

Tool 7

Handbook of Civic Engagement Activities

Use this repository to identify low-cost, flexible engagement activities that can reach diverse topics, including ones young people might not raise on their own. The eight activities below work online and offline, and can be combined into a single session or run as separate touch-points across an OGP co-creation process. Mix and match based on your context, time, and group.

Each activity has been adapted to work with a government official in the room, not just among youth peers, with practical guidance on facilitation and how to use the outputs in an OGP co-creation process.

QUICK REFERENCE: CHOOSING THE RIGHT ACTIVITY

PRE-EVENT SURVEYS

- **Format:** Online or paper
- **Group size:** Any size
- **Government role:** None
- **Best for:** Mapping priorities before you design the session

STORYTELLING

- **Format:** Oral, written, photo, video, audio, or social media
- **Group size:** 1 to large groups
- **Government role:** Optional
- **Best for:** Surfacing lived experience behind a policy issue

INTERACTIVE CARD GAMES

- **Format:** Physical cards or digital board
- **Group size:** 3-6 per table
- **Government role:** Optional
- **Best for:** Low-cost, energizing, low literacy barrier

BRUNCH DIALOGUES

- **Format:** In-person, informal venue
- **Group size:** 8-20
- **Government role:** Optional
- **Best for:** Candid, high-visibility alternative to a focus group

COMMUNITY COUNCIL SIMULATIONS

- **Format:** In-person
- **Group size:** 15-30
- **Government role:** Optional or central
- **Best for:** Teaching decision-making; discussing contested local issues

CIVIC PICNICS

- **Format:** In-person, outdoor
- **Group size:** 20-60
- **Government role:** None
- **Best for:** Constitutional literacy, civic education, and community building

PAINT AND POLICY CONVERSATIONS

- **Format:** In-person, creative workshop setting
- **Group size:** 20-30
- **Government role:** Optional
- **Best for:** Visioning and co-creation, reaching participants less comfortable in formal settings

ISSUE-BASED DEBATES

- **Format:** In-person
- **Group size:** 1 to 100+ depending on format
- **Government role:** Central
- **Best for:** Surfacing differing positions on a contested issue and putting youth questions directly to decision-makers

PRE-EVENT SURVEYS

Format: Online form or printed card, completed individually before the session

Group size: Any size (asynchronous)

Time needed: 5-10 minutes

Government role: None

Best for: Mapping priorities before you design the session itself

WHY IT WORKS

A short survey sent with the invitation lets you build the agenda around what young people actually want to discuss, instead of guessing. It also gives quieter participants a low-pressure way to flag a topic they might not raise out loud in a group.

HOW TO RUN IT

- Keep it to 5–8 questions: A few multiple-choice plus one open text, e.g. “What’s the one issue you’d want decision-makers to hear about?”
- Send it with the event invitation or registration link, online or printed.
- Close it 2–3 days before the event to leave time to adjust the agenda.
- Use the results to shape the discussion prompts for whichever activity follows.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Keep it anonymous, or optional-name, to get more honest answers.
- Share back a short “you said, we’re discussing” summary at the start of the session.
- Reuse the same core questions across events to track how priorities shift over time.
- Review Tool 5 and Tool 8 of this Toolkit to see an example of a pre-event survey.

OUTPUT

A short priorities list that anchors the agenda and can be cited in the consultation report.

STORYTELLING

Format: Oral, written, photo, video, audio, or social media. Pick based on the channel your audience already uses

Group size: From a single storyteller up to a large group, depending on format

Time needed: 30–60 minutes for a circle; longer for written, photo, or video pieces

Government role: Optional, mostly as audience or reader rather than participant

Best for: Building trust and surfacing the lived experience behind a policy issue, in whichever format actually reaches your audience

WHY IT WORKS

Personal stories make an issue concrete in a way statistics can’t, and storytelling is a familiar, low-pressure way to contribute even for participants uncomfortable with formal debate.

CHOOSE YOUR FORMAT

Storytelling Circle (or Campfire Stories)

- **What it looks like:** A small group shares stories aloud, in person or on a video call
- **Government role:** Optional, mostly as listener
- **Best for:** Building trust quickly inside a single session

Written Storytelling

- **What it looks like:** A short personal piece (article, op-ed, blog post) published on local media, an NGO site, or the council’s own platform
- **Government role:** None, reads it afterward
- **Best for:** Reaching people beyond the room and leaving a citable public record

Photo Storytelling

- **What it looks like:** A photo with a short caption, submitted by participants and compiled into an exhibition or social post
- **Government role:** None, reads it afterward
- **Best for:** Visual or lower-literacy audiences, exhibitions, social media

Video Storytelling

- **What it looks like:** A 1–2 minute testimonial or vox pop, filmed on a phone
- **Government role:** Optional, can attend a screening
- **Best for:** High shareability, or screening directly to officials

Audio Storytelling (or Podcasts)

- **What it looks like:** A recurring or one-off audio episode, often interview-style, where youth talk to each other or invite an official as a guest; distributed on a streaming platform or shared as a simple audio file or link
- **Government role:** Optional, can join as an interview guest
- **Best for:** Reaching youth who already listen to podcasts regularly, and building an ongoing channel rather than a single one-off piece

Social Media Storytelling

- **What it looks like:** A short personal-story post or reel, often tagging the relevant official or institution
- **Government role:** Optional, reads it publicly
- **Best for:** Public visibility and pressure, reaching youth where they already are

HOW TO RUN IT

- Pick the format, or combination of formats, based on the channel your audience already uses and the literacy or access realities of your group. You don't have to choose only one.
- Set one open prompt tied to the topic regardless of format, e.g. "Tell us about a time the [issue] affected you or someone you know." The same prompt can be used in different formats to reach different audiences and leave a different kind of record.
- For a storytelling circle: go around, nobody interrupts or "fixes" anyone else's story; a small object can serve as a talking piece.
- For written, photo, video, or audio formats: give contributors a simple structure (a one-page template, three photo prompts, a 60-second time limit) so nobody starts from a blank page.
- Collect and lightly edit submissions, or harvest themes live in the circle, before sharing further.
- Publish or present with consent, crediting the storyteller by name or pseudonym as they prefer.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Offer a pass option in every format. Nobody should be forced to share.
- Cap length: 2–3 minutes for oral or video, 300–500 words for written pieces, one caption for a photo.
- Get explicit consent before publishing anything publicly, separate from consent to participate.
- Combine formats: run a circle to surface stories live, then ask a few participants if they'd like to turn theirs into a short video or article for wider reach.
- If officials are present for a live circle, ask them to hold questions until the harvest step, not mid-story.

OUTPUT

A set of stories in whichever format fits, ready to sit alongside survey data in the consultation report, or to be published for broader visibility.

INTERACTIVE CARD GAMES

Format: Physical card decks or digital boards (Miro, Mentimeter)

Group size: 3-6 per table, multiple tables in parallel

Time needed: 20-45 minutes

Government role: Optional, can join a table

Best for: Engaging young people on almost any topic at a low-cost and energetic way

WHY IT WORKS

Cards turn an abstract topic into something to physically sort, discuss, or react to, which is useful for younger participants, mixed literacy levels, or as an energizer inside a longer session.

HOW TO RUN IT

Design two simple deck types and mix them as needed.

- Discussion cards: one open question per card, drawn at random to start a table's conversation.
- Scenario cards: a short mini-case (For example: "The council has \$X for one project, choose which one and justify"), pushing the group toward a decision rather than just talk.
- Each table draws, discusses for a set time, then reports back one idea or decision to the room.
- Optionally score or rank ideas across tables to add a light competitive element.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Build the deck in local language and slang so it feels made for the group, not imported.
- Leave a few blank cards for youth to add their own questions.
- Rotate facilitators or "table captains" between tables so the same voices don't dominate every round.
- If you'd rather not design cards from scratch, [PlayDecide](#) offers free, ready-made discussion card decks on real policy dilemmas, translatable into any language.

OUTPUT

Table-level ideas or decisions, easy to photograph and feed into a consultation report.

BRUNCH DIALOGUES

Format: In-person, informal venue with food (café, community space, co-working space)

Group size: 8-20

time needed: 1.5–2 hours, including the meal

Government role: Optional, often joining for one portion of the session

Best for: An informal alternative to a focus group, when you want candid input and visible, shareable engagement

WHY IT WORKS

Sharing food in a relaxed setting lowers the social barrier that a formal “consultation meeting” can create, especially for young people who might feel intimidated by an official format. Participants tend to stay longer, speak more candidly, and contribute more willingly than in a structured focus group.

The informal, photogenic setting also gives the engagement more visibility, useful for showing local government and partners that the process is alive and well-attended. The trade-off is that the relaxed mood can drift, so a brunch dialogue still needs a facilitator or moderator anchoring the conversation to the meeting’s actual aim. Otherwise, it risks becoming just a nice breakfast.

HOW TO RUN IT

- Choose an accessible, casual venue; sponsored or low-cost food works well as the draw.
- Define one clear “anchor question” for the day before you arrive, even though the room will feel informal.
- Open with a 5-minute icebreaker over food before introducing the topic.
- Pose the anchor question and let conversation flow table by table, gently redirecting side conversations back to the aim when they drift too far.
- Have a roaming note-taker (or the facilitator) per table capturing quotes and ideas on a visible flipchart or shared doc as they emerge.
- Close with a quick “one word, one idea” round so every table contributes something concrete before people leave.
- With consent, share photos or a short recap on social media to build visibility for the engagement process.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- The facilitator’s job is distinct from the host’s: hosts make people feel comfortable, facilitators keep the room anchored to the aim and pull in quieter voices.
- Keep tables small (4–6) so conversation flows naturally rather than becoming a lecture.
- Get photo or video consent before the event, not on the spot.
- Several smaller brunch dialogues tend to surface more candid input than one large, more formal-feeling one.

OUTPUT

Quotes and ideas that feed into the same consultation report as your co-creation formal sessions, plus shareable photo or video content for visibility.

COMMUNITY COUNCIL SIMULATIONS

Format: In-person, ideally in a real council chamber or similar space

Group size: 15-30

Time needed: 3-4 hours for a full simulation; 1–1.5 hours for a lighter version

Government role: Optional for the learning version, central for the live-issue version

Best for: Teaching how local (or national) decision-making works, and/or creating a structured space to discuss a real, contested issue with officials present

WHY IT WORKS

This is one of the most effective ways to get young people interacting directly with the government, especially at the local level, where the actors, procedures, and issues are tangible and close to participants' daily lives. National-level simulations (parliament, ministries) are also possible, but need more preparation to simplify the structure realistically.

The format does two distinct jobs well. First, it teaches participants how decisions actually get made—who the relevant actors are, what role citizens play, and how citizens can be consulted or engaged. Second, once that structure is understood, the same format can be repurposed to discuss live “hot” local issues, with real government staff, council members, or the mayor invited to take part.

There are two versions worth running:

- **Learning simulation (fully role-played):** Youth take on every role themselves (mayor, councilors, citizens, opposition, and press) and run a mock council session on a fictional or past local issue, following the real procedural rules of their own council (agenda, speaking order, motions, voting) so the experience mirrors reality as closely as possible.
- **Live-issue dialogue (hybrid, with real officials):** Youth keep the citizen and council seats, but the actual mayor, council members, or relevant staff join as themselves, turning the simulation's structure into a real, structured space to negotiate a current issue, giving young people more confidence and a more equal footing than an ordinary public hearing usually allows.

HOW TO RUN IT

- Pick the issue: a fictional or past case for the learning version, and a real, current one for the live-issue version.
- Map the actual actors relevant to that decision (mayor, council members, department staff, citizens, advocacy groups, press) and write a short briefing card for each role explaining its real interests and powers.
- Walk participants through the real procedure used by that body —agenda items, speaking order, motions, voting rules — so the simulation mirrors how decisions are actually made.
- Run the session: open the “meeting,” present the issue, hold a citizen comment period, debate among councilors, and reach a vote or decision.

- If real officials are joining, place them inside the existing structure as participants who respond to citizen comments or react to a youth-drafted motion, rather than as guest speakers presenting at the group.
- Close with an explicit debrief from participants: what surprised them, where could a citizen have changed this outcome, what would they want to change about the real process.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Partner with a council clerk or staff member beforehand to get the real procedure right —accuracy is what makes the learning land.
- Capture the group’s “shadow motion” or recommendations and consider sending them to the real institution being simulated.
- For national-level versions, simplify the chamber or committee structure and bring in one knowledgeable adult resource person to keep it accurate without overwhelming participants.
- Keep real officials in a listening-and-responding role throughout; the moment they start presenting at the group, it stops being a simulation and becomes a lecture.
- If you'd rather use a ready-made format than build one from scratch, [Electionville](#) can be a good option. It’s a Swedish Institute simulation in which participants play council members negotiating decisions in a fictional town. It can be played both online and offline. It has already been piloted in many countries, including Armenia, with local officials joining the follow-up discussion.

OUTPUT

A short set of youth recommendations or a “verdict” from the simulation, ideally shared back with the real institution it modeled.

CIVIC PICNICS

Format: In-person, informal outdoor venue (public park, open community space)

Group size: 20-60

Time needed: 2-3 hours

Government role: None

Best for: Constitutional literacy, emerging governance issues, building youth civic networks in a non-formal environment

WHY IT WORKS

Civic picnics tap into the growing popularity of social gatherings among young people to create informal, welcoming spaces for civic dialogue. The outdoor, community-owned setting, where participants bring their own mats and contribute snacks in a potluck format, creates a sense of shared ownership that formal consultation spaces rarely achieve.

In Kenya, Sauti Yetu Afrika's Katiba Hangouts are a strong example: young people gather in picnic-style settings to discuss the Constitution and topical governance issues, with topics determined in advance through participant surveys to ensure relevance.

HOW TO RUN IT

- Send a pre-event survey (Google Forms, WhatsApp poll) to participants to determine discussion themes in advance.
- Choose an accessible public space —a park or open area that is free or low-cost and easy to reach through public transportation.
- Invite participants to bring mats or shawls and contribute snacks in a potluck format to build a sense of community ownership.
- Open with a short icebreaker or civic quiz before introducing the main discussion themes.
- Facilitate small group conversations using prepared discussion prompts, rotating topics if needed.
- Incorporate storytelling, games, or a guest speaker to balance learning with community building.
- Close with a structured round where each group shares one key idea or recommendation before dispersing.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Keep discussions interactive and participant-driven. Resist the urge to lecture.
- Prepare discussion prompts in advance but remain flexible; let participant energy guide the depth of each topic.
- Consider inviting a local guest speaker or youth leader to spark engagement without dominating the conversation.
- Document key ideas on a shared flipchart or digital tool in real time so outputs are captured before people leave.

OUTPUT

Documented youth perspectives and recommendations on civic and governance issues, ready to feed into advocacy efforts, public participation processes, and/or OGP commitments.

PAINT AND POLICY CONVERSATIONS

Format: In-person, creative workshop setting (community space, arts venue, outdoor area)

Group size: 20-30

Time needed: 2-3 hours

Government role: Optional, can be invited for the gallery walk to hear outputs directly

Best for: Visioning and co-creation, exploring sensitive issues in a non-threatening environment, reaching participants who are less comfortable in formal settings

WHY IT WORKS

Combining art and dialogue can lower the barriers that formal consultation spaces create. When participants are painting, the pressure to perform or speak confidently drops, and more honest, creative thinking tends to emerge.

The process also produces a tangible, visual output that captures collective perspectives in a way that a report cannot.

HOW TO RUN IT

- Choose a guiding theme or question in advance and share it with participants before they arrive so they can come with ideas. For example, "What does accountable governance look like?" or "Paint your vision for your community in 2030." This gives the session focus while leaving room for personal interpretation.
- Set up tables or floor mats with canvases, paints, brushes, markers, or colored pencils. Keep the materials accessible and varied.
- Open with a brief introduction to the theme and a short icebreaker to help participants feel comfortable before they begin.
- Invite participants to respond to the guiding question through their artwork while facilitators circulate, encourage conversation, and note key ideas emerging from discussions.
- As participants finish, arrange the artwork into a mini gallery around the space.
- Close with a structured Gallery Walk: each participant or small group briefly explains the story behind their piece, and the facilitator captures common themes and recommendations on a flipchart.
- Photograph all artwork and document the key themes before participants leave.

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Reassure participants from the start that artistic skill is not the point. Expression is. This removes a common barrier to engagement.
- Play background music during the painting phase to keep the atmosphere relaxed and reduce self-consciousness.
- Use the Gallery Walk as your main data collection moment. This is where the most articulate and actionable ideas tend to surface.
- If government officials are present, invite them specifically for the Gallery Walk so they hear outputs in participants' own words.

OUTPUT

A collective visual representation of participant perspectives on civic and governance issues, documented through photos and facilitated discussion, ready to inform advocacy efforts, public participation processes, and/or OGP commitments.

ISSUE-BASED DEBATES

Format: In-person, auditorium, fishbowl, or one-on-one seating

Group size: From one-on-one up to 100+ in the audience, depending on format

Time needed: 30 minutes (one-on-one) to 2 hours (larger formats)

Government role: Central

Best for: Surfacing differing positions on a contested issue and putting youth questions directly to decision-makers

WHY IT WORKS

A structured debate format gives a contested issue room to be argued from more than one side, while putting officials in a position to answer specific, prepared questions publicly, which tends to produce more concrete commitments than an open-ended discussion.

Not every context has several officials willing to publicly disagree with each other, so the six formats below range from a single quiet conversation up to a full public debate, allowing the choice to match what is actually available rather than forcing a format nobody can fill.

CHOOSE YOUR FORMAT

One-on-One Dialogue

- **Who debates:** One youth representative and one official
- **Youth role:** Speaker
- **Best for:** Building confidence before a bigger event, or following up on one specific proposal

Panel Cross-Examination

- **Who debates:** One official faces a panel of youth questioners, or one youth proposal faces a panel of officials
- **Youth role:** Questioner on the panel, or the spotlighted speaker
- **Best for:** Holding one decision-maker accountable, or giving one proposal a serious hearing

Government vs. Government

- **Who debates:** Two officials or factions who genuinely disagree (e.g. a majority and an opposition councilor, or two department heads with competing budget priorities)
- **Youth role:** Moderator, questioner, or judge
- **Best for:** Showing youth that disagreement inside government is normal, and giving them an opening to question both sides

Fishbowl Debate

- **Who debates:** A small rotating group debates at the center while the audience listens and can swap in
- **Youth role:** Anyone can rotate into the inner circle
- **Best for:** Larger audiences and issues with more than two clear sides

Oxford-Style Team Debate

- **Who debates:** Two youth teams argue for and against a motion; one team can include officials
- **Youth role:** Debater or judge
- **Best for:** A clearly framed yes/no policy question

Town Hall Q&A

- **Who debates:** Officials answer a mix of pre-submitted and live questions
- **Youth role:** Question-asker
- **Best for:** Broad accountability sessions with many youth in the room

HOW TO RUN IT

- Pick the format based on what is actually available: How many officials can take part, and do they genuinely disagree with each other or only with the youth in the room?
- Agree on the motion, question, or specific issue with organizers and officials in advance.
- For the Government-vs-Government format specifically, identify a real, sourced disagreement first rather than manufacturing one; a staged disagreement reads as fake and undermines trust.
- Collect youth questions beforehand (the pre-event survey above is a good source) and share a sample with officials so they can prepare real answers.
- Brief everyone on the chosen format and time limits before the event starts.
- Run it with a strict, neutral moderator (a youth moderator works well for the one-on-one and panel formats) who enforces time and redirects vague answers back to the question.
- Close with a concrete ask, such as a specific next step or commitment, not just “thank you for the discussion.”

FACILITATOR TIPS

- Pre-submitted questions reduce stage fright for youth and make it harder for officials to dodge with a generic answer.
- In the Government-vs-Government format, stay neutral as moderator even if you have a preferred side; your job is to give both positions a fair, equal hearing.
- Recording or streaming the session adds accountability and extends its visibility past the room.
- Always end on a written, specific commitment or follow-up date, and circulate it afterward.

OUTPUT

A recorded set of public ideas/commitments or follow-up actions, plus footage or a transcript for accountability tracking.

FURTHER RESOURCES

None of this needs to be built from scratch. If you want to go deeper into any single method, these are good places to start:

[PlayDecide](#)

Free, ready-made discussion card decks on real policy dilemmas, translatable into any language.

[Fishbowl Conversations by Involve](#)

Step-by-step guide to setting up and running a fishbowl debate.

[Moderating Difficult Conversations Online by Citizen Lab](#)

Practical guide to moderating heated or sensitive exchanges, useful for both online and in-person sessions.

[People Powered Resource Center](#)

Searchable library of hundreds of participatory democracy guides, templates, and case studies.