them to remember what had been agreed upon and resolve issues without confrontation.

What challenges did we face and how did we overcome them?

Challenge: Sometimes agreements were made but forgotten during activities.

Response: They began to be recalled at the beginning and end of each session, and were displayed visibly (on posters or whiteboards) so that they became part of the environment.

TIPS for applying this good practice:

- Build agreements together with everyone. Avoid just presenting them. The important thing is to talk and allow each group to say what they need to feel comfortable and cared for.
- Connect them to care and rights. Remember that they are not just rules for coexistence: they also prevent situations of violence, harassment, or discrimination.
- Make them visible and revisit them. Write them down in a visible place and reread them when tensions arise or at the beginning of each new session.
- Document the process. Taking a photo or writing down the agreements in minutes can help with follow-up and accountability if necessary.
- Review them as a team. The facilitation team should also be included in the agreements. This reinforces the horizontality and trust of the group.

GOOD PRACTICE 8: Adolescents as allies in promoting inclusive participation

Who can implement it?

Facilitators, project coordination

What is it and why do we use it?

In many project workshops, we saw that it is not always enough for the facilitation team to promote inclusive participation. Sometimes, those leading the activities are so focused on the methodology, time and group that they fail to notice if someone is quiet, confused or isolated.

Therefore, before each activity, we invite adolescents who have already participated in previous processes to join as volunteer allies. We explain their role and give them the freedom to accompany the group from their perspective as peers, without replacing the team. For example, they greet those who are arriving for the first time, sit next to those who are alone, ask questions to encourage others, explain instructions if someone has not understood them, or encourage those who have not yet spoken to do so. Small actions like these create an atmosphere of trust and belonging. This is a transformative practice: inclusion ceases to be the exclusive task of adults and becomes a shared culture. In addition, those who take on this role strengthen their empathetic leadership, and their attitude inspires the group.

What results have you achieved?

- The climate of mutual care and shared responsibility among adolescents was strengthened.
- Activities flowed better, with more participation and trust.
- It allowed allies to develop more empathy and socio-emotional skills of care and respect.

What challenges did we face and how did we overcome them?

Challenge: Some experienced adolescents were unclear about their role as allies and tended to group together, as they knew each other from previous activities.

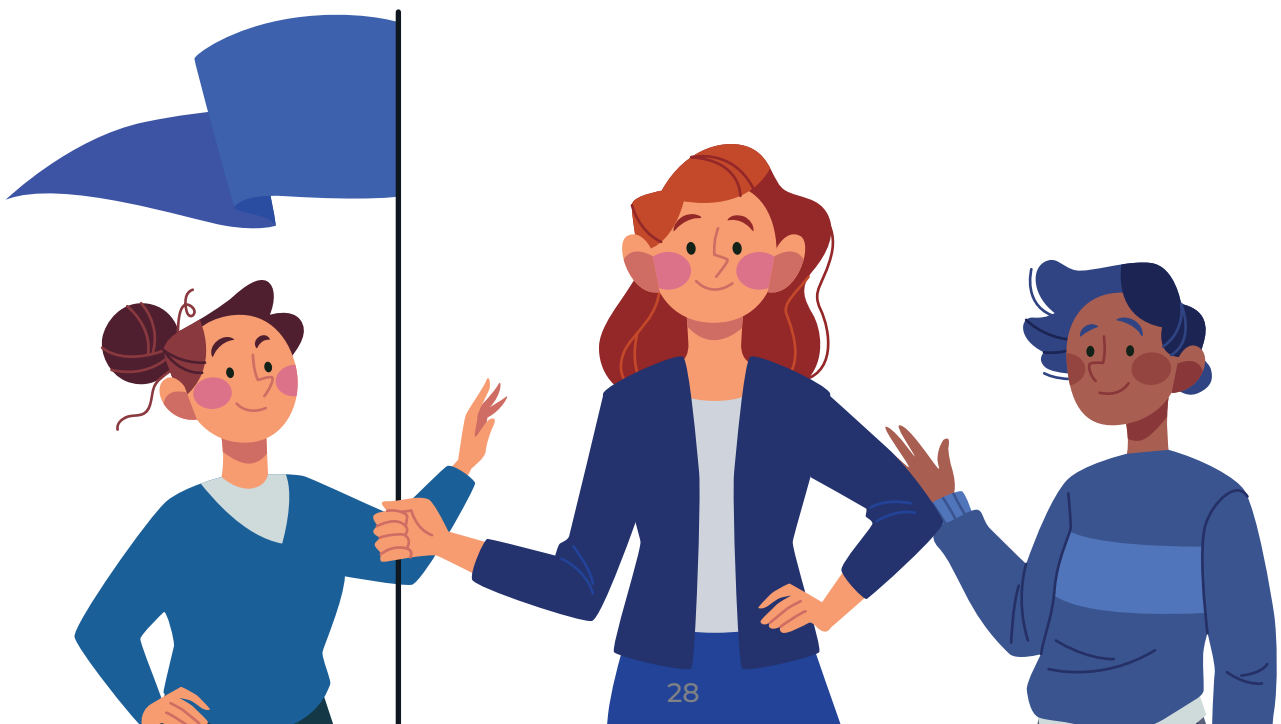
Solution: We spoke with them before the workshop, explaining what it meant to be an ally: encouraging participation, accompanying those who need it, observing if anyone feels uncomfortable, and promoting mutual respect. This helped them to take on their role with commitment.

TIPS

FOR APPLYING THIS GOOD PRACTICE:



- Identify allies with intention. Look for adolescents who are already actively involved, listen to them, and accompany them as they take on this new role.
- Explain your purpose clearly. It is not about replacing the team, but about adding to the care of the group. A direct, simple and affectionate message makes all the difference.
- Accompany them with adult support. If they face difficult situations (such as detecting exclusion or emotional distress), they should have someone from the team to back them up.
- Avoid overload. Their role should not become an extra burden. Ensure that they also have space to enjoy themselves, rest and participate freely.
- Make care a culture, not a task. This role helps to sow a different way of experiencing the workshops: with more empathy, horizontality and shared joy.



GOOD PRACTICE 9: Continuous communication with families and carers

Who can implement it?

Facilitators, project coordinators

What is it and why do we use it?

In many contexts, adolescent participation in community activities can be limited if their parents or carers do not understand what the project is about or distrust the space. To nurture this bond, a strategy of continuous communication with families was implemented, adapted to each territory. This communication took different forms: WhatsApp messages with information about dates and learning, informational meetings, phone calls when sensitive issues were discussed, and even informal conversations when greeting or saying goodbye to adolescents at the workshops. The goal was to build a close alliance based on trust and shared care.

What results have you achieved?

- The adolescents participated more consistently and with greater family support.
- The relationship with families made it possible to identify and prevent risky situations.

What challenges did we face and how did we overcome them?

Challenge: Communication was sporadic at the beginning, and it was not always clear what the adolescents were doing in the project.

Response: A more consistent strategy was created, with weekly or fortnightly messages sharing content, achievements and key dates.

Challenge: Some families had doubts about issues such as gender or mental health.

Response: The project's approach was carefully explained, emphasising the development of life skills and participation as tools for the future.



TIPS

FOR APPLYING THIS GOOD PRACTICE:



- Keep communication simple and personal. For example: "Hello, today your daughter participated in an activity on leadership and creativity. Thank you for supporting her participation!" accompanied by a photo of the day.
- Use the means of communication available in the area. If there is no connectivity, talk in person, during arrivals or departures.
- **Distinguish between three types of communication:**

Informative: Dates, schedules, logistics.

Relational: Active listening, gratitude, trust.

Preventive: Alerts, sensitive issues, possible risks.

- Invite families to get involved. They can give ideas, ask questions or share concerns. When they feel part of the process, they strengthen it.



GOOD PRACTICE 10: Refer cases that require specialised mental health care

Who can implement it?

Project coordination

What is it and why do we use it?

During the project, adolescents in need of specialised emotional support were identified on several occasions. Although the facilitation team was trained to create safe spaces and look after general wellbeing, they were not trained to provide psychological care or intervene in crises. Therefore, a strategy was designed so that when warning signs appeared, referrals were made to professionals or partner institutions in the area that provide mental health services. This was done in partnership with local governments and social organisations. In each case, the team accompanied the process, maintaining the link with the adolescent and their family environment.

The team activated the referral route when it detected situations such as:

- Persistent signs of emotional distress (isolation, frequent crying, intense anxiety).
- Abrupt changes in behaviour or mood.
- Reports of violence, neglect, or risky situations.
- Self-identification by the adolescent of the need for support.

In these situations, the following steps were taken:

- 1. Talk:** with the adolescent, respectfully and confidentially, to assess whether they want support for their mental health.
- 2. Contact the ally:** an institution or person with the capacity to handle the case.
- 3. Refer:** formalising the referral and recording the case securely.
- 4. Support:** without replacing the specialist, but maintaining the relationship.
- 5. Close:** verify that the adolescent was received and that follow-up is being provided.

What results have you achieved?

- Specialised support routes were activated in sensitive cases.
- Families valued the project's ability to act with care.
- Partnerships with public and community institutions were strengthened.
- The legitimacy of the project increased among local actors.
- The technical team gained confidence in its role as a bridge, not a replacement.

What challenges did we face and how did we overcome them?

Challenge: In some areas, it was difficult to find psychologists or available services.

Solution: From the outset of the project, local actors with experience in mental health or emotional support were mapped. This included not only local actors, but also actors who could provide virtual support.

Challenge: There was fear or mistrust on the part of parents or adolescents when mentioning the idea of "referral."

Solution: Clear language, without technical terms, was used, and it was explained with empathy that seeking outside help is a form of care, not punishment. In addition, trust was built with families from the beginning of the training process, which facilitated conversation when intervention was necessary.

TIPS FOR APPLYING THIS GOOD PRACTICE:



- Define from the outset of the project what your team can and cannot do in terms of mental health issues.
- Train your team and learn how to detect warning signs (isolation, frequent crying, reports of violence, etc.).
- Have simple, empathetic phrases ready to explain to adolescents and families why external support is being sought.
- Accompany the referral process with warmth, even if you are no longer directly involved in the case.
- Carefully document each referral, respecting confidentiality and in accordance with the local legal framework.



PHASE 3: Participatory monitoring

GOOD PRACTICE 11: Surveys piloted by adolescents

Who can implement it?

MEL team

What is it and why do we use it?

To find out if our activities with adolescents are working, we use surveys that measure changes in knowledge, perceptions, and experiences. But sometimes these tools contain difficult words, confusing phrases, or long questions that are not easily understood. This affects the quality of the responses.

That is why, at Alza Tu Voz, we started testing surveys with adolescents before administering them. The process has three steps:

- 1. Technical design:** the team responsible for the activity creates a first version of the survey.
- 2. Expert validation:** members of the MEL team or specialists review the survey to ensure it is well designed.
- 3. Pilot testing with adolescents:** a group of adolescents who have already participated in the project review the survey and make suggestions for improvement.

This piloting helps to make the questions clearer, use words that are familiar in their context, and include more relevant examples. Feedback is also given to those who participated so that they can see how their suggestions were taken into account.

Example: In a survey on mental health, one question asked, "Do you feel emotionally stable?" An adolescent suggested changing it to "Do you usually feel calm or moody?", which was easier to understand

What results have you achieved?

- The surveys are easier to understand and the responses are more honest and useful.
- Misinterpretations are reduced and data consistency is improved.
- Adolescents feel valued when they see that their contributions are taken into account.
- The data collected is more useful for adjusting activities or making institutional decisions.

What challenges did we face and how did we overcome them?

Challenge: Piloting requires additional time and can delay the schedule.

Response: This stage was included as part of the planning for each activity, placing it after expert validation so as not to affect implementation.

Challenge: The technical conditions for formal validation are not always in place.

Response: This can be done simply, for example, by reading the questions aloud to a small group of adolescents and discussing how they understand them.

TIPS

FOR APPLYING THIS GOOD PRACTICE:



- Include a testing stage with adolescents in the design of surveys or forms.
- Use their perspective to adjust the language, examples, and structure of the questions.
- Inform the adolescents about how their contributions were incorporated.
- Adapt the language not only to age, but also to the territory, language, or cultural references.
- Do not forget to ensure consent and confidentiality, even at this stage.

GOOD PRACTICE 12: Spaces to listen to adolescents during and after activities

Who can implement it?

MEL team, facilitators

What is it about and why do we use it?

Sometimes, what matters most is not said in a survey. That is why at Alza Tu Voz we use qualitative feedback spaces: moments of conversation, reflection and listening where adolescents share how they experienced the activities. It is not just about evaluating the content, but also about talking about what worked or did not work in terms of logistics (such as food, timing, transport), group dynamics or their own emotions. We also ask if anything changed in their lives after participating: did they feel more confident? Did they discover something new? Would they like to do something different? In addition, listening carefully is also a way of caring. It builds trust, shows that their opinions matter, and helps to adjust processes to make them more respectful, safe, and meaningful.

What results have you achieved?

- Improving future activities based on what the adolescents actually experienced.
- Detect logistical or methodological problems early on.
- Strengthen the bond between participants and facilitators.
- Reinforce adolescents' confidence in their power to influence.
- Inform reports, strategic decisions, or local public policies with sensitive and contextualised evidence.

What challenges did we face and how did we overcome them?

Challenge: The information collected was rich but scattered, making it difficult to see common patterns.

Solution: We are testing the use of SenseMaker, a tool that allows adolescents themselves to tell their stories and interpret them with simple symbols. This allows us to see trends without losing the subjective element. This tool is optional and can be replaced by other simple forms of recording depending on the resources available to each team.

Challenge: Doing it well takes time and an open attitude on the part of those facilitating.

Solution: We now plan these spaces as part of the schedule, taking place periodically with the participants in our activities.

TIPS

FOR APPLYING THIS GOOD PRACTICE:



- Use open and accessible questions that help adolescents express what they felt.
- Adapt the format: it can be a conversation, brainstorming, a drawing, or a dynamic activity.
- Listen without interrupting or judging. Always thank them for their answers.
- Record ideas clearly, ensuring confidentiality.
- When possible, provide a summary of what was said and how it was used.
- **Remember:** listening with openness is also a way of being accountable and sharing power.



GOOD PRACTICE 13: **Create spaces where adolescents and adults are on the same level**

Who can implement it?

Project coordination, facilitators

What is it about and why do we use it?

One of the most transformative lessons learned from the project has been understanding that listening to adolescents not only serves to improve activities or validate tools: it also changes the way adults, such as facilitators, coordinators, or public officials, understand their role, break down stigmas, and relate to adolescents.

This practice consists of creating spaces where adolescents and adults participate on equal terms, recognising each other as valid actors in the process. The aim is for adolescents to move from simply expressing their opinions to being truly listened to by adults as peers, based on their experience and life stories. At the same time, the aim is for adolescents to develop skills to interact with people from other generations, strengthening relationships, learning and efforts between different generations.

A very useful resource has been the use of play as a tool for equality. Play erases hierarchies, redistributes roles and creates a symbolically horizontal space where everyone learns from everyone else. This allows, for example, adolescents to explain concepts to adults, mutual trust to be built and new forms of collaboration to emerge.

What results have you achieved?

- Public officials, teachers and carers have changed their perception of adolescence by listening to them directly in non-hierarchical spaces.
- Those of us working on the project have broadened our view of adolescence, recognising the transformative power that comes from putting them at the centre.
- Empathy and respect between generations have been strengthened within the project.
- Shared activities have enhanced the leading role of adolescents.
- Adolescents have learned to work together as a team with adults, rather than seeing them as outsiders or threats.
- Adjustments have been made to the way activities are designed and facilitated, incorporating games and dynamics to avoid adult-centred structures.

What challenges did we face and how did we overcome them?

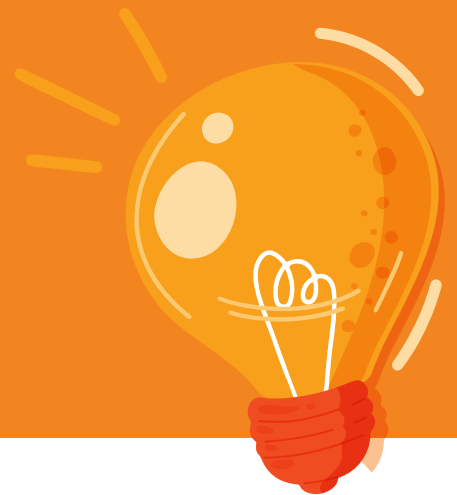
Challenge: In highly technical activities or those designed for adults, adolescents lost interest, became distracted or remained silent.

Solution: Games were incorporated to create more horizontal spaces. First, they were tried out with adolescents so that they could gain confidence and become familiar with the rules. Then, they were the ones who guided the adults during the activity, reversing the usual roles. The game proved to be a powerful "equaliser" for fostering respectful interactions, breaking down implicit hierarchies and promoting mutual recognition.

Challenge: Some adults arrived with fixed ideas about adolescence, which made it difficult for them to open up and listen with humility.

Solution: Before these sessions, brief alignment sessions were held with the adults, explaining the value of actively listening to adolescents and how this could help them make better decisions. This preparatory approach facilitated a more genuine openness and served as a persuasive strategy to foster respect and horizontality.

TIPS FOR APPLYING THIS GOOD PRACTICE:



- Invite adolescents to facilitate or co-facilitate activities with adults, to reverse the usual roles.
- Use games or symbolic dynamics that eliminate hierarchies and encourage collaboration.
- Introduce moments of horizontal dialogue, where both generations share from experience, not from position or technical knowledge.
- Accompany adults so that they recognise their own stigmas towards adolescence and are willing to change their perspective.
- Remind everyone that listening is not just a technical tool, but a way to transform power relations.



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