



The Youth Parliamentary Academy (YPA)

A Toolkit for Parliaments

Start exploring →



WYDE
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Parliaments in Partnership
EU Global Project to Strengthen the Capacity of Parliaments





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Interactive menu

This toolkit provides parliaments with the information and materials required to organise their own **Youth Parliamentary Academy (YPA)**. Parliaments are encouraged to reflect on their specific needs and adjust the various elements as they see fit.

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1. Introducing the YPA

1.1 What is a YPA?

- The **Inter Pares YPA** is a **four-day in-person programme that invites around 20 young people into parliament**. It equips them with the knowledge and skills to participate in the work of parliament and provides opportunities to engage directly with Members of Parliament and the parliamentary administration.
- The YPA is delivered by the Host Parliament. The Host Parliament is encouraged to bring in selected (youth) organisations and/or experts, in particular **organisations that support democratic and parliamentary processes**.
- The **participation of one or more other parliaments** in this programme is a significant plus, but not a must.

The YPA focuses on:



The place of parliaments in democratic systems.



The work and working modalities of parliaments.



The relationships between a parliament and the society it represents and serves. Specific attention is paid to the position and role of young people.

Unlike many youth parliaments, the YPA is not a simulation exercise. The YPA does not offer young people the 'seat' of a Member of Parliament: rather, **it equips them with the experience and entry points to engage with parliament directly, both during and after the programme.**



1.2 Why organise a YPA?

What's in it for parliament?

- Inviting young people's input on a range of issues and opportunities, for example: youth participation in parliament, climate change or social media.
- Investing in a diverse cohort of politically aware and engaged young people.
- Further developing potential approaches to youth engagement and participation.

What's in it for young people?

- An opportunity to directly engage with Members of Parliament and members of the administration.
- An intensive learning and skills building programme.
- Networking with like-minded young people from across the country.
- Entry points for further engagement with parliament, beyond the duration of the programme.





1. Introducing the YPA

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1.1 What is a YPA?

1.2 Why organise a YPA?

1.3 Leading the way: the **Zambian YPA**

1.3 Leading the way: the **Zambian YPA**

The first YPA was hosted by the National Assembly of Zambia in Lusaka in November 2024. This four-day programme enjoyed the participation of the Austrian Parliament and the Irish Houses of the Oireachtas. Design and delivery of the programme were facilitated by Inter Pares.

Twenty young people between the ages of 19 and 24 took part. The National Assembly of Zambia attaches particular importance to regional representation: as a result, the selected youth cohort included one young man and one young woman from each of Zambia's ten provinces.

The various YPA sessions were delivered by the National Assembly of Zambia, the EU Member State Parliaments and national actors, including BBC Media Action and Zambian youth participation advocates. Areas of focus included youth participation in parliament and climate change.

Throughout the programme, participants built the understanding, ideas and skills to answer the following question:

Imagining the Parliament of Zambia in 2030, how could it best represent and serve the Zambian people?

On the programme's final day, they translated their ideas into a set of 90-second pitches to the National Assembly.

Their suggestions included appointing youth representatives to constituency offices, setting up (a committee of) youth representatives in parliament, lowering the voting age and expanding civic education.



This programme has brought a change and knowledge in us youth, giving us courage to participate in National Assembly issues."

– YPA Participant





2. A guide for Parliamentary Staff

2.1 A whole-of-parliament YPA

2.1.1 Getting your colleagues involved

- **A successful YPA enjoys contributions from across your parliament.** Legal drafters can deliver a session on how laws are introduced, reviewed and adopted; committee clerks can speak to committee work and the importance of parliamentary groups; public engagement officials can outline how parliament already engages with (young) people.
- Wherever possible, **invite the political leadership, including Members of Parliament**, to participate. This is particularly helpful for sessions on youth participation – and for the final pitch.



I believe that the participation of EU Member State Parliaments was of great benefit for the programme itself, since it was great to have numerous people being able to facilitate the skills sessions and provide insights in different parliamentary systems.”

– National Assembly of Zambia



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2.1.2 A strategic approach

Organising a YPA requires significant time and resources. To maximise its impact, the YPA should respond to recognised needs and opportunities. The more closely your YPA links to your institution's strategic priorities, the greater its contribution is likely to be.

Consider the following:

- How would the YPA address (some of) your parliament's strategic development priorities, on (youth) participation and beyond?
- How could the YPA contribute directly to the work of a committee or working group? Would any of their upcoming activities or discussions lend themselves well to input from your youth cohort?
- How could the YPA help you to identify capacity gaps within the administration, specifically with respect to (youth) participation?
- What kind of feedback could further inform your thinking on future capacity investments?
- How could the YPA help you build, or deliver on, your (youth) participation strategy and/or civic education programmes?



2.1.3 The building blocks of a successful YPA



A strong, diverse and legitimate **youth cohort**, selected through a transparent and competitive process.



A **demanding but flexible programme** that balances content and skills, active and passive learning, immersion and self-paced exploration ([Annex 1](#)).



A commitment from parliament's **political and administrative leadership** to secure support throughout the YPA's duration and enable direct exchanges with Members of Parliament and parliamentary staff.



2.2 Setting your objectives

2.2.1 Overall YPA objectives

The overall objective of the YPA is to provide young people with the knowledge and skills to participate directly in parliament, and to engage with Members of Parliament and the parliamentary administration.

To do so, the YPA builds the capacities of young people in two primary areas:



Technical knowledge of democratic principles and the functioning of parliament



Practical skills, including but not limited to research, team building, writing, negotiating, analytical thinking, public speaking and debating

Young people will also be connected to organisations that support parliaments and (youth) participation in politics more broadly.



I plan to use social media to share parliamentary updates, promote transparency and encourage dialogue with constituents. By leveraging interactive content and responding to feedback, I'll ensure inclusive, accessible and meaningful engagement with my parliament and the community."

– YPA participant

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2.2.2 What should your YPA achieve?

The approach, objectives and delivery of your YPA should respond as closely as possible to what your institution seeks to offer and hopes to achieve. As you identify your objectives, consider the following questions:



Do you have a specific target group in mind? (Pupils, young people, young people from specific areas or communities, young people living with disabilities, etc.)



What do you want your youth cohort to learn, develop and take home? (Ideas, knowledge of parliament, skills, connections, etc.)



Are you looking for input from young people on specific areas of your work? (Your youth strategy, public engagement, education, climate change, etc.)



What kind of continued engagement do you envision? This will help avoid the YPA being a one-off.



What kind of follow-up is possible? How can you lay the ground for this before and during the YPA? ([Section 2.5](#))



It was really impactful, I learnt a lot, from social media etiquette to climate change and carbon markets.”

– YPA participant



It’s a really good opportunity for young people to learn about the parliament. Because a lot [of us] don’t know the functions of the parliament”.

– YPA participant



2.3 Selecting participants

2.3.1 Invest in your selection process

You want to welcome a motivated and representative youth cohort to your parliament.

- Be clear about who you want to invite and why
- Use objective eligibility and selection criteria
- Make sure you run a transparent selection process ([Annex 3](#))



2.3.2 Eligibility and selection criteria

Eligibility criteria will determine whether a candidate will be considered for a place in the YPA. You can opt for one or more of the following:

-  **age:** for example, a candidate should be [x] years old on the first day of the YPA
-  **ID:** a candidate should provide a formal ID (name, age, citizenship, if relevant) as part of their application
-  **education:** candidates should provide proof of their educational enrolment and/or degree
-  *[include your own criteria here]*

Selection criteria will help determine which candidates are selected. Weigh these carefully! Your application of these criteria should be fair and transparent. Opt for one or more:

-  **scores** of submitted answers, (short) essays and/or other submissions requested in the Call for Applicants
-  **location:** if you seek representation from (for example) each region, candidates from underrepresented regions may be selected over higher-scoring candidates from overrepresented regions
-  **gender:** if you seek equal representation of men and women, lower-scoring candidates of the underrepresented gender may be selected over higher-scoring candidates of the overrepresented gender
-  *[include your own criteria here]*

Note: After careful consideration, the National Assembly of Zambia opted to select young people who had not previously engaged with parliament. You may choose to do otherwise, of course. Whatever your preferences, be as consistent as possible.

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2.3.3 Participant selection: timeline

This timeline offers you an indication of the key steps to be taken in participant selection (for more information, see [Annex 3](#)).

Think carefully about how to approach this and about who should be involved. Be mindful that this is a time-consuming process: give yourself plenty of room to get this right! Finally, remember to consider any relevant safeguarding questions. This is especially important if you are inviting participants under the age of 18 or if your YPA involves overnight stays. If needed, consult the necessary experts.

1.

Develop the Call for Applications

Provide a short overview of the YPA. Clearly outline the eligibility requirements (age, education, etc.) and the selection criteria, along with the selection process.



2.

Disseminate the Call for Applications

Use your own channels and those of trusted partners (news and radio networks, youth organisations, etc.) to disseminate the Call to Applications.



3.

Application deadline

Close the Call to Applications and make sure it is no longer advertised. Do a first selection based on the eligibility criteria: incomplete applications can be discarded.



4.

Score applicants

Review and score the applications of all eligible candidates. Ideally, this is done by several people, including partners. Finalise a list of average scores for each candidate.



5.

Select successful and waitlisted participants

Apply any additional selection criteria you agreed on (gender, geography, areas of interest, etc.). With this in place, build a list of 'accepted' and 'waitlisted' candidates.



6.

Inform participants

Inform accepted and waitlisted candidates. Ensure they understand what to expect in terms of next steps.



7.

Coordinate logistics

Make the necessary logistical arrangements (funding, travel, accommodation, etc.) for each participant. This will likely require follow-up by phone and/or WhatsApp.





2.4 Building your programme

2.4.1 The importance of balance

Blending technical knowledge and practical skills is a key strength of the YPA. Make sure your youth cohort are active participants throughout – this will make your YPA a more effective and rewarding experience for all.

2.4.2 Knowledge, skills and a final pitch



Knowledge: a detailed look at the organisation, operation and output of parliamentary institutions



Skills: identifying issues you care about; understanding your audience; constructing and delivering an argument



Pitch: presenting a 'reimagined parliament' (90 seconds) to Members of Parliament and senior members of the parliamentary administration

For more information, see [Annex 1](#).



Technical knowledge:
democratic principles and
parliamentary functioning

These sessions are designed to introduce your participants to the role and functions of your parliament. Some participants may have a (basic) understanding of this already, but it does not hurt to repeat. Starting from the beginning, with a focus on key terms and processes, will help you advance meaningfully as you work through the programme.

Areas of focus may include:

- **The role of parliament in your democracy** (including the separation of powers).
- **The functions of your parliament:** representation, law-making and oversight. Depending on your focus, you may wish to spend some additional time on the budget process.
- **How Members of Parliament are elected.**
- **Parliamentary processes and organisation:** the plenary, committees, the importance of parliamentary groups, the Rules of Procedure, and so on.
- **The parliamentary administration:** who works in parliament and how they support the institution.
- **Public engagement and participation:** how citizens can learn about parliament, engage with Members and make their own contributions.



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Practical skills: empowering young people as emerging leaders

The YPA helps young people to identify issues that are important to them, to develop and articulate their thoughts and to effectively share their ideas and opinions. The objective is to empower them to engage with Members of Parliament, parliamentary staff and others in politics, or – should they want to – to become young leaders themselves.

Skills building can focus on research, team building, writing, negotiating, analytical thinking, public speaking and debating, among others. As you build these sessions, connect young people to your knowledge sessions as much as possible. This will make the material come alive and will provide your cohort with genuine practice.

Examples of skills building sessions:



Invite your cohort to imagine that they get 30 seconds to speak to their Member of Parliament, one on one. What is the one issue they would like to introduce, and what is the one question they would ask?



Explore social media etiquette and the importance of building a professional profile. If they want to be a young leader, or advance a particular issue, how should they communicate?



Organise a session on climate change in your country, delivered by a parliamentary researcher. In addition to exploring the subject, you give participants a brief introduction to public speaking. You task them to make a 60-second video statement for the climate committee.



It can be interesting to work with (external) partners for these sessions, for example, a public speaking professional or a youth advocate. Be open to such options. The closer you remain to the living realities of your cohort, the more effective these sessions will be.

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The pitch: shaping and delivering a big idea

Throughout the YPA, young people will gain the knowledge and skills to approach Members and staff of parliament about issues that concern them. At the end of the programme, they will get the opportunity to put this into practice.

Invite your participants to deliver a 90-second pitch to Members of Parliament and staff of the administration.

Ideally, the pitch itself answers a specific question.

For example: *‘How can this parliament improve youth participation in politics?’*

Or: *‘How can this parliament make it easier for young people to run for election?’*

Ideally, this question builds on the focus of your YPA sessions.

Regarding the pitch, consider the following elements:

- Ideally, the development and delivery of the pitch takes place across the entire final day. This takes time!
- Each pitch lasts no more than 90 seconds. A pitch can be developed in groups of two to three people and should be delivered by all members of the group.
- Pitch development takes place across three stages: identifying the issue, developing your solution and developing your pitch. It helps to set rough timings for each stage but allows your participants the flexibility they need. To help you get started, take a look at the pitch materials in [Annex 2](#).
- Organise a formal jury and provide them with clear scoring criteria. Decide on one award (‘best pitch’) or several (‘most original idea’, ‘best delivery’, and so on).
- Consider ahead of time what you will do with your participants’ pitches. Will they be broadcast, published, placed on the parliamentary record? Inform participants of your plans and follow up with them, also after the YPA.





2.5 Follow-up beyond the YPA

This toolkit has emphasised the importance of a whole-of-parliament approach: to develop and deliver a YPA that responds to the parliament's strategic priorities and that enjoys the support of your Members of Parliament and staff.

Ensuring effective follow-up of your YPA is a key part of this. As you develop your programme, and reflect on its implementation, consider the following options:

The substance

- Carefully consider the input young people provided throughout. What ideas, feedback and findings should you take forward? What might fit into short-term, mid-term and even long-term planning?
- How could you disseminate the YPA's findings most effectively within and beyond your institution? What individuals and/or services would most benefit from this input?
- What opportunities exist for continued collaboration with new or existing youth participation champions?

The institutional engagement

- How could you link the YPA to existing activities? For example, a youth working group or an internship programme.
- What areas of parliamentary work could invite young people's input? How could you make this possible beyond the YPA?
- How will you stay in touch with your youth cohort?

Please think carefully about any post-YPA engagements you communicate to your participants. Too often, youth participation activities often raise expectations they cannot meet. This can be very disappointing for participants, especially when such opportunities are already in short supply.



[Download the Annexes](#)

