



YOUTH-LED RESEARCH

WHAT IS YOUTH-LED RESEARCH?

Youth-led research (YLR) is a powerful tool for youth empowerment and engagement, and for inquiry contributing to improved understanding of community issues. Search for Common Ground uses YLR as a programmatic approach that can engage young people¹ in peacebuilding, strengthen their leadership skills, and help them build stronger relationships with members of their community. The findings generated by YLR provide valuable insight to research topics, and the act of conducting research itself can have a positive impact on youth and their relationships in their community.

Search's approach to YLR is based on the [Listening & Learning](#) research and interview methodology². Created by Search, the methodology is specifically designed for research led by youth and relies on natural conversations as an exchange of information between both parties. A topic for YLR does not need to have a direct focus on youth; what makes a research project youth-led is that young people play a leadership role in all stages of design, data collection, data analysis, and results sharing.

1 Typically YLR engages young people ages 15 - 29 years old. There are additional restrictions and protection policies when working with youth under the age of 18. Search requires permission from a parent or guardian when involving anyone under 18 years of age.

2 "Listening and Learning Toolkit" (<https://www.sfcg.org/tag/children-youth-toolkits/>).

WHY YOUTH-LED RESEARCH?

YLR offers potential benefits to youth researchers, communities, and projects. YLR can:

- ◆ **Build a Foundation for Youth Leadership and Advocacy:** YLR projects can serve as a "foot in the door" to engage young people in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, redefining common narratives of youth as victims or perpetrators. YLR projects empower youth researchers with new skills and they carve out space for their leadership in communities as solution seekers.
- ◆ **Increase Access to Community and Marginalized Populations:** Having young people conduct the research can, in some cases, help children and vulnerable participants feel safer and more comfortable to speak freely.
- ◆ **Improve Community Relationships:** By bringing together youth who reflect a community's diversity, YLR provides an opportunity for young people to learn about each other and understand their commonalities. YLR can also shift how adults in the community perceive youth, from potential threats to credible partners.
- ◆ **Be Flexible in Its Application:** YLR can be designed to achieve a variety of different outcomes - from challenging assumptions and misconceptions in the community, to increasing interaction between divided groups, to generating recommendations for solutions to community problems.

WHEN IS YOUTH-LED RESEARCH THE RIGHT APPROACH?

Youth-led research offers value in several ways. If the goal is to increase youth engagement, build better relationships, and activate locally-owned community peacebuilding, then a well-designed YLR project can serve those functions in a way that traditional research could not. If you answer YES to the following questions, your project might be a good match for YLR!

- ◆ Are you interested in creating a foundation for young people to act on issues in their community based on understanding and relationships developed through inquiry and information sharing?
- ◆ Do you want to shift or improve the perception of youth participation and leadership in a community?
- ◆ Do you want to access youth and marginalized groups that need peers to make them feel comfortable?
- ◆ Do you have resources to commit to train, support, and coach youth in ethical research?

YLR is adaptable to multiple needs, but is **not appropriate** for advanced research needs such as baselines, in-depth conflict assessments, or evaluations.

WHAT ARE KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR PLANNING YOUTH-LED RESEARCH?

YLR is an empowering and valuable participatory approach, but it also requires a special set of considerations. Participation must be balanced against protection for young people, in accordance with their age and competencies³. Key considerations are that YLR must be:

- ◆ **Professionally Supported and Technically Advised:** Since the youth recruited for YLR are meant to be from diverse backgrounds, many have little to no research experience. High-quality YLR requires professional supervision and guidance throughout the process. This support does not infringe upon young people's leadership, but should instead support the quality of research efforts.
- ◆ **Conflict Sensitive and Do No Harm:** When engaging youth researchers in conflict affected areas or to address traumatic topics, special care must be taken to support youth researchers as they may experience exposure to trauma. YLR projects in complex contexts should establish clear protocols for responding to revelations of violent crimes or safety concerns, and consider appointing a steering committee including professional researchers, child protection experts, and trauma specialists⁴.

3 For additional guidance on engaging youth, Search's Children and Youth Team recommend Search's "Guiding Principles on Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding" (<https://www.sfcg.org/tag/children-youth-toolkits/>).

4 Additional guidance on conflict sensitivity and the "do no harm" approach in research is available on DME for Peace (www.dmeforpeace.org) and its Peace Exchange community (www.dmeforpeace.org/peaceexchange).

WHAT IS SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND'S EXPERIENCE WITH YOUTH-LED RESEARCH?

Search has implemented projects across our global teams that put the power of research, design, and advocacy in the hands of young people. Our lessons learned and insights on YLR come from our implementation of YLR projects in Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Burundi, and Tanzania.

LEARN MORE ABOUT YOUTH-LED RESEARCH!

For more information and guidance on applying Youth-Led Research and the Listening & Learning Methodology, visit <https://www.sfcg.org/tag/children-youth-toolkits> where you will find the *Guidance Note Supporting the Design and Implementation of Youth-Led Research Projects* and the *Listening & Learning Toolkit*.



For more information on Search for Common Ground's Youth-led Research, please visit <https://www.sfcg.org/children-and-youth/>

