Involving Young People: A toolkit for peer research

December 2025

Partnership for Young London

Trust for London
Tackling poverty and inequality

Centre for Youth Voice

Acknowledgements

We want to thank the over 200 peer researchers who have worked with over the past decade for their work and their dedication, and the organisations that support them to make an impact.

Partnership for Young London

Partnership for Young London believes in a future where every young person's right to wellbeing is recognised and fulfilled.

With young people making up a quarter of London's population, we have to respect that they are crucial to its future.

Trust for London

Tackling poverty and inequality

Supported by Trust for London, who funded the Involving Young Londoners programme between 2020 and 2025.

This toolkit builds on the work that took place as part of that project.

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Introduction

My entry into peer research happened almost by accident. Ten years ago, I was in Elephant and Castle researching the barriers young parents under 25 faced when entering the workplace. Kevin, a young father passionate about the work, offered to help facilitate the focus groups. As I watched, the session completely transformed. Kevin began asking follow-up questions about local nurseries and soft-play areas, specific details I simply wouldn't have known to ask. The energy in the room shifted from a formal research setting to a genuine conversation between parents. The quality of the responses improved immediately, and I realized: he should be the one doing this, not me.

Youth participation isn't new, but over the seven years, I have watched a quiet but fundamental shift take place in how we involve young people in the decisions that impact on their lives. For a long time, the sector focused on doing research on young people: treating them as subjects to be studied or beneficiaries to be consulted. We set the questions, we interpreted the data, and we decided what happened next. But peer research challenges us to move beyond that. It asks us to view young people not as problems to be solved, but as co-researchers with the insight and authority to lead.

We are now entering an exciting new phase of practice. I have seen peer research in London expand from the youth sector into arts and culture, local authorities, and housing associations. The consensus is growing: any organisation with a responsibility to young people must find ways to meaningfully involve them in decision-making.

n my experience, the value of this approach is threefold. First, it generates richer, more authentic data; peer researchers use shared culture to reduce power imbalances and build trust. Second, it increases relevance; when young people define the questions, we stop making assumptions and start addressing their actual priorities. Third, it improves the quality of policy and practice by grounding it in lived experience. Perhaps most importantly, the work is transformative for the young people themselves: building skills, agency, and the confidence to command the attention of decision-makers.

However, let's be honest: doing this work well is hard. It is rarely a straight line from A to B. It requires us to sit with the discomfort of not knowing exactly where the research will go. This toolkit is not a "gold standard" and we have so much more still to learn, but it is an attempt to share the practical learning we have gathered so far.

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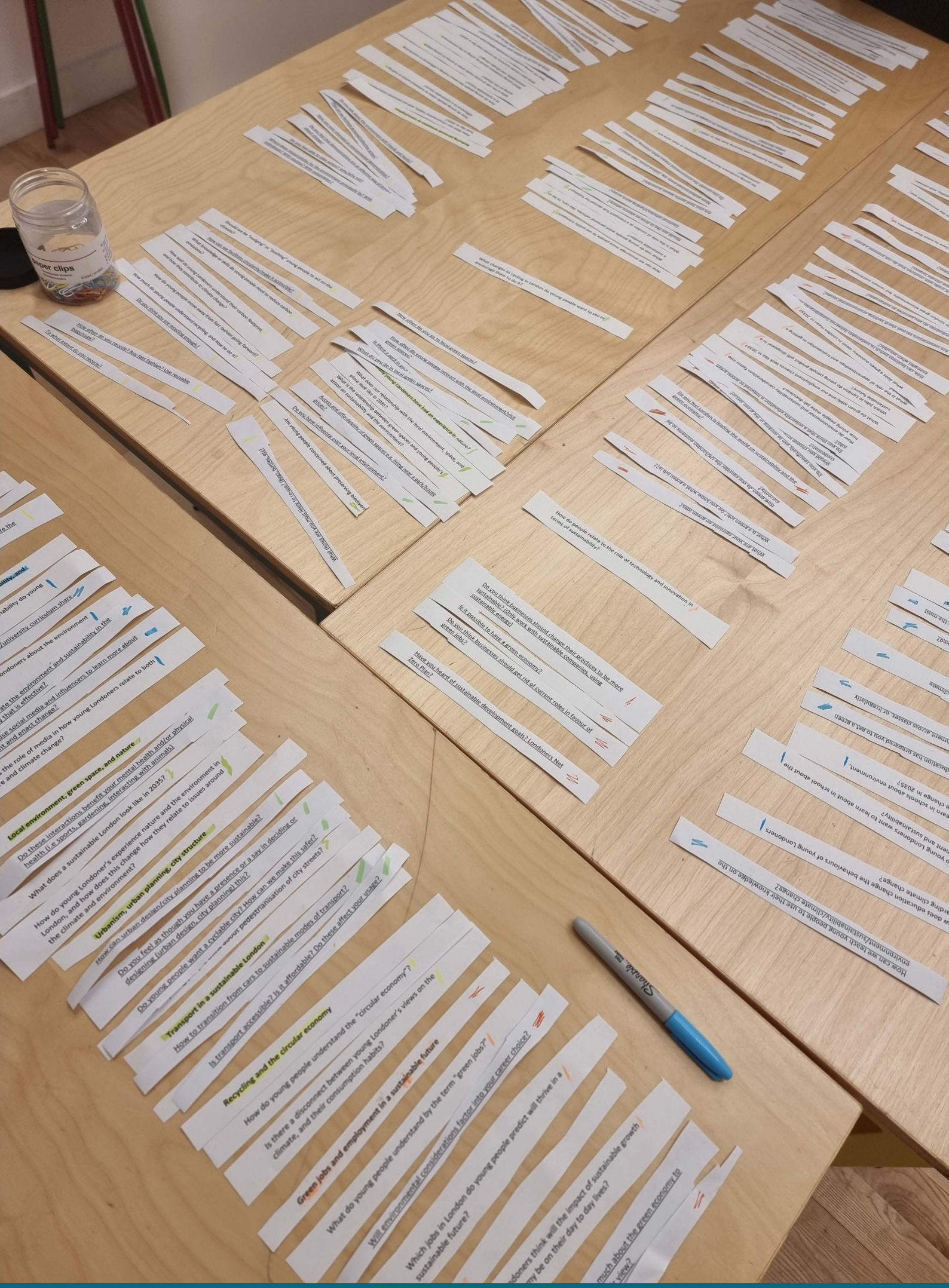

Local environment, green space, and nature
Urbanism, urban planning, city structure
Transport in a sustainable London
Recycling and the circular economy
Green jobs and employment in a sustainable future

About this toolkit

This toolkit is a follow up the previous publications from Partnership for Young London, funded by Trust for London, that explore involving young people in research.

1. Involving young Londoners (2020): A review of participatory approaches in the youth sector: This desk-based review looked at a range of organisations and how they navigated their own participatory approaches with young people; from funding, to recruitment, and the impact they have seen.
2. Involving Young Londoners: A toolkit for peer research (2021): A pre-cursor to this toolkit, where we gathered the learning of three years of delivering peer research across London.

Limitations

We intend for this toolkit to provide information and guidance, allowing practitioners to reflect on what they might want to consider for their own projects. It is not a definitive guide on a “gold standard” of peer research, but an attempt to put what we have done and learned from the projects we have done. The toolkit also recognises that there is a wide range of organisations, from different sectors, who will have different funding, staffing, and organisational structures

How to Use This Toolkit

This toolkit is designed as a comprehensive manual for anyone who works with young people and wants to involve them meaningfully in the process of research and decision-making. Whether you are a youth worker, a commissioner, a policy officer, or an academic researcher, this document provides the frameworks and practical tools to move from "consultation" to genuine "co-production."

While the primary focus is on peer research, where young people are recruited and trained to conduct research with their peers, the principles of power-sharing, lived experience, and participatory action found here can be applied to a wide range of youth engagement work.

Who this toolkit is for

Peer research is a collaborative effort that requires different skills at different levels. We have designed this toolkit to support specific roles:

For Commissioners and Funders:

- Use Part 3 (Getting Ready) and Part 4 (Programme Design) to understand the resources, timelines, and ethical considerations required to fund high-quality peer research.
- Use Stage 6 (Creating Impact) to understand how to embed youth voice into long-term governance and commissioning structures.

For Practitioners and Youth Workers:

- This toolkit serves as your delivery manual. Stages 1 through 4 provide step-by-step agendas, session plans, and checklists for recruiting, training, and supporting young people day-to-day.
- Use the "Training" sections (e.g., Stage 2) to structure your workshops with young people.

For Researchers and Evaluators:

- Use Part 2 (Foundations) to situate this work within the wider history of Participatory Action Research (PAR).
- Use Stage 3 (Fieldwork) and Stage 4 (Analysis) to explore how methodological rigour can be maintained while handing power over to young people.

How to navigate the toolkit

I would first like to apologise for the length of this toolkit. Secondly, I would encourage you to dip in and out of the different sections that are most relevant to your current challenges.

This toolkit is structured to follow the lifecycle of a peer research project, from the initial spark of an idea to the final legacy of the work. It is divided into two main sections: Foundations and The Delivery Cycle.

Part A: Foundations and Planning (Chapters 2–4): These chapters are for the project leads and organisations to read before young people are recruited.

1. **Chapter 2: Foundations:** Defines what peer research is, explores the concept of "lived experience," and sets the ethical baseline for the work.
2. **Chapter 3: Getting Ready:** Covers the practical infrastructure: budgeting, staffing roles, remuneration models, and organisational readiness.
3. **Chapter 4: Programme Design:** Helps you define the scope of the project. It introduces the Scope Triangle (Ambition vs Feasibility vs Influence) to ensure you have a realistic "starting offer" for the young people.

Part B: The Delivery Stages (Chapters 5–9): These chapters guide you through the active delivery of the project with young people.

1. **Stage 1: Recruitment:** How to define "peers," inclusive recruitment methods, and practical setup.
2. **Stage 2: Training & Design:** A curriculum for training peer researchers, creating team cohesion, and co-designing research tools (surveys, interview guides).
3. **Stage 3: Fieldwork:** Managing the risks and logistics of data collection, including trauma-informed practice and safeguarding in the field.
4. **Stage 4: Analysis & Outputs:** How to involve young people in making sense of data (qualitative, quantitative, and creative) and producing outputs.
5. **Stage 6: Impact & Legacy:** Moving beyond the report to create policy change, and ensuring a legacy for the peer researchers involved.

1. Foundations: What is Peer Research?

1. Foundations: What is Peer Research?

This chapter sets out the foundations that everything else in the toolkit rests on.

It explains what we mean by “peer research” in a youth context, how it relates to wider traditions of participatory and action research, and why organisations across sectors are turning to young people as co-researchers rather than just respondents.

It introduces key ideas such as lived experience, power-sharing, rights-based participation and action, and traces how these have developed in policy, practice and research over time.

The aim is not to turn this into a theory textbook, but to give a shared language and set of principles that youth practitioners, commissioners, researchers and young people can work from.

By the end of the chapter, readers should have a clear sense of how peer research differs from traditional consultation or engagement, what benefits it can bring for young people and systems, and what commitments it implies for organisations who want to do it well.

1.1 Introduction to Peer Research with Young People

Peer research is part of a wider shift from doing research on young people to doing research with young people. Rather than seeing young people only as respondents or "beneficiaries", peer research treats them as co-researchers: people with the insight and authority to ask questions, gather evidence, interpret findings, and push for change.

From consultation to shared inquiry

Many organisations already involve young people in some way – for example through surveys, youth councils, or consultation events. These approaches can be valuable, but they often position adults as:

- Deciding the questions
- Owning the data
- interpreting the findings
- choosing what, if anything, changes

Peer research goes further. It starts from the assumption that young people most affected by an issue should be centrally involved in investigating it and deciding what happens next. That means moving beyond one-off consultation towards a shared process of inquiry and action, where young people:

- help define the issue or question
- contribute to the design of methods
- carry out fieldwork
- analyse the data
- develop recommendations
- take part in influencing and implementation

Adults still bring important skills, resources and responsibilities. For example safeguarding, research expertise, organisational power, but they are no longer the only or primary "owners" of the research.

Core ingredients of peer research

Across very different projects – from housing to health, education to youth justice – successful peer research with young people tends to share a common set of ingredients:

Lived experience at the centre	Young people are recruited because they have direct experience of the issue or system being explored, not just because they are "keen" or "good at talking".
Meaningful decision-making	Peer researchers make real choices about the focus, design and direction of the work, within the constraints of funding, ethics and safeguarding. Adult staff are transparent about what is flexible and what is not.
Capacity-building and support	Young people are not expected to arrive as "ready-made researchers". Time and resources are set aside for training, mentoring, reflection and support, so that they can grow into the role.
Fair recognition and remuneration	Peer researchers are paid for their time and expertise, and acknowledged as co-authors or co-creators of outputs. The project does not rely on unpaid labour from communities who are already under-resourced.
Commitment to action	From the outset, there is a clear conversation about how findings will be used and what change is possible. Key stakeholders are involved throughout, not only at the end.
Ongoing ethics and safeguarding	Projects take seriously the emotional, practical and ethical risks of asking young people to research issues that may be close to home, and build in support, boundaries and reflection.

What peer research looks like in practice

Involving young people in research can take many different forms in practice. The problem, or issue, can vary greatly which, in turn, can determine the approach taken and the lived-experience of the recruited peer researchers, and the impact that they can make.

Problem	Peer research project	Impact
Young people in temporary accommodation feel unsafe and unsupported.	A group of care-experienced young people design and run interviews with peers living in temporary accommodation across the borough, mapping daily challenges and identifying what "feeling safe" means in practice.	Housing officers introduce a new move-in checklist, improve security standards, and create a youth-led induction pack for all new residents.
Young renters feel exploited by landlords and don't know their rights.	Peer researchers aged 18–25 create a mixed-methods study on affordability, repairs, and communication with landlords, collecting evidence from their networks and local housing forums.	The local authority launches a youth renters' rights campaign and introduces a dedicated officer to support young tenants.
Black and Brown young people experience long waits, inconsistent treatment, and a lack of cultural sensitivity.	Peer researchers from racialised communities create a mixed-methods project combining street outreach, online surveys, and storytelling workshops. They explore experiences of help-seeking, distrust in services, and what culturally competent care looks like from young people's perspectives.	Local services redesign their referral pathways to reduce drop-off rates, introduce mandatory anti-racist practice training, and establish a youth advisory group that scrutinises service changes.
Young parents feel judged and struggle to access childcare, employment, and mental health support. Many feel services are fragmented and not designed with them.	A group of young parents design a research project combining mobile-friendly surveys, interviews in children's centres, and "day in the life" video diaries. They explore barriers to accessing early years provision, stigma from professionals, and what practical support would make the biggest difference.	The local authority creates a coordinated "Young Parent Hub" with simplified referral routes and a named support worker. Job centres pilot flexible appointment models for young parents, and childcare providers revisit eligibility processes to improve access to subsidised places.
Young people feel unsafe in local parks, bus routes, and estates, reporting over-policing, poor lighting, and lack of safe spaces.	Peer researchers map safe and unsafe spaces using digital mapping tools, conduct walk-along interviews, and gather stories of encounters with police and other adults. They work with community organisations to identify systemic issues such as environmental design and youth provision gaps.	The council improves lighting, redesigns park routes, and funds new youth provision in identified hotspots. Police neighbourhood teams shift toward a youth engagement model, informed by regular meetings with the peer researchers.

Research benefits of a peer research approach

Peer research with young people is more than a methodological choice – it is a way of producing better evidence, strengthening rights, and driving meaningful change.

When young people lead or co-lead inquiry into the issues that shape their lives, the research becomes richer, more grounded, and more relevant to real-world contexts. It also creates structured opportunities for young people to exercise agency, build confidence, and take an active role in shaping decisions. Crucially, peer-led work tends to generate clearer, more actionable findings, with young people often becoming powerful advocates for the changes the research calls for. There are three clear reasons to involve young people in peer research:

1. Richer, More Authentic Data

- Young people are more likely to open up to peers than to adults or professionals.
- This reduces power imbalances and social desirability bias.
- Peer researchers can use youth-friendly language, cultural references, and shared lived experience to ask better questions.
- The result is deeper insights, more nuanced accounts, and data that reflects the real experiences of young people.

2. Better Access to Participants and Seldom Heard Groups

- Peer researchers can reach groups that traditional research often struggles with: care-experienced young people, marginalised groups, or those mistrustful of professionals.
- They can use their networks, lived experience, and cultural/linguistic competence to engage people who would otherwise decline involvement.
- This improves both sample diversity and the overall validity of the research.

3. Increased Relevance, Accuracy, and Impact of Findings

- Peer researchers help design questions that actually matter to young people.
- Their involvement ensures methods, tools, and interpretations are grounded in lived reality rather than adult assumptions.
- This leads to findings that:
    - » better reflect young people's priorities
    - » are more credible to youth-facing practitioners and policymakers
    - » are more likely to be acted on by services because they carry authentic youth insight
- In short: peer research improves the quality, usefulness, and impact of the research.

Benefits to young people of a peer research approach

Involving young people as peer researchers brings a wide range of developmental, relational and empowerment benefits. Rather than taking part as subjects, young people become active contributors who shape the research process, make decisions and generate insights based on their own experience. This approach supports learning, confidence and progression, while also creating a sense of belonging and influence. The benefits can be understood across three key areas:

1. Skills, Learning & Progression

- Young people develop practical research skills (interviewing, designing questions, analysing data, using digital tools).
- They build transferable skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving.
- Gaining these skills increases confidence and supports progression into education, training, employment or leadership roles.
- Young people evidence achievements in CVs, UCAS statements and applications.

2. Agency, Identity & Empowerment

- Being researchers, not subjects, gives young people real influence over questions, decisions and findings.
- They gain a stronger sense of identity, recognising their lived experience as valuable expertise.
- Participation increases confidence, self-efficacy and belief in their ability to shape change.
- It builds critical awareness of systems and encourages active citizenship and advocacy.

3. Connection, Belonging & Wellbeing

- Peer research creates a supportive group environment and helps young people form meaningful connections.
- Working with others who share similar experiences reduces isolation and builds belonging.
- The reflective, youth-led nature of the work can improve emotional wellbeing and help young people feel heard and valued.
- Supportive relationships with peers and trusted adults strengthen resilience and overall wellbeing.

Benefits for Organisations

Peer research does not just improve the data produced: it also strengthens the organisation itself. Bringing young people into meaningful research roles can shift organisational culture, increase buy-in from stakeholders, and improve the way services are designed and delivered. These wider organisational benefits can be understood across three key areas:

1. Stronger Youth Partnerships, Trust & Engagement

- Peer research demonstrates that the organisation values youth voice and lived experience.
- It strengthens relationships with young people, improving ongoing engagement and participation.
- Organisations gain credibility and trust among communities who may previously have felt unheard or excluded.
- This leads to more effective programme delivery and higher levels of youth involvement across other areas of work.

2. Organisational Learning, Culture Change & Staff Development

- Staff learn new approaches to participation, co-production and ethical youth engagement.
- Working alongside peer researchers strengthens reflective practice and challenges assumptions.
- Organisations become more responsive and youth-centred, with improved internal understanding of young people's needs.
- Peer research can catalyse a wider culture shift towards shared power and collaborative decision-making.

3. Greater Legitimacy, Influence & External Impact

- Organisations can demonstrate evidence of genuine co-production to funders, inspectors and partners.
- Youth-led research increases the organisation's legitimacy and credibility in advocacy and policy work.
- Findings produced through peer research often gain stronger traction with external decision-makers.
- This enhances reputation, supports funding bids, and positions the organisation as a leader in youth-led practice.

1.2 Defining Peer Research & PAR

Peer research as we use it here is part of the "big tent" of the wider field of Participatory Action Research (PAR). Peer research is the term that this toolkit will be using, being the term best understood and most used by London's youth sector. However, we recognise the broad spectrum of terms used, often interchangeably, such as community-led research, user involvement, and experts by experience.

Participatory Action Research is defined by Flora et al's excellent primer as:

> *"PAR involves the participation and leadership of those people experiencing issues, who take action to produce emancipatory social change, through conducting systematic research to generate new knowledge."*

We are focused on peer research as a form of PAR, one that prioritises the involvement of the people with the lived experience of the issue being explored to design and conduct the research. The approach that we take to peer research follows on from the four key principles of PAR.

- **The authority of direct experience:** The lived experience of peer researchers, through first hand direct experience of the issues or systems being explored is paramount. They are best placed, and the most knowledgeable, to direct research into that which directly impacts on them.
- **Knowledge in action:** The action aspect of PAR, which focuses not only on research for research's sake, but enabling and empowering the peer researchers to create impact and change because of the new knowledge generated.
- **Transformative process:** For the peer researchers and organisations undertaking this work, the process of co-design, co-delivery, and co-analysis can be as important as the outcomes, creating empowering relationships within the research process.
- **Collaboration through dialogue:** Peer research, often marginalised from decision-making, are empowered to re-address the typical power imbalance through critical dialogues and recognition of their expertise.

The building blocks of PAR

There are six building blocks for PAR identified:

1. **Building relationships:** The building of relationships is key to this work, with successful projects seeing collaboration sustained beyond the project. Projects are often a collaboration between the supporting organisation, the community from which the peer researchers are drawn from, and the wider stakeholders that have the ability to create action. They are often funded by, and nested in, the context of existing long-term collaborations, such as a Local Authority's remit to engage with the views of local residents, or the National Health Service's (NHS) continually desire to improve services and access to services by service users. PAR projects are primarily interested in building up the relationships between these key stakeholders, with the research being a secondar concern.
2. **Establishing working practices:** Collaboration over a broad range of stakeholders can bring competing priorities, and tensions. Placing the community, and those affected by the issues, can disrupt historically entrenched power dynamics that can be challenging. Establishing clear joint working practices, with meaningful partnership working is key to a successful project.
3. **Establishing a common understanding of the issue:** It is important that the issue being identified, or the problem to be addressed, is one that is recognised as a priority by the community. While precise research questions are often refined through multiple iterations during the process, all stakeholders must have a shared understanding of the issues that is recognised by the community.

4. **Observing, gathering and generating materials:** It is up to the peer researchers to decide the methods to which they will use to gather or generate data. Skilled facilitation is needed to create a balance between developing peer researchers' research skills, and having an open and non-prescriptive dialogue about the direction of the research.

5. **Collaborative analysis:** Peer researchers should be supported to meaningfully analyse the data that they collected, as their lived experience provides additional insight unavailable to practitioners. It is vital that the key findings and recommendations reflect the interests of the community as it is taken forward.

6. **Planning and taking action:** Change and action needs to be identified from the start, with stakeholders engaged throughout for effective buy-in. There can be a wide range of actions, aimed at different audiences, but each contributing to creating change.

How this toolkit uses the term "peer research"

There are many overlapping terms in this field: participatory action research, community-led research, co-produced research, youth-led inquiry, user involvement, "experts by experience". This toolkit uses peer research to refer to:

"research in which young people who share lived experience of the issue being explored are recruited, trained and supported to co-design, conduct and analyse the research, and to drive or contribute to action based on the findings.

However, we firmly root this in the history of PAR, focusing on the action and impact that peer researchers create because of the research. To this extent, peer research can be misleading as a term, as the value of the work is not the research but what comes of it.

1.3 Forms of Participatory Approaches

While we look at peer research as a form of participatory action research, there are a wide range of ways that we see this implemented with young people in recent years. Each approach is grounded in a PAR approach, differing in the outcome that it wants to achieve or the scope of the work.

This toolkit is focused on peer research, though there is a large overlap often between it and peer evaluation. However, participatory budgeting and grant making projects may find aspects of this toolkit useful but would require separate training and structures.

	Peer research	Peer evaluation	Participatory budgeting	Participatory grant making
Recruitment	Peer research recruits those with the lived experience of the issue being explored.	Peer evaluation recruits those with the lived experience of the specific services or programmes to be explored.	Participatory budgeting recruits those who will be impacted by the funding decisions.	Participatory grant making recruits those with the lived experience of issues that will be benefited by the grants.
Rationale	Those with the lived experience of the issues are best placed to make decisions about research design, delivery, and analysis.	Those with the lived experience of the services or programmes are best placed to evaluate them.	Those who are impacted by funding decisions are best placed to make decisions about how it is spent.	Those who have the lived experience of an issue are best placed to decide what interventions are funded.
Outcome	The peer researchers gain new understanding or information on the issue and use this to create change or impact.	The peer researchers understand what works and isn't working about a service or a programme, and support in the redesign/reiteration of it.	Funding decisions are made democratically, with the views of local people/residents who will be beneficiaries involved.	Grants are given out democratically, with the community involved in those funding decisions, resulting in more relevant and effective interventions being funded.

1.4 Defining "Peers" and Lived Experience

Peer research places importance on the idea of placing those with the lived experience of the issue being explored in the driving seat of the research. This is often an acknowledgement of the idea that young people are best placed to make decisions about their own lives. While this seems like common sense, the complexity of what we define as a peer and relevant lived experience can create challenges for the recruitment process. Lived experience is defined as:

> *"Personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events rather than through representations constructed by other people. It may also refer to knowledge of people gained from direct face-to-face interaction rather than through a technological medium."*

Peer research projects place a strong value on the lived experience of young people, with many projects referring to them as "experts by experience". There are several reasons why involving young people with the lived experience of the issue being studied is important:

1. **Reduced democratic deficit in research and policymaking:** Young people are often consulted on for their opinion but are now meaningfully empowered to have a final say in decision-making. Young people should not just have the lived experience of an issue but would ideally be those would be impacted by the decisions made as a result. For example, users of a specific service see the service they use change for the better because of their involvement.
2. **Better quality research:** Peer researcher's first-hand experience brings invaluable insight into the research process, improving the relevance, accessibility, and specificity of the approach and the design of the chosen approaches. Their involvement in the analysis and creation of recommendations benefit from their insight.
3. **Stronger advocacy and social action:** Policy and decision makers can be data driven, however having advocates with the lived experience of an issue is often an effective way to influence. Peer researchers, who have ownership over the data they collect, are best placed to disseminate findings and drive social action and change.

The complexity of lived experience

Young people, especially young Londoners, are the most diverse in history and not a homogenous whole. Their lived experience of being a young person in London can vary hugely based on which part of London they live, what socio-economic background they are from, their ethnicity and cultural background, their gender identity, their sexuality, or their first-hand experience of key issues like mental health or the housing crisis.

Recruitment of peer researchers should be as tailored to the lived experience of the issue being explored as possible, with age being just one characteristic. There can be a challenging balance to navigate between a specificity of experience, and a range of experiences for representativeness.

- **Specific:** Rather than focusing on young people living in the borough, the project focuses on young women only, aged 18-20, living in the south of the borough. The findings will be more original, but there has to be a clear rationale for each element of specificity added. For example, you find employment outcomes for specific young women are worse in a particular area of the borough.
- **Representative range of experience:** The project aims for a range of representative experiences. This does not necessarily mean broadening the focus past young women aged 18-20 living in the south of the borough but ensuring that there is a representative spread of ages and wards represented. If the topic is employment, it means ensuring that there is a representation of those working full time, part time, or unemployed.

The more layers of shared experience the peer researchers have, the more detailed and specific research can be, and the more expertise they can bring to the project. For example:

1. Under 25s with experience of homelessness.
2. Under 25s, who live in Lambeth, with experience of homelessness.
3. Young people aged 16-17 who live in Lambeth, with experience of homelessness.
4. Young people aged 16-17 who live in Lambeth, from the Bangladeshi community, with experience of homelessness.

This can be challenging especially where organisations don't have access or connections into a community that will enable this level of specificity of recuritment. Most commonly, organisations will recruit peer researchers from the young people that they are engaged with or deliver service for.

Project scope	Recruitment criteria
Young Renters Toynbee Hall: Exploring the challenges for young people privately renting in Tower Hamlets	Young people aged 18-25, with a range of experiences privately renting, in Tower Hamlets.
Latin American Young Women's Service: Exploring the impact of sexual harassment in London's University spaces for Latin American young women.	Young women aged 18-25 who identify as Latina, both first and second generation, who are currently at or recently left a London University.
House Project Evaluations: Evaluating the impact of Local House Projects across Scotland and England on the young people it serves.	Young people who are currently in House Projects from across England and Scotland.
Black Thrive and NLPC: Exploring the attitudes and perceptions of the Black community in East Haringey of mental health services.	Residents of East Haringey aged 18+, who identity as Black, who both have and have not got experience of mental health services.
Partnership for Young London and Housing Associations: Youth leadership in Housing Associations	Young people aged 18-25 who are currently residents in the following Housing Associations: Hyde Housing, Clarion Housing, MTVH.

1.5 History of peer research with young people

Peer research with young people is not a new invention. It sits in a long line of work where communities investigate their own lives to drive change. This approach is part of the "big tent" known as Participatory Action Research (PAR).

The Three Roots of This Approach

- **Action Research (The Method):** Traced back to psychologist Kurt Lewin in the 1940s, thiestablished the cycle of planning, action, and reflection. It rejected the idea that research should just "sit on a shelf", instead, it must solve practical problems through democratic participation.
- **Critical Pedagogy (The Power Shift):** In the 1970s, educators like Paulo Freire and sociologists like Orlando Fals Borda argued that oppressed communities should investigate their own reality to take collective action. This moved research from being done on people (as subjects) to being done with them (as partners).
- **Children's Rights (The Legal Basis):** The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) established that children have a right to express views on matters that affect them (Article 12). This shifted youth voice from a "nice to have" to a right.

Models of participation

- **Hart's Ladder of Participation (1992):** A foundational tool to distinguish tokenism (where youth are decoration) from meaningful participation (where youth share decisions or lead projects).
- **Lundy's Model (2007):** Endorsed by governments and policy bodies, this model argues that "voice" is useless without an audience. Meaningful participation requires four elements: Space (safe/inclusive), Voice (support to express views), Audience (someone with power listening), and Influence (acting on what is heard).

What this history means for this toolkit

For the purposes of this toolkit, this history gives us three anchors:

1. **We stand in the PAR tradition:** Research should be done with young people and communities to support action, not just knowledge production.
2. **We are grounded in children's rights and participation frameworks:** Projects should be designed to maximise space, voice, audience and influence for young people, and to climb beyond tokenistic rungs of participation.
3. **We treat peer research as both method and movement:** Peer/YPAR projects are not only about collecting data; they are also about building young people's capabilities and reshaping the institutions that affect their lives.

The rest of the toolkit translates these principles and the evidence base above into practical guidance for designing, delivering and sustaining peer research with young people in real-world services and systems.

2. Getting Ready: Organisation, Staff & Funding

2. Getting Ready: Organisation, Staff & Funding

This chapter establishes the operational foundations required to launch a successful peer research project.

It details the practical infrastructure needed before young people are recruited, covering programme timelines, essential staff skills, and the specific organisational capacities required to support a youth-led approach.

It introduces key logistical frameworks, including linear versus non-linear research structures, and establishes the ethical necessity of fair remuneration and adequate funding for impact.

The aim is to provide a realistic roadmap for resource planning, ensuring that the "process" of support is funded as robustly as the research "outputs."

By the end of the chapter, readers should have a clear understanding of the financial, temporal, and human resources needed to support peer researchers effectively and avoid common delivery pitfalls.

2.1 Programme Structures & Timelines

Peer research projects may often be structured similarly, with a typical order of recruitment, design, fieldwork, analysis, and impact. Projects can vary in the emphasis and time they proportion to each stage, depending on budgets and programme time. Many projects may also be less linear in how they are structured, reiterating in cycles, and repeating across several rounds and cohorts of peer researchers.

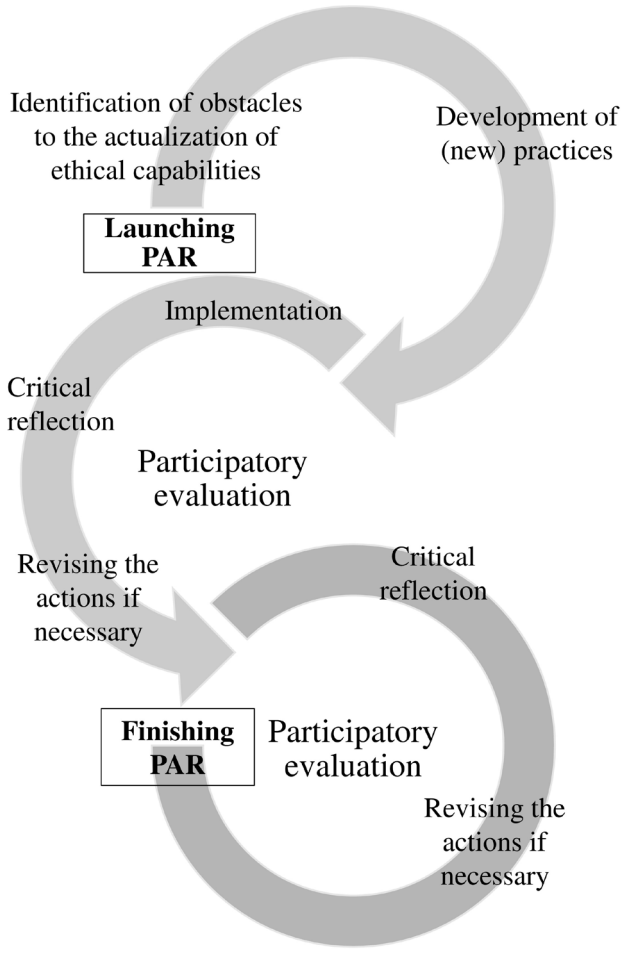
The full PAR action cycle

The traditional action cycle of a participatory action research programme is about seeing the work as a continuous cycle of action through continued study. This allows those involved to grow and develop their knowledge and understanding of the issues and reflect and reiterate to improve recommendations and action.

Importantly, PAR cycles do not progress in a linear fashion, with a range of approaches. They are less a single research project with a starting point and an end point, but a process of continual engagement and reiteration for improvement. For example, a school may implement a PAR cycle to gather parents feedback, starting a new cycle at each school year and reiterating and improving on each successive year's progress and reflection.

In practice, we see very few examples of individual peer research projects with multiple cycles. Typically, peer research is funded for a single cycle of research, with the resulting outputs being recommendations and action with peer researchers not being retained. In many cases, where the action and implementation can be over a long time period, the responsibility will be left with the practitioners or organisation rather than young people.

There are examples where peer research projects might be funded for multiple years in a row typically, but not always, reflecting and building on the previous year. Many funders will fund a first period to conduct an exploratory piece of research, with a view of a second round of funding to develop the ideas further. In that case he action cycle can be easily implemented, especially if the cohort of peer researchers continue to the second cycle.



PAR Research Cycle from SAGE Research Methods

Basic linear design structure

Most peer research projects follow a similar basic structure, often followed in a linear way. This basic structure can serve as a starting point for designing a peer research programme. Between each stage there should be periods of reflection, and engagement with wider stakeholders.

1. **Programme design:** Designing the scope, limitations, and opportunities of the project in relation to the funding, capacity, and time available. Reiterating project design with key stakeholders, creating buy-in from key decision makers, and improving access and reach.
2. **Recruitment:** Recruit peer researchers with relevant lived experience and diverse perspectives. Ensure an inclusive, accessible process where young people understand expectations, support available and the value of their role. Begin building trust and a supportive group culture.
3. **Research design:** Provide core skills in research ethics, safeguarding, interviewing, and method design. Work with young people to co-create the research question and choose appropriate methods. Develop tools (topic guides, consent forms) that reflect lived experience and are feasible and ethical.
4. **Fieldwork:** Support peer researchers to collect data safely and confidently using the chosen methods. Manage logistics, wellbeing and safeguarding. Adults offer supervision without overriding youth leadership, and stakeholders help with access to participants or settings.
5. **Analysis:** Train young people in accessible forms of data analysis (coding, sorting, clustering). Work with them to identify themes, patterns and contradictions while ensuring accuracy and reflexivity. Begin drafting findings and evidence-based insights.
6. **Recommendation:** Peer researchers use findings to develop practical, realistic recommendations. Work with stakeholders to refine and prioritise actions, ensuring proposals are grounded in evidence and lived experience. Agree responsibilities and next steps.
7. **Action:** Organisations and partners implement agreed changes based on the research. Peer researchers may continue as advisors or co-design partners to support accountability. The goal is to translate youth insight into meaningful improvements in services, policies or practice.

Time allocation of a linear process

Different aspects of the research stages can take different times, however, below presents suggestions for how long each stage should take as a proportion of the overall timeline. The general rule, like most project work, is plan for more time than needed.

Stage	Time	Rationale
Programme design	5%	Programme design should be straightforward, with much work done pre-funding. The only variable can be how long it takes for external stakeholders to engage, or how long it takes decisions to be signed off internally.
Recruitment	20%	Recruitment time can hugely vary depending on the scope of the work and the organisation conducting the work. However, given how important the peer researchers are to the process it is important to spend longer on recruitment for it than you would other similar youth voice programmes to ensure you have the relevant lived experience and diversity.
Training and design	15%	Training and design of the research can also vary depending on the budget and capacity available. A project which only has the scope to conduct in-depth interviews with take a fraction of time as one which also includes quantitative methods, and creative methods. Time needs to be provided for training so that all decisions made by the peer researchers are meaningful, but this can be done quite quickly depending on the availability of the peer researchers, for example spending three days back-to-back in a single week, or every Saturday for week weeks.
Fieldwork	30%	Fieldwork is always the stage that takes the longest amount of time, with the most variables out of the control of the project. Many projects will lengthen the fieldwork phase if they have not met their target sample, as failure to achieve an adequate sample can undermine the strength of analysis, recommendations, and action.
Training and analysis	10%	Training and analysis with peer researchers can be quite quick, with a full day or two days enough depending on the variety of data collected. The more time-consuming aspect comes from the preparation of data by organisations before that point, for example the creation of transcripts from interviews.
Recommen-dations	10%	The creation of recommendations is often done in a session, or two, with young people, external stakeholders, or both. Time is often best spent ensuring that the right external stakeholders are engaged, and peer researchers have the opportunity to build meaningful relationships with them to support the co-production of strong recommendations that can be championed in the action phase.
Action	10%	The action phase should have a much larger proportion of the time spent to it, being the most important aspect of the project. However, the small proportion here reflects the reality that many peer research projects are unfortunately funded for the length of the research and end with the output. Many projects will look for additional funding for a subsequent project focused on action, building on the findings. While other projects will see action as an ongoing long-term process of embedding findings and referencing recommendations. At the very least, peer researchers should have the opportunity to influence through meetings with decisionmakers.

The variability of timescales

The amount of time that organisations proportion to different stages also varies from project to project depending on a range of variables. For example:

Stage	Rationale
Programme design	• The project is more inexperienced with a peer research process, seeking additional support from organisations or individuals with the experience. • The organisation does not have the relationships with key stakeholders that are needed for the success of the project, for example schools or the local authority. • The project is a collaboration between a range of organisations or agencies, which can take longer to clarify roles and responsibilities.
Recruitment	• The scope of the project focuses on populations that are minoritized, and individuals from underrepresented groups are those with the lived experienced needed. • The organisation does not have existing networks and trusted relationships or access to young people. Recruitment will be dependent on building relationships with organisations on the ground.
Training and design	• The capacity and budget available in the project enables young people to learn and design a wide range of research methods. • The peer researchers recruited have additional needs that need to supported through the design and delivery of the training. • Peer researchers are busy, or geographically scattered, requiring greater effort to come together or for work to be done in multiple shorter online interactions.
Fieldwork	• The peer researchers have designed a range of methods that need adequate time to collect data. Creative methods and surveys in particular can be time consuming. • If access to the target populations is difficult, or the organisation lacks the relationships with the trusted adults to broker that access.
Training and analysis	• There are a range of research methods used, each with a different approach to analysis needing to be taught and applied. • If the topic is particularly complex, the analysis might need additional time as peer researchers would need additional contextual knowledge or expertise from external stakeholders.
Recommen-dations	• Projects don't have strong relationships with decision makers and key stakeholders, making it difficult to engage them meaningfully with the recommendations. • The scope of the work means that recommendations require knowledge or context of systems that would not have necessarily been provided in earlier stages.
Action	• You should always proportion more time to this if you have the budget and capacity to do so. • The expected recommendations or scope of the change is larger, and will need more work to get commitments and create impact.

Linear vs non-linear design structure

Peer research projects may be structured in a linear way, which follows a single PAR action cycle, and is most done. It may also follow a non-linear structure, which may contain several mini-cycles of action, reiterating as it goes along.

Linear design		Non-linear design	
Programme design	Organisation designs the peer research programme.	**Programme design**	Organisation designs the peer research programme.
Recruitment	Organisation recruits peer researchers.	**Recruitment**	Organisation recruits peer researchers.
Research design	Peer researchers design surveys and interviews.	**Research design**	Peer researchers design interviews.
Fieldwork	Surveys and interviews conducted.	**Fieldwork**	Interviews are conducted.
Analysis	Interview and survey data analysed.	**Analysis**	Interviews are analysed, providing key insights.
Recommendations	Recommendations created with stakeholders.	**Research design**	Insights fed into designing a survey.
Action	Peer researchers create impact from the findings.	**Fieldwork**	Survey is conducted.
		Analysis	Interview and survey data analysed together,
		Recommendation	Recommendations created with stakeholders.
		Action	Peer researchers create impact from the findings.

While a linear design follows the cycle of design, fieldwork, analysis, action, a non-linear design may cycle back to create an iterative process. Importantly, a non-linear design structure is something intentional, designed that way from the outset, to improve the project. Non-linear design is not when a project is forced to jump back, because recruitment was insufficient, or fieldwork failed to capture an adequate sample.

Non-linear design is also a cycle, that must repeat in order, and projects cannot just jump around the different stages. For example:

- A project that is already at the analysis stage cannot go back to recruitment to get a few more peer researchers to support with analysis – the entire peer research team, including the newly recruitment members, should again design, conduct fieldwork, and analyse data together.
- A project at the action stage cannot go back to fieldwork to get a stronger sample for action without having to re-analyse the additional data and re-generate recommendations.

Non-linear research structures

Many projects will structure the process in a way that is non-linear, jumping back and forth between different stages of the research process, creating mini cycles within a single project. Depending on the timescales and capacity, peer researchers may wish to repeat earlier stages after reflecting on new knowledge, understanding, or opportunities.

For example, projects may wish to revise their original research question after initial fieldwork provides new understanding that the peer researchers feel need to be explored. Or the analysis of survey data presents surprises that need to be better understood, so peer researchers decide to step back to the research stage to conduct an additional round of interviews focused on exploring that surprising finding.

Peer researchers who have the flexibility and support to reflect and reiterate in this way can lead to stronger conclusions and recommendations at the expense of time and capacity. There are intentional reasons why a project may want to build in iterative cycles into the project from the outset. For example:

- **Jumping back to programme design:** The organisation may receive more funding or capacity to build in additional work or scope to the research. The cycle would jump back to the start to reimagine what the project would now look like.
- **Jumping back to recruitment:** The project may uncover a specific lived experience that is missing over the course of their analysis that needs addressing or meet young people who want to be involved during the fieldwork.
- **Jumping back to research design:** The project may want to start with a qualitative exploration of the topic, using the findings to conduct a second cycle of design, fieldwork, and analysis focused on quantitative data. Projects with an abundance of quantitative data may want to repeat the cycle of research design, fieldwork, and analysis but with a focus on creative approaches to research instead.
- **Jumping back to fieldwork:** The project may do a first round of fieldwork and analysis, using it to identify other communities that you may want to collect data from. Projects may use the key findings from an analysis to inform another round of more detailed fieldwork.

Used mixed methods as an iterative process

For projects that take a mixed methods approach, using both qualitative and quantitative research methods, we see two approaches that projects can take to structure: one that runs parallel of each other, or the other sequentially that reflects and iterates.

- **Parallel mixed methods:** A more linear approach, the project decides to conduct in-depth interviews and a survey design and fieldwork at the same time. They may differ in questions but are ultimately informed by the same research question and discussions. There may be a influence on the design process depending on which method is designed first (interviews before surveys for example), but ultimately the data gathered from either method is not available to inform the design process.
- **Iterative mixed methods:** A less linear approach, the project that decides to stagger different methods and create mini cycles of research design, fieldwork, and analysis. While this takes longer, it allows one research method to go into greater detail based on the findings from the first. A project may start with in-depth interviews with young people, creating the interview guides, conducting fifteen interviews and analysing the transcripts, before using the initial findings from that to inform the design of surveys, which will be then conducted and analysed. They also may do the reverse, or with other methods. For example, a survey may establish a certain demographic are engaging less with an aspect of a service, whereafter the in-depth interviews decide to focus on targeting that demographic with questions specifically about that aspect of a service. This allows peer researchers to explore in detail findings which stand out from the initial research findings.

2.2 Staff Skills & Roles

Peer research with young people needs to be supported by staff with the right set of skills, navigating a range of different roles: from pastoral support to researcher. We have seen smaller projects with one staff member having to do all roles, or other projects with a staff team divided into key roles. For example:

- **The pastoral role:** Peer researchers need to be supported by staff pastorally. This is a typical youth worker-style role, ensuring that young people feel good.
- **Administrative role:** The project will have several logistical challenges and considerations. Peer researchers or research participants need to be coordinated, venues and spaces need to be secured, etc.
- **Researcher role:** Staff will need to play the role of an academic supervisor, providing clear feedback and guidance on questions of research process or quality. This is often the hardest role to fill in the youth sector.
- **Teacher and facilitator role:** Staff will need to able to teach peer researchers a variety of skills, making often complex ideas and processes in research simple and accessible.

As a result, there is several skills that the staff team ideally need to conduct good peer research with young people.

Experts to co-learners

One challenge we find across different projects is how staff position themselves in the process, not as experts, but as co-learners. It can be difficult for staff to assume an equal relationship, especially when outside of the peer research process they are not: responsible for multiple for young people, safeguarding, mentoring, providing advice and guidance.

Alongside delivering research training, programme structure, and research support, our role is also ensuring that adults power share with young people. Being positioned as a co-learner is about recognising the expertise of others and creating a safe environment for them to share this.

We often work with organisations to deliver peer research and encourage staff to attend training as one of the researchers alongside the young people. One of the key outcomes we look for is the development of staff, and their ability to continue to embed elements of peer research in their practice going forward.

Staff skills challenges and limitations

Staff good practice	Benefits and opportunities	Potential challenges
Youth work and youth engagement skills	Traditional youth skills are key in delivering peer research, working with and supporting young people through often complex processes and sensitive topics. Supporting the creation of trusted relationships, which allows young people to participate fully in the project. This also enables a better attendance rate and reduces drop out of peer researchers.	Staff who have no experiencing with youth workers can struggle to deliver peer researchers, even with a background in research or academia. Delivery of key pieces of work can be delayed, or time-lines disrupted, if staff find themselves having to chase young people.
Teaching and facilitation skills	Staff will need to have experience in how to support young people to learn and understand key information. Their ability to learn key skills is vital in supporting them to make meaningful decisions about the process and conduct effective research. Creating a safe and open environment and facilitating productive and respectful conversations is key. Issues can be complex, and peer researchers may have disagreements. Staff need to navigate this, and support young people to work as a team and reach collective decisions.	Meaningful participation in decision making requires the peer researchers have to have been given the relevant knowledge. A lack of teaching or facilitation skills by staff can lead projects to be a series of co-produced exercises, led by staff with inequal power. Especially where the topic being explored is an emotive one, discussion between disagreeing peer researchers can become unproductive without good facilitation skills.
Research skills and understanding	Supporting young people to design and deliver a research project works best when supporting staff have existing research skills. Staff can provide a level of methodological rigour, ensuring that research methods are created to a high-quality standard. Staff can also use their research skills to support with the analysis stage. They can teach approaches to data analysis or do some of the heavy lifting in terms of creating transcripts or conducting statistical analysis of quantitative data.	While staff might be knowledgeable about the context of the issue to be explored, without existing research skills, the methods designed or approach to analysis can lack the quality needed to be taken seriously by key stakeholders. Peer researchers will also have to do more work as part of the project, having to serve a quality control role on the research, one that they might not have training for.
Safeguarding training and understanding	Staff will need to have safeguarding training and be clear about the policies they have as an organisation. This is particularly a risk for projects where the issues being explored are sensitive. The ability to recognise safeguarding risks, communicate the processes and support available to peer researchers, and to act is critical in keeping all young people safe during the project.	Lack of clear safeguarding training can lead to safeguarding incidents not being picked up, especially in the unique context of conducting research in the field. Especially where the issue is sensitive, peer researchers might not be clear that they can be given the space to withdraw and reflect.

2.3 Organisational Structures & Capacity

Alongside staff readiness, there are several considerations for the organisation supporting peer researchers. This relates to the structures within an organisation (finance, HR, computers), and the capacity of those to support a peer research project.

This may exist for many organisations, especially the youth sector, but for those in other sectors (for example arts and cultural organisations, or housing) there may be additional planning needed to ensure these systems are in place before recruiting young people. We have seen this be navigated through partnerships between organisations, for example a health organisation partners with a youth club who is funded to manage relationships with young people and renumerate them.

Organisational good practice	Benefits and opportunities	Challenges and limitations
Effective finance system for renumerating young people	A responsive finance system can deliver payments to young people in a timely manner. A flexible finance system can allow projects to renumerate different peer researchers for differing number of hours, giving more flexibility to the peer researchers. A simple and accessible finance system can make the process of getting paid easier for peer researchers, without a huge burden of paperwork upfront. A clear system for monitoring hours worked, allows the correct payment of young people for their time.	Unresponsive or slow finance systems can mean payments are delayed, causing young people to struggle with living expenses or participation in the project. An inflexible finance system means that number of hours has to be set for each peer researcher at the outset of the project, and can be harder to re-divert funds in the case of drop out. A complex finance system can mean that peer researchers spend many unpaid hours troubleshooting with the organisations about their payment details. A lack of a clear system for monitoring hours means peer researchers can be underpaid or overpaid for their time.
Strong network and cross-sector relationships with key external stakeholders	Strong relationships with external stakeholders allows engagement at the start and throughout the project to strengthen the project design and delivery. Engagement of key external stakeholders throughout the project help create buy-in, with peer researchers capitalising on this to create change or impact. A network with a breadth of experience, cutting across a range of sectors, allows for a range of views to be involved and enable a systems approach to problem solving. Strong relationships with external stakeholders can allow projects to bring in additional time, resource, or capacity to improve the research process or offer of support for peer researchers involved.	Weak or non-existent relationships with external stakeholders can mean that peer researchers can design a research process that is devoid of important context from the wider sector. Lack of engagement of key external stakeholders can mean that the work of the peer researchers does not land, and makes it harder to create to the key relationships necessary for change. A network with a narrow breadth of experience can miss out key drivers of change, or key pieces of context, that is needed to understand a wider systems-based approach. A lack of strong relationships with external stakeholders mean that projects are delivered solely by the organisation, within the budget and capacity that they have.

Organisational good practice	Benefits and opportunities	Challenges and limitations
Open internal structure for cross-departmental support	An open internal structure provides an opportunity for learning across different departments, with additional perspectives from across the organisations supporting the peer researchers in the design process. Support from other members of staff, across different projects or departments, allow a greater breadth of experience and expertise to strengthen the project. Engagement or interaction with staff or departments across the organisation can provide peer researchers with a better experience of the workplace and strengthen their identity as paid member of staff.	A closed internal structure means that projects operate in a bubble, with only the perspective of the lead staff member involved with the peer researchers. A lack of support from other members of staff or departments can limit the availability of organisational expertise that can be brought into the project. A lack of engagement by paid peer researchers with the wider organisations can create a sense that they are operating as a standalone youth group, rather than a meaningful part of the organisation as equal co-researchers.
Independent HR or a trusted system of complaints	While peer researchers are not staff, there should be a clear system for them to be able to submit complaints or concerns about staff or other members of the peer research team. It allows organisations to mediate conflict between peer researchers, or between peer researchers and staff before it escalates to cause harm. Drop-out of peer researchers is reduced if they have a way of voicing their concerns, and seeing those concerns addressed.	Conflict between young people can sometimes be inevitable, and formalised HR or complaint systems can escalate the seriousness of these and undermine the ability for them to resolved informally. Peer researchers are often not contracted members of staff, and so may not have offer to the same level of support and HR as others.
Accessible and effective systems of information, computers, and technology	Projects that can set peer researchers up on their computer systems, with their own profile or organisational email, reinforce the parity of peer researchers with staff. Accessible computer systems, such as shared drives, facilitate much better co-working in the peer research team. It allows staff to track work, uploads, and project manage more effectively.	Not all young people have laptops or computers, and many will be working predominately from their phone. This has limitation for certain tasks or accessing certain types of documents. Young people, often without experience of the workplace, need additional support to be taught how these systems work and to get confident in using them.

2.4 Funding Structures for Peer Research

Peer research is, like all good youth work, relationship-heavy work. A common mistake is budgeting only for the "research outputs" (the report) rather than the "process" (the support). If you under-budget the process, there is a danger of burning out staff or exploiting the young people.

There are some key principles of good funding for peer research:

1. **Valuing Lived Experience:** We treat peer researchers as consultants, not volunteers. They possess a form of expertise (lived experience) that our organisation lacks. Therefore, we pay them. The 2025 Standard: As of late 2025, the London Living Wage (LLW) is £14.80 per hour. This is the baseline for hourly payment. We view all parts of the process, from training to fieldwork to analysis, as work that should be paid.
2. **Funding for the journey:** There should be adequate time to engage the peer researchers, from relationship building, to training them in research. This includes meeting in person, food, residentials, external trainers, and (most importantly) time to work together as a team. We find that better funding of the process can reduce costs associated with the fieldwork, with peer researchers better prepared being more effective and a better network of stakeholders to facilitate engagement with participants.
3. **Flexible funding means meaningful decision-making:** Projects will tend to estimate budgets for certain stages of the peer research process. However, peer research is notoriously difficult to budget for as staff will not know what question or approach the young people might want to use. The result is a temptation to limit the choices, for example budgeting clearly for interviews and a survey and teaching only those. Organisations who are able to sit in the discomfort of not knowing what each stage will cost, and be flexible to allocate budgets around to best support the project as it forms, are more able to meaningfully take on the decision-making of the peer researchers.
4. **The "Hidden" Costs of Access:** Payment is not just about wages. To ensure we don't just recruit the "usual suspects" (those who can afford to participate), we must budget for access barriers. This means budgeting for data bundles for those without reliable Wi-Fi, prepaid oyster cards for those who must travel, and food which helps build the safety needed to participate.
5. **The "Impact" Pot:** The biggest risk in peer research is that young people generate findings, but there is no money left to do anything about them. Projects should try to ring-fence at least 10% of the budget as an Impact pot, allowing peer researchers to take actions to create impact.

Renumeration models

The most important part of the funding structure is the renumerations of the peer researchers. One of the aims of peer research is to empower the community to create change, raising their voices as equals in the research process, and decision-making. As such, young people must be renumerated or paid for their work as peer researchers. Practically, a higher budget for peer researchers just means more time, to plan, to team-build, to conduct research, and to create impact.

There are a range of reasons for paying young people for their time:

- **Equity:** To create equity between peer researchers and paid staff, young people need to be paid for their time. Their identity on the project, as a paid member of staff, or paid member of the research team is important for creating a sense of ownership over the work and enabling agency over design decisions.
- **Perpetuating socio-economic disadvantage:** Peer research is often used with young people from marginalised communities, furthest from the considerations of decision making and power. These communities should not be expected to volunteer or provide their expertise via their experience without a fair reward for their time.
- **Flexibility:** Renumerating young people for their work allows projects to be more flexible in the delivery and timescales of their project, with additional paid hours in reserve to cover any extra work that needs to be done or unforeseen opportunities to be explored. Asking volunteers to do more unplanned for time can be tricky to navigate, and unfair.
- **Meaningful working experience:** While peer researchers will gain many skills as part of their time on the project, being paid an hourly wage makes for a more meaningful work experience for their future employability. Young people can talk about being a paid researcher, rather than a volunteer.

While all peer research projects should have an element of payment for time, the exact level of payment and which hours are paid for varies by different projects. When peer researchers are paid an hourly wage, this toolkit defers to the Living Wage Foundation which states that the minimum liveable wage for London is £13.85 . However, there are a few models that are used across the sector:

- **Payment for all hours:** Peer researchers are paid London Living Wage for all their hours on the project. This includes training sessions, workshops, online meetings, time spent conducting fieldwork, and other project related activities. This is the ideal approach, as the co-design nature of peer researcher means that young people will be meaningfully contributing their ideas and work to every stage of the process. However, this can obviously stretch budgets which can either limit the number of peer researchers who can take part, or limit the number of hours of engagement.
- **Part full payment, part reward payment:** Peer researchers are paid London Living Wage for certain hours on the project, such as from fieldwork stages onwards. During the training and design stages, peer researchers are not paid hourly but paid a training stipend. We have seen this effectively work where an organisation wanted to be able to afford having a very wide training and design process, inviting over 35 members of the community, with hourly paid opportunities for them post-training to deliver the fieldwork.
- **Part full payment, part unpaid:** Peer researchers are paid London Living Wage for certain hours on the project, but engagement hours when peer researchers are seen to be receiving skills, support, or learning is unpaid. While we do not advise young people being unpaid, this can be balanced if an organisation provides sufficient renumeration in-kind, for example pairing training and delivery with sporting activities that have a costed associated to access otherwise, or funding for young people to go away on residential as part of the project.

Example renumeration budget

The following is an example budget for 7 peer researchers in a 12-month project which looks to involve them in as many stages as possible. All costs were calculated based on current London Living Wage and excludes costing a social action phase after the research as that can be hugely variable in time and cost.

Work needed	Detail of work	Hours	Cost
Regular steering group meeting.	Peer researchers meet once a month as a steering group.	1.5 hour a month for 12 months	£1745.1
Training workshops and co-design sessions	Peer researchers trained in different aspects of research before making key decisions about the process.	4 workshop days for 7 hours a day	£2714
Fieldwork (interviews and focus groups)	Peer researchers conduct interviews and focus groups either online or in person.	5 hours per peer researcher	£484.75
Creative research methods	Peer researchers conduct or take part in creative approaches to research.	5 hours per peer researcher	£484.75
Analysis, and recommendations	Peer researchers are taught about analysis and examine data to generate key findings and recommendations.	2 workshops for 7 hours a day	£1357.3
Contributing to research outputs	Peer researchers can support with the creation of research outputs, contributing to the report or creating infographics.	3 hours per peer researcher	£290.85
Dissemination, meetings	Peer researchers support launch the research, and disseminate findings	5 hours per peer researcher	£484.75
		Total cost	£7561.5

What needs funding?

Peer research with young people can be funded by a variety of sources, each with different requirements and expectations. Part of the challenge of conducting peer research in the youth sector is balancing the delivery of high-quality work, with the budget and capacity that it is funded by.

	What is it?	How important is it?
Management and overhead costs	Organisations will have additional costs that will be added onto a budget, such as overhead costs, or management costs added onto a budget. These can vary widely, depending on the size of the organisation, and the reliance of their core funding on programme funding. Typical management costs for organisations are a consistent percentage of the overall budget, ranging between 6% and 14%. Overhead costs also vary massively but tend to be a fixed cost and isn't a percentage of overall programme cost like management fees.	Given the current funding environment for organisations, there is an understandable need to build in these costs into peer research budgets to create sustainability for the delivery organisations. Organisations should not be shy about including this, as it improves the sustainability of them, and the project in the long-term.

	What is it?	How important is it?
Staffing costs	Organisations will have to budget for staff members time to deliver or support the project. This hugely varies from project to project, depending on the existing staff team and their skills and/or their relationships with young people. Almost never is a staff's role fully funded to work on peer research project but will be something that part-funds their role. Peer research funding can often be short-term too, with less projects over a year.	It can be very important, but it depends on the external support that an organisation has for the project. For example, hiring staff who can conduct high quality research as well as practice high quality youth work can be rare. Some projects will fund an external partner to support with research, while an organisation who might not do frontline delivery may partner with a youth organisation to hold those
Peer researcher costs	Young people are recruited and paid to be peer researchers. This is either informally, or as a contracted member of staff. This would also include travel expenses if needed. This can also vary, depending on the number of peer researchers. We find projects work better, where funding is limited, to allocate more hours to less young people than the other way around.	Peer researcher costs are the most important aspect of the budget. The amount of time peer researchers has the more training, fieldwork, and action they can do. Costs may be reduced if the peer researchers are recruited from an existing youth voice structure, with their hours already paid for from another budget.
Participant costs	Incentives (vouchers or cash) for the young people interviewed by the peer researchers (e focus group attendees or survey respondents). Many organisations seeking participants will have access to young people and therefore don't necessarily renumerate participants financially. Because they provide services to them as participants and support them in several ways, they don't always renumerate them. Otherwise, most commonly we see young people participating provided a £20 voucher.	Renumeration, in some form, thanks young people for giving up their time. Financial renumerations specifically becomes more important depending on the research, and the participant's lived experience. It reduces the "extractive" nature of research, ensuring participants get something back for sharing difficult stories. It is also essential for recruiting seldom heard participants who might otherwise not engage.
Research output costs	Costs associated with producing the final products: graphic design for reports, video editing, printing, or hosting a website. This depends on the output and the internal capacity. Some organisations might have the ability to write, design, and disseminate a report, some might have to get external support.	A professional-looking report or video ensures the findings are taken seriously by decision-makers. Peer researchers should be involved in design decisions. Projects might want to budget more if they want to create different versions for different stakeholders too. For example, a youth friendly version for participants.
Impact cost (The "Impact Pot")	A ring-fenced budget (ideally 10%) reserved specifically for the action phase (campaigning, social action projects, or prototypes). Many projects go beyond 10%, having entirely separate budgets for the action/impact phase. This might be a Year 2 project.	Impact cost is really important, as without this, the project hits a "cliff edge" where the report is finished but there is no money left to create change. This protects against the project becoming "all talk, no action". A strong budget also provides flexibility for the ambitions of peer researchers.

	What is it?	How important is it?
Food and refreshments	The budget for lunch, snacks, and drinks during training, sessions, and stakeholder engagement meetings or events. Many projects might also take peer researchers out for dinner for a celebration event, or as an initial team bonding.	Sharing food breaks down barriers and builds the team relationships necessary for the work. It also addresses food poverty without stigma, ensuring young people are physically able to focus. However, it doesn't need to be expensive and fancy. Pizza, the reliable staple of the youth sector, is always on hand.
Venue hire	Costs for renting neutral, safe, and accessible spaces for training and fieldwork (community centres or libraries). You might also factor in venues for launching research or conducting social action. Many organisations will have their own spaces, which is much easier and cost effective to build peer research around.	A lack of a safe space makes a venue hire essential, however for most organisations this will be less important. Peer researchers may also need a private space to conduct interviews where they feel safe and professional. Relying on "free" spaces can sometimes mean noisy or unsuitable environments.
Pastoral support / Wellbeing	Budget for external supervision, counselling support, especially if the topic is sensitive (youth violence or mental health). Projects may want instead factor in additional staff time to do pastoral support rather than bringing in external support depending on the existing expertise in the organisation.	The importance of this depends on the sensitivity of the subject being researched, or the lived experience of peer researchers and participants. If you are researching trauma, you must budget for trauma-informed support to protect the mental health of the young people involved.
Events and stakeholder engagement	Costs for launch events, steering group meetings, or travel to present findings to decision-makers. This would involve venue costs, additional organisational capacity to organise, materials and printing, and external speakers.	Stakeholders need to be engaged throughout. Budgeting for their involvement (launch event) creates the buy-in needed for the recommendations to land. However, if the project is funded to conduct research, we find most stakeholders will engage for little to no budget.
Training costs	Training costs pay for an external trainer to support the project with learning that can't be provided by staff. This might include teaching the research process overall, or a specific aspect like campaigning or public speaking. You might also want to pay to ensure peer researchers get an accredited qualification.	Projects need to ensure training is high quality and adequately prepares peer researchers with learning to make meaningful decisions and deliver high quality work. Often projects will deliver the majority of the training themselves.

Example Budget Template (9-Month Project)

Budget Line Item	Unit Calculation	Total Cost	Notes for Funders
Peer Researcher Resourcing			
1. Recruitment & Selection	8 youth x 5 hrs @ £14.80	£592	Includes taster sessions and interviews (we pay for the selection day).
2. Training Bootcamp	8 youth x 2 days (14 hrs) @ £14.80	£1,657	Core research skills, ethics, and safeguarding training.
3. Fieldwork & Delivery	8 youth x 40 hrs @ £14.80	£4,736	Conducting interviews, focus groups, and street surveys.
4. Analysis & Reporting	8 youth x 15 hrs @ £14.80	£1,776	"Sense-making" workshops and co-writing the report.
5. Dissemination & Events	8 youth x 5 hrs @ £14.80	£592	Presenting to stakeholders/ commissioners.
Sub-total Wages		£9,353	
6. Employer On-Costs	~20% of wages	£1,870	NI, Pension, Payroll admin fees (often forgotten!).
Participant Costs			
7. Participant Incentives	50 participants x £20 voucher	£1,000	Ethical payment for those interviewed by the peers.
8. Accessibility Fund	Flat sum	£1,000	For data bundles, taxis for safety, or neurodiverse aids (e.g. fidgets).
9. Pastoral Care/ Wellbeing	Flat sum	£500	Clinical supervision or 1:1 debrief support for challenging topics.
Delivery costs			
10. Food & Refreshments	15 sessions x £80	£1,200	"Pizza budget" – vital for group cohesion.
12. The "Impact Pot"	Ring-fenced	£2,500	Crucial: Budget for the action phase (videos, events, campaigns).
Total costs		£17,423	(Excludes core staff management time & overheads)

3. Programme Design & Stakeholders

3. Programme Design & Stakeholders

This chapter outlines the strategic planning necessary to define the scope, ambition, and influence of a peer research project before delivery begins.

It introduces the "Scope Triangle"—balancing Ambition, Feasibility, and Influence—to help organisations design projects that are both manageable and impactful, rather than over-promising or under-delivering.

It guides readers through the essential process of stakeholder mapping, clarifying which elements of the project are fixed and which are open to genuine youth leadership, and details how to manage the "political risk" that comes with disruptive youth voice work.

The aim is to move beyond vague intent to a concrete programme design, ensuring that research questions are clear, partners are engaged early, and there is a viable path from data collection to real-world action.

By the end of the chapter, organisations should have a clear project framework that protects the independence of peer researchers while securing the buy-in needed to turn their findings into change.

3.1 Clarifying Scope, Aims & Research Questions

The first thing the organisation needs to consider is the core issue that they want to research and act on, and the rationale for doing so. There are three key questions that should be reflected on:

1. **Why this specific issue?**
2. **Why now?**
3. **What problem is the project trying to better understand or change?**

The focus on peer research, as part of PAR, is on the action that the work creates. It is important that projects have a clear intended change or action in mind from the start, to ensure that the research never becomes research for research's sake. Organisations need to reflect on, and articulate thinking on:

1. **Decisions and decisionmakers:** Projects should be able to articulate clearly what specific decisions or processes the research could influence, and the decision makers it is aimed at.
2. **Systems and structures:** Projects should understand what systems are in the scope of the research and work. For example, is the work focused on schools, CAMHS, housing providers, or youth clubs?
3. **Actions and impact:** Projects should have a clear awareness of what action is realistic for them and the peer researchers to achieve. Is the project focused on changing policy, practice, or service design?

The Scope Triangle (The project management triangle)

Designing a peer research project always involves balancing three core dimensions: Ambition, Feasibility, and Influence Potential. These form what we call the Scope Triangle. If one dimension is unrealistic or disproportionately weighted, the project can become unmanageable, tokenistic, or unable to create real change. The Scope Triangle helps organisations and partners shape a project that is ambitious enough to matter, grounded enough to deliver, and strategically positioned to create impact.

1. Ambition: How big is the issue we are trying to address?

Ambition is about the scale and depth of the research focus. It reflects the importance of the issue, the extent of change sought, and the opportunities for young people to explore complex questions. High ambition is good, PAR encourages young people to investigate issues that matter deeply to them, but without boundaries it can quickly become unmanageable. Ambition must be shaped in relation to feasibility and influence so that young people can meaningfully lead the process.

Questions to test ambition:

- Is the topic big enough to matter, but not so broad that young people cannot explore it meaningfully?
- Will the project generate new insight, rather than repeating known findings?
- Does the scope allow for depth, not just surface-level commentary?

2. Feasibility: What can realistically be done within our time, resources and constraints?

Feasibility is about the practical conditions needed to deliver the research. Peer research is relational and often slower than adult-led research, involving safeguarding considerations, training, mentoring, and organisational governance processes. Feasibility assessments draw on organisational readiness principles (see Chapter 3), ethics and safeguarding requirements, and PAR's emphasis on respectful pacing and emotional safety.

Questions to test feasibility:

- Do we have access to the young people or communities we want to reach?
- Do we have the skills and capacity to support the methods we are considering?
- Can we gather sufficient data within the available timeline?
- Are there safeguarding or ethical constraints that limit the scope?

3. Influence Potential: Where can this project realistically create change?

Even well-designed research may struggle to influence decision-makers if there is no clear route to action. PAR emphasises the link between investigation and transformation (Freire, 1970), and youth participatory research literature highlights that influence must be built in from the beginning (Ozer, 2017; Anyon et al., 2018).

Influence potential is about identifying who has the power to act on the findings, whether they are involved early enough, and whether the research is aligned to a moment of opportunity, for example a strategy refresh, service redesign, or funding shift.

Questions to test influence:

- Who can act on this research, and are they already engaged?
- Is there a policy or organisational window where recommendations can land?
- Are the research questions shaped to inform real decisions, not hypothetical ones?

Over scoping and under scoping a project

A well-scoped project finds a stable point where ambition, feasibility, and influence reinforce each other. When one dimension is disproportionately large or small, the triangle destabilises.

Problem	Ambition	Feasibility	Influence Potential	Result	Lesson
A borough wanted peer researchers to "improve mental health support for all young people aged 11–25 across the local system".	Too high. This scope spans children, adolescents, young adults, schools, CAMHS, GP practices, youth justice, community groups, and crisis services.	Very low. There was a 12-week timeline, no access agreements with schools, and limited staff capacity.	Moderate. The borough was reviewing youth mental health pathways, but not at the scale needed for this question.	The project became superficial; peer researchers gathered scattered insight but couldn't drill down deeply. Recommendations were too broad ("services need to communicate better"). The findings were "not actionable" in the words of commissioners.	Over-Scoped Project. High ambition without feasibility leads to tokenism and frustration, not impact.
A youth service asked peer researchers to investigate "how young people feel about the new reception area".	Too low. The issue was trivial compared to the challenges young people were facing.	Very high. It was simple to gather feedback: maybe too simple.	Low. Changing the reception area was already decided; the research could at best tweak décor choices.	Young people felt the project was not meaningful and lost motivation. Staff tried to expand the scope halfway through, but the project had already lost momentum.	Under-scoping can signal that young people's time is not valued and fails to engage or empower.

Problem	Ambition	Feasibility	Influence Potential	Result	Lesson
Care-experienced young people reported significant issues with the move from supported accommod-ation into independent tenancies.	Strong and meaningful. A clear, specific journey (move-on support) within a much larger system.	Achievable. There was 6-month funding, access to young tenants through existing networks, and housing providers willing to facilitate interviews.	High. The local authority was reviewing its housing pathways that year and had committed to incorporating youth-led evidence.	Peer researchers investigated a discrete but impactful part of the system, generated rich findings, co-authored recommendations, and shaped the new move-on policy.	Correctly scoped projects tend to produce deeper insight, higher engagement, and concrete systemic impact: aligning with PAR's core emphasis on action.

Initial Project Research Question

Projects should reflect on what they are aiming to achieve, and what their objectives are for the peer research project. This helps get clear what they want to understand, influence, and expect from their peer researchers. There are three sentences' organisations can complete:

- "We want to better understand…"
- "We want to influence…"
- "We expect youth to lead on…"

This allows organisations to root the project in a clear problem, with clear opportunities, and a clear role for the peer researchers to influence and shape the process. For example:

- **We want to better understand...**"We want to better understand what the barriers are for young girls attending our youth club, and how we can get more young girls accessing our services."
- **We want to influence…**"We want to influence how our youth club reaches young people and delivers services, and local schools who can signpost students to us."
- **We expect youth to lead on…**"We want young girls to lead on designing a research question, a research approach, and designing an action our youth club can take"

Organisations without a clear answer to each will find it difficult to lead an effective project, impacting either the start (research question) or end of the project (impact), or the entire process (young people's ability to lead throughout).

- W**e are unsure on what we want to better understand:** Projects will not know what lived experience they need to recruit from and will be asking recruited peer researchers to start from a completely blank slate, which can lead to the generation of a shallow research question.
- **We are unsure on what we want to influence:** The results of the peer research will have less opportunities to influence policy and practice, and peer researchers will end up speaking to the wrong decision-makers or stakeholders.
- **We don't have expectations for what young people will take a lead on:** The decision-making of the peer researchers becomes tokenistic, as there are no expectations that they will take a lead. Instead, their participation becomes determined by other factors like time or budget.

Drafting Initial Research Questions

Organisations should use their reflections to generate several draft initial research questions. A research question pinpoints exactly what you want to find out in your work. We will go over designing a research question in far more detail with the training for young people later, but it is important that organisations have draft research questions for two main reasons:

1. **Project clarity:** Several related research questions provide projects with a clear understanding of what the project is, what they're aiming to achieve, and impact on.
2. **Recruitment of lived experience:** This is important for organisations when recruiting peer researchers, as the research questions will provide guidance on the lived experience that is needed.
3. **Reiteration rather than reinvention:** Peer researchers should not be working from a blank slate. By providing feasible, original draft questions, you allow peer researchers to refine, challenge, and reimagine them, ensuring the final questions are both grounded in reality and creatively impactful.

Peer researchers scoping ideas

3.2 What's fixed? What's flexible?

Before young people join a peer research project, it is essential for organisations to be clear about which elements of the project are fixed, which are flexible, and which are genuinely open for youth decision-making. This clarity is a core principle in high-quality youth participation and participatory action research. It protects young people from being asked to influence areas that adults cannot realistically change, and it prevents organisations from unintentionally limiting youth leadership later in the project.

Research on youth participatory action research (YPAR) emphasises that young people can only exercise meaningful agency when the boundaries of their influence are transparent (Ozer, 2017; Cammarota & Fine, 2008). Similarly, rights-based participation frameworks such as Lundy's Model of Participation (2007) highlight that young people must not only have a space to speak, but also a clear route to influence, which is only possible when young people know which decisions are theirs to make.

Organisations also need this exercise because peer research involves multiple forms of responsibility: ethical compliance, safeguarding, GDPR, staffing, budgets, and timelines. Some of these elements cannot be delegated or changed, even in a youth-led model. Mapping fixed versus flexible areas helps adults avoid over-promising or inadvertently placing young people in situations that are unsafe, unfeasible, or emotionally overwhelming: a risk commonly identified in evaluations of youth-led research (Anyon et al., 2018).

At the same time, identifying areas that are fully open to youth decision-making ensures that young people have genuine ownership, creativity, and leadership within the project. This is foundational to peer research's purpose: shifting the balance of power, elevating lived experience, and enabling young people to shape the direction and outcomes of work that affects their lives.

In short, this mapping process creates the conditions under which peer research can be safe, authentically youth-led, and capable of producing meaningful change.

Fixed – Non-negotiable elements that must be decided before young people join	Flexible – Areas that can be adapted, co-designed, or shaped together	Decision-Making – Areas young people should lead on
These are things that cannot be changed, usually because of funding rules, ethics, safeguarding, legal requirements, organisational policies, or practical constraints. They are the structural boundaries of the project: the things that protect safety, feasibility, and accountability. Adults must set these in advance so the project is safe and deliverable, and so young people are not promised things that cannot happen.	These elements sit in a shared decision space. Adults have responsibilities (for ethics, quality, safeguarding, or delivery), but they can negotiate and change these things with young people. They are not fixed, but they are not fully in young people's control either. This is where co-production happens: adults bring context, logistics and constraints; young people bring lived experience and creativity; and decisions are made collaboratively.	These are the parts of the project that young people should own. They relate to lived experience, meaning, priorities, values and impact: the heart of why peer research exists. These decisions do not pose safeguarding risks or violate ethics, so young people can decide them freely. Adults support, scaffold, and advise, but they do not override youth choices unless there is a clear safety concern.

Fixed	Flexible	Youth-decision making
• Budget ceiling and how money must be allocated (staff time, safeguarding) • Project timeline / delivery window • Geographic boundary (only residents of specific boroughs) • Eligibility criteria required by funders ("must include care-experienced young people") • Required safeguarding processes • Ethics approval conditions (no interviewing under-16s without consent) • Organisational policies on data storage & GDPR • Staffing availability (number of sessions adults can attend) • External reporting deadlines (end-of-grant report date) • Non-negotiable delivery partners (the project must involve X housing provider) • Venue availability / access restrictions • Method restrictions due to risk (no street intercepts, no late-evening fieldwork) • Accessibility or safety requirements (sessions must be facilitated by trained staff)	• Methods mix (interviews vs surveys vs creative methods, etc.) • Recruitment routes (for example through schools, youth clubs, online platforms) • Stakeholder list (who to involve, when, and how often) • Data types (qualitative only, or mixed-methods) • Fieldwork plan (timing, frequency, locations, online/offline mix) • Length & number of sessions (within overall time limits) • Incentive structure for participants (vouchers, events, certificates) • How analysis is supported (coding approach, use of tools, involvement of adults) • Which organisations peer researchers meet (commissioners, service providers, community groups) • How findings are presented (report shape, visuals, depth of analysis) • Levels of anonymity offered (as long as GDPR rules are followed) • Use of creative or digital outputs (videos, artwork, infographics) • Format of the final dissemination event	• Final research question / focus • Priority areas for action • Creative outputs (zine, video, exhibition, podcast) • Influence strategy (who to target, narrative and tone) • Interview / survey question design • Sampling priorities (within fixed eligibility constraints) • Which issues from lived experience matter most • Which stakeholders are engaged most heavily ("We want to talk to frontline staff first.") • How to frame findings (language, themes, youth-friendly concepts) • What stories or examples should be highlighted • What "success" looks like for the project (youth-defined outcomes) • Recommendations for systems change • Which channels to use for communicating findings (social media, community events, youth spaces) • Roles within the team (who leads facilitation, analysis, stakeholder meetings) • How sessions run (ground rules, structure, group norms)

3.3 Stakeholder Engagement & Buy-In

Peer research should never happen in a vacuum. To ensure the work has real-world application, it requires the active support and interest of people who hold influence over the issues being studied. Stakeholders buy-in is not merely a "nice-to-have"; it is a strategic necessity for the success of the project. Engaging with external partners, decision-makers, and community leaders serves two primary functions:

1. **Ensuring Validity and Context:** Stakeholders bring a vast history of working around the specific issues you are investigating. Their involvement ensures that peer researchers do not waste time "reinventing the wheel."
    a. **Refining the Focus:** Stakeholders can help identify current gaps in knowledge, ensuring the research questions are specific and relevant.
    b. **Reality Checking:** They provide a necessary "ground-truth" to the work, ensuring that the research aims are realistic and grounded in the complexity of the system.
3. **Sustainability Beyond the Project:** The impact of peer research should last longer than the project timeline. A wide range of engaged stakeholders increases the longevity and legacy of the findings.
    a. **Embedding learning:** When stakeholders feel ownership of the research, they are more likely to embed the findings into their own future strategies.
    b. **Future Resources:** Engaged stakeholders are often the source of future funding or opportunities to replicate the model in different contexts.

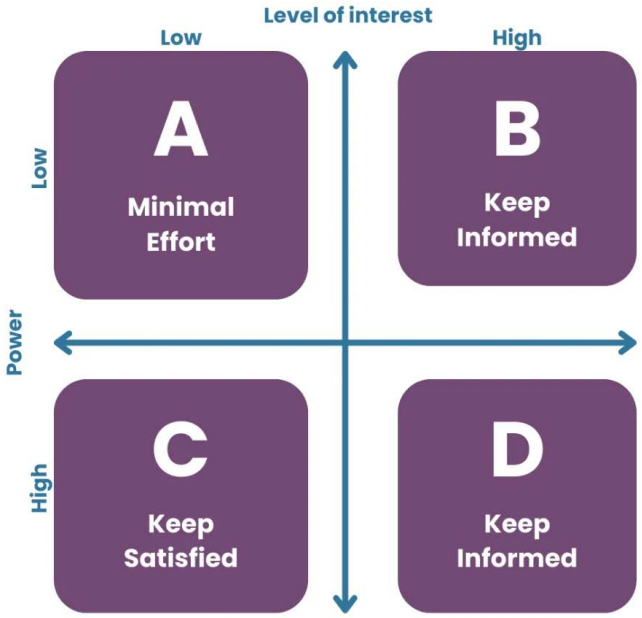
The most successful peer research projects do not wait until the final report to contact stakeholders. Instead, they ensure that key partners are brought in at the very beginning and are kept engaged throughout the lifecycle of the project. Peer researchers should be actively involved in the process of identifying who the key stakeholders are and supporting the effort to build those relationships. This empowers the researchers and ensures the stakeholders hear directly from the lived experience experts from day one.

There are a range of different types of stakeholders for a peer research project, and some stakeholders could provide multiple purposes:

- **Problem solving stakeholders:** These are stakeholders that are interested in providing informal support, helping to solve problems or challenges that arise over the course of the project. This can be a supportive officer at the local authority, who can make introductions to groups or provide access into spaces. A youth worker at a local youth club, who will help peer researchers recruit participants for focus groups or interviews. The anticipated challenges in a peer research project will differ from project to project, so having the right stakeholders who can support with this is key.
- **Added value stakeholders:** These stakeholders are interested in providing formal support, through additional research or by providing additional opportunities for the peer researchers. They can add value to the research outcomes and learning for young people beyond what was initially scoped out. These can be local voluntary sector organisations, arts and culture organisations, or private sector organisations.
- **Expertise and knowledge stakeholders:** These are stakeholders that have a wealth of experience and knowledge on the issue or community that is being explored. They can help provide the wider context. These can be research organisations, community groups, or even individuals with experience, such as peer researcher from other projects.
- **Decision-making and impact stakeholders:** These are stakeholders who have decision making power, or influencing power, and can support the peer researchers to create impact on the back of the research. They will be less likely involved throughout but should be engaged at the start and end of the project. These can be individuals working in the local authority, regional government, funders, or wider infrastructure organisations.

Mendelow's Matrix: Stakeholder mapping

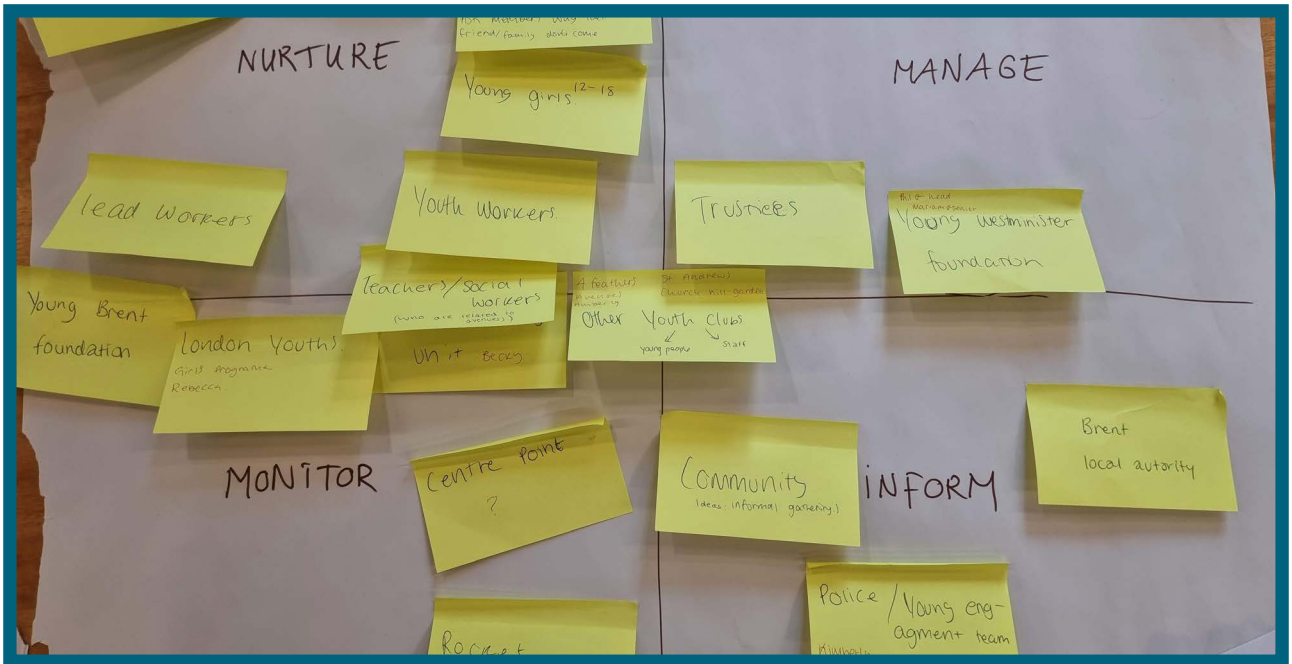
Mendelow's Matrix is a tool used to map stakeholders based on two specific variables: Power (how much influence they have to change things) and Interest (how much they care about your specific project).



The Four Quadrants (and how to explain them to young people)

- **High Power, High Interest (Manage Closely):** These are your key stakeholders. They can make the change happen and they want to be involved.
  - » Action: Meet them face-to-face, invite them to the steering group, co-design with them.
- **High Power, Low Interest (Keep Satisfied):** These are the important potential allies. They could really support your project but right now are focused on other things.
  - » Action: Keep them updated with short briefings so they don't block you. Try to move them into the "High Interest" box with a compelling story.
- **Low Power, High Interest (Keep Informed):** These are your supporters. They love the project but can't change the policy. They are often frontline youth workers or community members.
  - » Action: Use them to spread the word and build momentum.
- **Low Power, Low Interest (Monitor):** These are the stakeholders with the least power to affect change, and the least interest in the project.

Action: Don't waste time here. Send them a newsletter once a year.



Mapping stakeholders

Briefing sheets for stakeholders

Briefing sheets on the project are one of the most important things a project can create. It is a living document, constantly updated, and serving multiple purposes. They can be very short, or more comprehensive, written for young people, practitioners, or both.

In simple terms, a briefing sheet is a short document that tells anyone external to the project what the project is. We will be talking about briefing sheets for research participants, which serves a different purpose ethically, later in this toolkit.

For this section, we are referring to a simple briefing sheet for engaging external stakeholders. The exercise of co-creating this with the peer researchers helps them develop their ability to speak about the project. It should summarise:

- What the project is about
- Why the project matters
- What the peer researchers are going to do
- What the project hopes to achieve

The briefing sheet should be updated as peer researchers make additional decisions about the research process, becoming a living document that marks the development of their research

Managing Political Risk

Peer research is inherently disruptive. By centring the voices of young people, especially those from marginalised backgrounds, projects can uncover uncomfortable truths about how services or systems are failing. "Political Risk" in this context refers to the pushback or gatekeeping that can occur when peer research is conducted, outside of the control of the stakeholders. If left unmanaged, political risk can lead to:

- **Gatekeeping:** Access to participants being blocked by defensive staff.
- **Censorship:** Pressure to water down findings or remove "difficult" quotes.
- **Co-option:** Young people's voices being used to justify decisions that were already made.

This section outlines how to anticipate these risks and protect both the independence of the research and the wellbeing of the peer researchers.

1. Recognizing Organisational Constraints and Concerns

Stakeholders in the youth sector are rarely hostile to youth voice; they are usually supportive professionals operating under significant pressure. This constraint in the system can clash with the ambition of the peer researchers. Additionally, professionals may have a responsibility to safeguarding and protect service users. Peer researchers should be supported to recognise the valid concerns of stakeholders:

- **The Protective Instinct (Safeguarding Relationships):** Youth workers spend years building trust with vulnerable young people. They may hesitate to grant access to peer researchers because they fear the process might be intrusive, disruptive, or that the peer researchers lack the skills to handle sensitive disclosures safely. This is a duty of care, not just gatekeeping.
- **The Strategic Concern (Reputation and Funding):** In a tight funding environment, organisations are anxious about anything that might threaten their stability or public trust. If a report highlights service failures, this can be very challenging for stakeholders to engage with, especially if it lands on their doorstep late into the process and they don't feel involved throughout the process.
- **The Feasibility Reality Check (Resource Constraints):** Commissioners and managers are often managing shrinking budgets. They may find findings challenging, not because they disagree, but because they are wary of over-promising to young people and then letting them down when the budget isn't there to deliver it.

2. The "No Surprises" Approach

The most effective way to manage political risk and reduce defensiveness is to ensure that stakeholders feel like partners in the inquiry, rather than targets of it. Projects should adopt a “No Surprises” approach, which means taking key decision-makers on the journey alongside peer researchers. Ensuring stakeholders are sighted on the work as it develops, providing feedback which peer researchers meaningfully consider and adopt, helps creates this buy-in.

To achieve this, projects should build in specific "touchpoints" for engagement, which we go into detail later as part of the peer researcher training process:

- **Engagement on the research question:**
    - » Involve stakeholders in reviewing the initial research questions.
    - » **The Buy-in:** If they agree that the questions is relevant and addresses a genuine gap, stakeholders are more likely to support the work and engage with findings.
- **Engagement on the research method design:**
    - » Involve stakeholders on the research method design, providing feedback to the survey or interview question.
    - » **The Buy-in:** This gives stakeholders an opportunity to provide feedback to the questions that are going to be asked of young people. This can help peer researchers refine the questions they have, but also consider what questions they don’t have that they might want to get in to increase buy-in from stakeholders.
- **Engagement on the key findings and recommendations:**
    - » Before any public launch, hold a private briefing with key decision-makers to walk them through the draft findings and support the development of recommendations.
    - » **The Buy-in:** Having stakeholders, many of which are key in implementing recommendations, be involved in the creation of those recommendations is vital.

3. Protecting Peer Researchers from "The Politics"

Peer research is unique because the researchers often share the lived experience of the subject they are studying and feeling a genuine sense of ownership over it. Because of this, professional challenge can be difficult to manage. To protect their wellbeing, we must support them to navigate these interactions with professional distance and resilience. While we want peer researchers to lead, the supporting organisation has a duty of care to act as a buffer.

- **Pre-meeting vetting:** Staff should gauge the room/meeting before bringing young people in. If a stakeholder is currently in crisis or hostile to the project, do not expose the young people to that environment.
- **Debriefing:** After every stakeholder engagement, hold an immediate debrief. Ask: "How did that feel? Did you feel listened to?" This allows emotions to be processed in a safe space. It also allows projects to reflect if more work should be done with stakeholders ahead of their engagement with peer researchers.

4. Recruiting the Peer Researchers & Setup

4. Recruiting the Peer Researchers & Setup

This chapter details the practical strategies for identifying, engaging, and selecting a team of peer researchers who bring relevant lived experience to the project.

It explores the nuances of defining "peers" beyond simple demographics, using the "Layers of Lived Experience" model to balance specificity with diversity, and outlines how to avoid the "usual suspects" often found in youth participation work .

It contrasts open recruitment methods (such as social media campaigns and taster sessions) with closed approaches (such as nominations and existing groups), providing guidance on which method suits different project goals and sensitive topics .

The aim is to move beyond tokenistic involvement to a rigorous recruitment process, treating peer researchers as paid staff with clear role expectations, management structures, and fair remuneration models that value their expertise .

By the end of the chapter, practitioners should have a clear plan for building a diverse, capable team of peer researchers and the management systems necessary to support them effectively throughout the project lifecycle .

4.1 Defining the peers

Before designing a recruitment, poster or reaching out to partners, the project team must answer the most fundamental question: "Who counts as a peer?" While this seems like common sense, "young people" is not a specific enough category, for example young Londoners are not a homogenous whole. A 14-year-old student in Harrow has a very different lived experience to a 24-year-old care leaver in Lambeth. If the definition of "peer" is too broad, the research loses its power. If it is too narrow, you may struggle to recruit.

The Theory: Layers of Lived Experience

We define lived experience as "personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events", In peer research, we look for "Experts by Experience". When defining your cohort, it is helpful to think of lived experience in layers. The more layers you add, the more specific (and potentially insightful) the research becomes, but the harder recruitment will be.

Most peer research projects define their peers using one or a mix of these four dimensions:

1. **Identity Peers: Defined by who they are (race, gender, sexuality).**
    - » **Example:** Young Latin American women exploring safety in university spaces.
    - » **Theory:** Shared identity allows for culturally safe spaces where nuanced, specific conversations can happen that wouldn't occur in a mixed group.
2. **Service/System Peers: Defined by what they use or navigate.**
    - » **Example:** Care-experienced young people or residents of a specific Housing Association.
    - » **Theory:** These peers understand the technical and bureaucratic "system" (what a pathway plan is) without needing it explained.
3. **Issue Peers: Defined by a shared challenge or experience.**
    - » **Example:** Young private renters or young people with experience of homelessness.
    - » **Theory:** They share the emotional reality of a problem, even if they come from different backgrounds or areas.
4. **Geographic Peers: Defined by where they live.**
    - » **Example:** Young people aged 16–18 living in Lambeth.
    - » **Theory:** They share a physical context (the same parks, bus routes, and schools).

Balancing Specificity vs. Diversity

A common pitfall is assuming that recruiting for "Lived Experience" means recruiting a group of people who all think the same. If you define your peers too narrowly, you risk creating an echo chamber:

- **Example:** Recruiting "Young people in Lambeth who hate the mental health services."
- **Risk:** You will get seven peer researchers who all have a negative story. You miss the nuance of those who had a positive experience or those who tried to access help but failed.

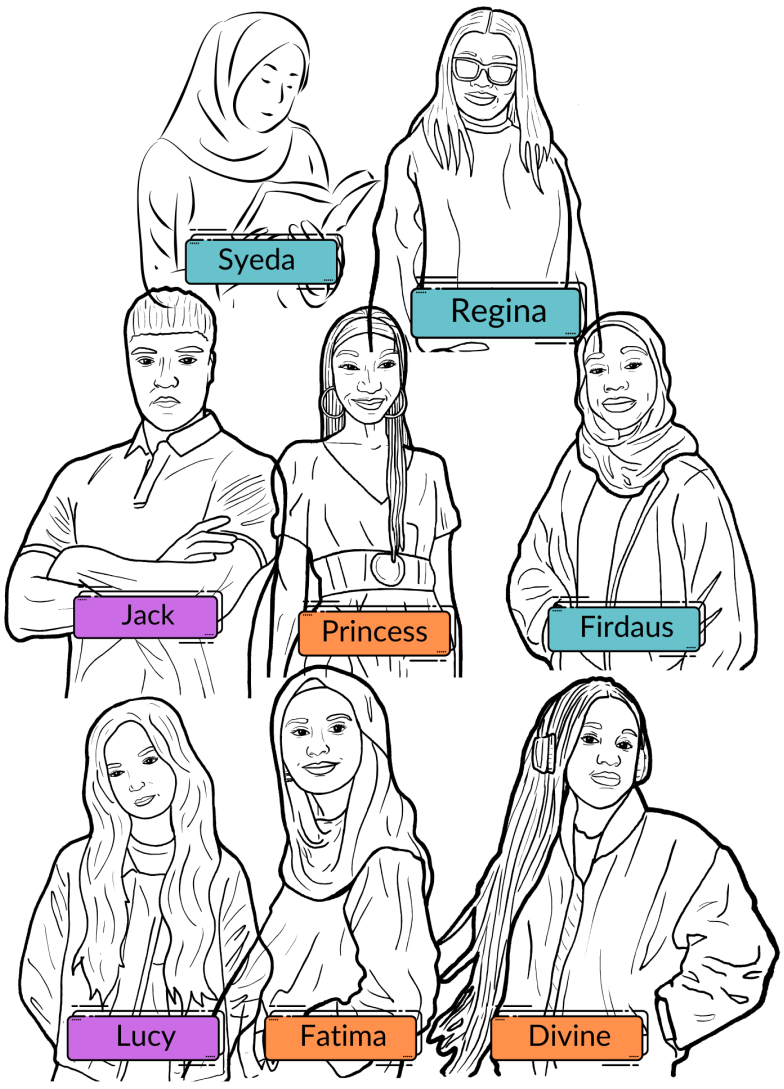
The aim is to be specific about the criteria relevant to the research topic, but diverse within that:

- **Bad Definition:** "Young people from Newham." (Too broad).
- **Bad Definition**: "Young men aged 20-22 from Newham who have been excluded from school and are currently unemployed." (Too specific).
- **Good Definition:** "Young men aged 18 to 25 from Newham (Specific Identity & Geography) who have had contact with the education welfare system (Shared System Experience)."

Decision to be Made: The Recruitment Criteria

Using the "Layers of Experience" concept, the project team must now agree on the "Must Haves" vs. the "Nice to Haves" for the peer researcher job description. We recommend filling out a simple matrix to lock in these decisions before advertising:

Layer	Criteria for this project	Rationale (Why is this needed?)	Fixed or Flexible?
Geography	Example: Must live or study in Brent.	Because the funding is tied to the Council.	Fixed
Age Range	Example: 18–25.	Because we are looking at employment, and under-18s are in school.	Fixed
Lived Experience (The "Peer" Factor)	Example: Experience of temporary accommodation.	This is the core research topic.	Fixed
Diversity Targets (The Range)	Example: Mix of genders; mix of those currently in temp accommodation vs. those who have moved out.	To ensure we don't just get one perspective.	Flexible target



Peer researchers from a Partnership for Young London project

4.2 Peer Researcher Recruitment Sampling

Recruiting peer researchers successfully can be a balancing act. On the one hand, want young people to range of specific lived experiences relevant to the research project. On the other hand, we still want to purposeful sample a range of diverse experiences and backgrounds within that purview. For example:

- Unless the issue is one that affects a particular gender identity more, most projects will attempt to recruit a balanced mix of young men and young women. Many peer research projects often have an over-representation of young women.
- For projects exploring an issue for those impacts on young people aged 18 to 24, peer researchers need to be aged across that range group, with an over-representation of 18- and 19-year-olds limiting the ability to speak to the older age range.
- For projects exploring a specific locality, projects will purposefully recruit an unequal mix of different ethnicities that reflects the population locally. If the project is situated in a ward where 70% of the youth population identify as Black, the peer researchers should also be disproportionately from these communities.

This sense of trying to achievable a representative sample of peer researchers in the topic that is being explored can often be done simply by examining the protected characteristics and geographical placement of young people and ensuring that there is diversity within that if the issue's scope allows for it. However, given that peer researcher groups are usually around six to seven young people, ensuring that number of people fully represent an area, or a community, can be impossible. It is for the organisation and practitioners to decide on what types of diversity of experience is most important for the issue being explored and recognise any limitations of the group recruited.

Stacking the deck

When it comes to protected characteristics, this can be quite a straightforward exercise in ensuring a diversity within the peer research group as possible. However, when considering diversity of experience of the issue being explored, it can be more challenging. For example, a project is recruiting 18–20-year-olds who live in Lambeth from the South Asian community to explore how to improve mental health services in the area.

1. Let's assume we do not know what proportion of the young South Asian community in Lambeth have had positive, or negative experiences of local mental health services to sample our recruitment from.
2. We recruit seven peer researchers, and six of them have a very positive experience of local mental health services. We do not know how representative this is of the overall community's view on the issue.
3. The peer researchers with a positive experience will collectively decide to explore aspects of the issue, potentially different to the one peer researchers who had a negative experience. Their experience, within the group, is more likely seen as an anomaly.

To what extent do we look for diversity of opinion in the peer research group largely rests on the organisation and practitioners. Young people with positive experiences of a service can contribute insight into how it can be improved as much as those who have had a negative experience; however, their insight and perspectives will differ greatly.

Before peer researchers are trained and supported to make decisions about the project, the recruitment process is a way in which organisations and practitioners can intentionally or unintentionally "stack the deck", setting the process up to favour a certain outcome or perspective. This is only a problem when projects are not intentional about this, and transparent with their reasoning. For example, recruiting only young people with a negative experience of an issue because they are the young people who will most benefit from the changes.

There is an additional danger of recruiting young people for their negative or positive experiences too, especially where there is additional flexibility on research scope. For example, recruiting a group of young people with lived experience of serious youth violence will increase the likelihood that there will be a focus on youth violence.

4.3 Recruitment Approaches

There are a range of approaches to recruitment of peer researchers, and this will vary based on the strengths and weaknesses of an organisation or the limitations of time, budget, access, and capacity. However, there is some standard good practice:

- **Ideal numbers of peer researchers:** Projects should ideally aim to recruit around six to ten peer researchers. This enables there to be a good diversity of young people, while being small enough to enable a good level of participation from all members of the group. Organisations, depending on the level of drop out they're expecting, might want to look to over-recruit too, to provide a safety net.
- **Scheduling in enough time for recruitment:** Recruitment of committed peer researchers, with the relevant lived experience and diversity is critical to the success of the project. Time dedicated to the recruitment phase can range between 2 to 8 weeks, depending on the access and relationships the organisation has into the community that the research is focused on, and the complexity of the lived experience the peer researcher need. This time also needs to consider application stages, shortlisting, and setting peer researchers up on finance or any other organisational setup work.
- **Existing knowledge on subject/community:** Recruitment is always much higher quality when organisations have a high degree of existing knowledge and experience with the issue being explored, or the community that it relates to. In the absence of this, key partners who have that knowledge or hold those trusted relationships with the community are required. This on the ground knowledge can enable the recruitment of peer researchers who are passionate about making a change, or are already active in this work, making drive change and action post-research easier.
- **Tailoring skill requirements to training capacity:** Where organisations are funded with sufficient time and capacity to support with a fully realised training programme, existing skills of peer researchers is less important. In that case, projects can aim to drive positive outcomes for the young people involved. However, where timelines or budgets are shorter, organisations may have to make sure that the existing skills of the peer researchers recruited are at a level that the project can be delivered efficiently and effectively in that context.
- **Timeframes of the young people matching the project:** The timeframe of recruitment should fit around the commitments of those being involved. For young people, this most obviously means being conscious of busy periods like exam season, and all typical busy periods like Christmas breaks or start of the year, where there will be less interest in starting a research project.
- **Fast follow ups:** It is important that you are able to get back to young people within 48 hours of them contacting you or applying, to ensure that those who do reach out to apply are engaged strongly from the start.

4.4 Open recruitment process

An open recruitment process involves advertising the opportunity to be a peer researcher to all, or selected groups, of young people for them to apply. This involves creating adverts and communication materials that can reach young people across a variety of mediums, with a process for them to apply.

Open recruitment can also still be selective, as organisations can target advertising out the opportunity to target groups or through selected external stakeholders. The nature of open recruitment also typically means organisations will have a larger selection of young people to chosen from, shortlist, and select from.

Type of recruitment	Approach	Benefits	Limitations
Job-style application	Young people will have to apply for the role, and there is a clear process. This can include interviews, cover letters, or presentations.	You can create a process which ensures those recruited have certain skills or a level of commitment needed.	The barrier to entry is far greater the more work a young person has to do as part of an application.
Self-referral	Young people can simply express interest in taking part.	Easy for young people to engage initially.	There is no way of narrowing down applicants, other than first come first serve.

Open recruitment process relies on a number of key factors, such as your organisation's ability to create engaging adverts to effectively communicate the opportunity, the strength of existing communication channels to place those adverts in and reach young people, and the facilitation of the recruitment process such as interviews. Having advertising and communicating content being reviewed and checked by young people, or designed by them, can ensure efficacy before work is done to disseminate it.

The strength of an organisation's existing channels and access into young people determines how many young people will see and engage with the opportunity. Some organisations have a large online following of young people which they can easily recruit from, though young people who follow a youth sector organisation or local authority online may potentially be not suitable depending on the issue explored. Regardless of your organisation's reach, it is always important to seek external out external stakeholders who work with or have access to the lived experience that the project pertains to. Having a strategy for on the ground visibility, helps access young people who won't be accessing the online social media channels that organisations have.

Stage	Timeline	Key objectives
Defining recruitment criteria	0-1 weeks	Project staff and key stakeholders should define a clear recruitment criterion for the research project and aims. This should be communicated in advertising, so those applying have relevant lived experience.
Reaching out to key partners	2-3 weeks	Advertising should be done through a number of key partners first, who often have networks of young people who are most relevant for the work. It will also allow you to evaluate the communication assets and reiterate.
Opening to a wider audience	4-7 weeks	Once the approach to recruitment has been tested and finalised, the opportunity should be disseminated to the widest possible network as possible.
Targeted recruitment gaps	7-8 weeks	Time should be provisioned in recruitment for targeting any gaps that you may have in applicants who have applied. For example, addressing a gender or ethnicity imbalance in applicants.

Incentivising open recruitment

Recruitment can take more or less time depending on an organisation's networks and access to groups of young people1. However, there are a number of ways to make an open recruitment process more visible and appealing to a diverse range of applicants

Approach	What is it	Advantages
Open Zoom or Online "taster" sessions	Hosting an informal, low-stakes online drop-in session where potential applicants can meet the team and ask questions before applying.	**Low Barrier:** Allows young people to "check the vibe" of the project without the pressure of a formal interview. **Clarity:** Helps manage expectations early on about what the work involves.
Posters and QR codes for advertising	Physical posters placed in youth hubs, schools, or community centres featuring a QR code that links directly to the application form or information pack.	**Ease of Access:** Removes friction: young people can access details instantly on their phones. **Offline Reach:** Reaches young people who may not be algorithmically targeted by your social media channels.
"Bring-a-friend" approach	Explicitly encouraging applicants to apply in pairs or allowing them to bring a friend to the interview/taster session for support.	**Reduces Anxiety:** Social anxiety is a major barrier; having a friend present makes the initial step less intimidating. **Snowballing:** Leverages peer networks to reach young people outside your immediate circle.
Skill-swap/ emphasis on formal training	Framing the recruitment not just as a job, but as a training opportunity where they will gain accredited skills (research methods, public speaking).	**Value Add:** Appeals to career-minded young people looking to build their CVs. **Reciprocity:** Demonstrates that the organisation is investing in them, not just extracting their labour.
Community events, and outreach in spaces	Physically going to spaces where young people congregate (youth clubs, colleges, parks) to speak to them directly, rather than relying solely on digital methods.	**Trust:** Face-to-face interaction builds trust much faster than a digital ad. **Inclusion:** Crucial for reaching digitally excluded young people or those who do not follow "youth sector" accounts.
Social media call outs and advertising	Using platforms like Instagram, TikTok, or LinkedIn to broadcast the opportunity, often using paid ads or partner shares to boost reach.	**Scale:** Can reach thousands of young people quickly. **Shareability:** Easy for partners and young people to share with their own networks.
Having a clear about the impact or change they will make	Messaging that focuses on the outcome of the work ("Help change mental health services") rather than just the process ("Join a research group").	**Purpose:** Attracts young people who are passionate about social justice but might not identify as "researchers." **Motivation:** Sets a high bar for engagement and passion from the start.
Being transparent about the	Clearly stating the hourly rate (London Living Wage) and the total hours available on all advertising materials.	**Equity:** Signals that you value their expertise as work, not volunteering. **Attraction:** Being clear about remuneration is a huge draw, as there are few paid opportunities for young people to do socially minded work.
Clear recruitment process	Designing a simple application process (a short form or voice note) rather than a complex CV/Cover Letter requirement.	**Accessibility:** Reduces the barrier to entry for those with less experience in formal applications. **Diversity:** Encourages a wider pool of applicants who might otherwise self-select out of a "professional" process.

4.5 Closed recruitment process

A closed recruitment process is more selective and doesn't involve advertising the opportunity to be a peer researcher. Instead, they are recruited through referrals by staff either internally or externally or are asked to conduct the work as part of existing duties they have as part of a youth voice structure. It is useful when recruiting peer researchers with lived experience of marginalisation, or who may have additional needs. Certain spaces, like pupil referral units, or certain topics are not suitable for an open recruitment process.

This approach is particularly effective when:

- **The topic is sensitive:** For example, researching experiences of the youth justice system, where public advertising would be inappropriate.
- **The group is hard to reach:** For example, working within Pupil Referral Units or with young people who are digitally excluded

Types of closed recruitment

There are a number of different approaches to closed recruitment of peer researchers. The common theme in their advantages is speed, especially for organisations in the youth sector with existing networks. However, there are additional benefits and limitations depending on the exact type of closed recruitment used.

Type recruitment	Approach	Benefits	Limitations
Existing youth voice structure / advisory groups	Recruit directly from groups that already practise collective decision-making (Youth Councils, Young Inspectors).	**Speed:** The group is already formed, safeguarding is in place, and they have existing skills in working together. **Stability:** High retention rates as they are already committed to the organisation.	**"The Usual Suspects":** These groups often attract young people with high civic engagement. They may not represent the lived experience of disengaged or marginalised peers (a Youth Council researching political apathy is a mismatch).
Nomination from trusted adults	Ask trusted youth-serving orgs (schools, youth clubs, charities) to nominate a small number of young people who meet specific criteria.	**Targeting:** Enables precise sampling of specific lived experiences ("young carers") that you cannot identify publicly. **Support:** The nominating adult can provide a "safety net" of pastoral support for the young person.	**Gatekeeping Bias:** Staff may unconsciously select "favourites" or avoid referring young people with challenging behaviour, skewing the sample. **Time Intensive:** Requires significant time to brief partners and build trust before they will refer young people.
School or class cohort	An entire class, year group, or after-school club is recruited as the peer research team.	**Captive Audience:** Guaranteed attendance and high retention because it is part of their timetable. **Diversity:** Classes (especially in non-streamed subjects) often contain a genuine cross-section of the local population.	**Lack of Interest:** Not every student wants to be a researcher; you may have to manage disengaged participants. **Peer Dynamics:** Existing classroom hierarchies or bullying issues can disrupt the safe space needed for research.

Type recruitment	Approach	Benefits	Limitations
Random selection from a particular cohort	Selecting names at random from a specific list (a housing register or service user database) and inviting them to take part.	**Representativeness:** This is the "fairest" method and removes selection bias entirely. **New Voices:** Reaches young people who are not connected to any youth services and would never apply for a role.	**High Refusal Rate:** Requires a lot of effort to contact people, and many will decline. **Cold Engagement:** Young people start with zero relationship to the project, so building trust and confidence takes much longer.

Adult gatekeeping

The criteria of who to refer can vary if there is a lack of clear communication between the peer research delivery team and those doing the referrals, especially if they are an external partner. Young people having the right lived experience, or diversity, may be superseded by considerations about suitability for the perceived type of work that will be done.

For example, youth workers may select young people who they feel would be interested in doing the work, expressed an interest in research or are more “academic”, or are most likely to attend and be retained. However, these may not be the young people with the correct lived experience, or the diversity of experience that the project requires. Inversely, young people with no interest in taking part may be referred in because they have the correct lived experience, and peer research delivery team have to work hard to sustain engagement with capacity they might not have built in.

4.6 Peer Researcher Management

Once the peer researcher team has been recruited, projects will need to manage them effectively. Because peer researchers are renumerated for their time, their relationship with the organisation shifts from volunteer to staff. This creates a need for clear management structures while acknowledging that this may be their first experience of a professional workplace. Managing a team of peer researchers requires a careful balancing act. Staff must navigate the tension between being a supportive youth worker (who prioritises wellbeing and growth) and a line manager (who requires outputs and professional standards).

Conflict Resolution & Group Dynamics

Peer research groups are often conflict-free, with young people brought together with similar lived experience, focused on affecting change on an issue they care about. However, disagreement and clashes of personality can happen, which need to be managed.

One of the most important aspects to consider is the power dynamics in the peer researcher group. While sharing a similar lived experience, some members of the group may be more confident, or older, or have additional experience. Projects may also involve some peer researchers in more work than others, because of their existing skills, but this creates a power imbalance. Ensuring that the group dynamic remains positive and supportive is important to ensuring full participation of all peer researchers, and that the process is not dominated by one or two members. Mitigation strategies:

- **Equal participation in all stages:** Peer researchers should be recruited at the same time and participate in the same activities and training together. Any training missed by a peer researcher must be supported with additional learning to catch them up.
- **Providing support that's needed, not necessarily equally:** While learning and opportunities should be provided equally to all, the level of support might not be able equal to all. Recognising the differing levels of need of each peer researcher should allow you to provide more targeted support to ensure that each peer researcher progresses along the process at a similar rate.
- **Individual check-ins:** Having staff available to speak to individual peer researchers about issues they may be having with another member of the team or checking in on them alone.
- **Monitoring online communication:** Communication channels, regardless of the platform, should have clear established rules and boundaries put in place and monitored by staff.

This process can often invite peer researchers to disagree, practicing their ability to discuss, debate, and come to a collective decision. Healthy challenges are important, but projects need to be wary of unsafe conflicts that either sudden, or build over time.

Healthy Challenge	Unsafe Conflict	Action Required
Debating the work: Disagreement about the research question, the methods, or the wording of a survey.	**Attacking the person:** Personal insults, exclusion, or comments about a peer's lived experience or background.	**Immediate Mediation:** Staff intervene to separate the issue from the person. They will be reminded of the code of conduct and expectations and given a warning
Passionate expression: Young people expressing anger or frustration about the system or issue being researched.	**Directed aggression:** Anger directed at other team members, staff, or stakeholders.	**Safeguarding/Pastoral check-in:** Remove the young person from the space for a 1:1 debrief. Assess if they need to withdraw for wellbeing.
Silence/Listening: A peer researcher stepping back to listen or reflect during a complex discussion.	**Withdrawal/Refusal:** A peer researcher refusing to participate, keeping camera off (online) constantly, or ignoring direct questions.	**Performance conversation:** Check in on barriers to participation. Is it a confidence issue or a disengagement issue.

Performance Management

Peer researchers who are paid to do work must have systems in place to manage their performance. This can be uncomfortable for staff who are used to unconditional support. However, failing to hold peer researchers accountable is also letting them down, as it does not give them a realistic experience of work or teaches them the professional standards they should expect in employment. Meaningful working experience requires meaningful feedback.

Performance management in peer research should be developmental. It is about helping the young person succeed in their role, not just punishing failure. This can be done in a range of ways:

1. **Clear role expectations:** Performance cannot be managed if expectations were not clear. Ensure every peer researcher has a signed agreement outlining their specific responsibilities ("Attend 80% of sessions," "Conduct 5 interviews"), or the hours that they are expected to work. While projects can be flexible with when these hours are fulfilled, around peer researchers existing commitments, they should be tracked.

2. **Regular 1-to-1 Check-ins:** Schedule regular short check-ins (online or in person) to discuss how they are finding the workload, their progress with their tasks, and the barriers they may be facing. This allows projects to intervene or provide support before a peer researcher gets overwhelmed or lets problems build.

3. **Managing Non-Engagement or Drop-out:** If a peer researcher stops attending or delivering work, the organisation needs a clear process. Firstly, staff should assume there is a barrier, is this a transport issue? What else do they have going on? Are they okay? Second, if barriers are removed but engagement is still low, an honest conversation about whether they still want to be involved is needed. Lastly, peer researchers who still do not engage need to be “off-boarded”, thanking them for their contribution so far, and letting them step away rather than kept on a payroll they are not contributing to.

5. Training & Research Design

5. Training & Research Design

This chapter provides a draft curriculum for training peer researchers, guiding practitioners through the critical phase of moving young people from recruitment to active research design.

It outlines a "Plan, Act, Reflect" training model, emphasizing that skill-building must be directly paired with decision-making—ensuring that every training session results in a concrete output, such as a draft research question or a finalized survey design.

It offers detailed session plans for teaching specific methodologies—including qualitative interviewing, quantitative survey design, and creative methods—while also covering the essential foundations of team building, ethics, and safeguarding.

The aim is to equip peer researchers not just with technical skills, but with the confidence and understanding to make informed choices about how to investigate the issues that matter to them.

By the end of the chapter, practitioners will have the tools to facilitate a co-design process, ensuring that the research instruments created are ethical, feasible, and high-quality before fieldwork begins.

5.1 Principals of good peer research training

There are certain principles that can be applied to ensure that all training programmes, regardless of timeline or budget, are effective and conducive to meaningful decision making by young people.

1. Learning into decision-making

Providing young people skills and knowledge is essential for them to make meaningful decisions about the research project. Young people with no prior experience of design research projects cannot be expected to make informed decisions about the different choices on offer. However, the important research knowledge that is needed can be quite abstract or theoretical and needs to be made relevant to the work they're doing.

This can be done by pairing all learning with a key decision to be made about the project, which also impacts the sessions going forward. For example, one session the morning is spent learning about different research methods, and the afternoon is spent deciding on which research methods they would like to use as part of the project.

2. Plan, act, and reflect

Good training programmes should follow iterative cycles of planning, acting, and reflecting at each stage. This means that rather than a linear path of research design, projects should look to test and reflect on work done previously to iterate and improve. The ability to reflex and revise previous decisions is important as it allows for peer researchers to not feel constrained by their past decisions in light of new information or in response to developments in the fieldwork.

While much of peer research training is often learning paired with planning, projects need to think about where in the training programme there will be space provided for action and reflection. This could be testing out the interview guides designed by peer researchers, before reflecting and revising. It could be going back to the first session and the research question that peer researchers designed and amending it with additional specificity after conversations with key stakeholders in the community.

3. Interactive and practical

Regardless of the existing skills of young people recruited as peer researchers, a training programme where all teaching can be practical and taught through exercises breaks up sessions that can contain a lot of information and keep young people engaged. They also provide opportunities for the peer researchers to start developing their team working skills and build the foundations of good collaboration which they will need over the course of the project as they make increasingly complex decisions together.

Many peer research projects use flipcharts and pens, especially when getting peer researchers to provide their opinion or input. However, use of exercise sheets and icebreaker-style physical activities as a way of teaching research skills is recommended too. These won't be written up, or contribute to the overall research design process, but are important, nevertheless. If organisations have the ability to, the use of technology can also help with this, encouraging young people to participate via their phones or laptops with collaborative platforms such as Mentimeter or teaching platforms.

5.2 Creating relationships, building teamwork

The most important aspect of peer research training is how a group identity is created, and how relationships between peer researchers are fostered. There are clear benefits for this, with stronger relationships leading to more support between peer researchers, additional engagement over the life of the project, and accountability as they feel a sense of responsibility to each other and the work.

Eating and drinking together

The advantage of training in-person is being able to share a meal together and having that time to have conversations to get to know each other. Their discussion of their shared lived experiences is conducive to building bonds between them, but especially when conducted in an informal and supportive environment. There is where sharing food together over lunch can be especially valuable.

As for food choices themselves, this is largely budget and time dependent. Many organisations default to pizza, as it is a quick, cost-effective, choice that can cater to many different dietary requirements. However, as anyone in the youth sector, I have eaten enough pizza in sessions to last a lifetime.

Instead, what to order for lunch is a great opportunity to demonstrate and practice the values of peer research and joint decision making. If peer researchers are asked to make decisions about the research process, giving them the agency over what they eat is a small example of this in practice. We ask for suggestions of what type of food to order from each peer researcher, before voting (either ranked choice voting or First Past the Post voting) on which they would collectively decide on. This process can be stretched further to tailor to what is being taught, for example introducing an element of qualitative interview questions to field explaining their choice, creating an interactive survey for them to participate that decides on what to eat, or allowing them to lobby and influence each other between rounds of voting.

Some options, such as Lebanese or Chinese, require further planning and collaboration as the peer researchers must decide collectively what they want to order and are collectively happy to share. However, this can take a very long time (as every peer researcher demands to read the entire menu to the point of decision paralysis) and projects must decide whether there is value in dedicating session time to this.

Giving young people a choice about what snacks and drinks are available should be done and is relatively a quick exercise. Projects may feel a responsibility to provide healthy options like fruit, but where there can be choice created for peer researchers, the better.

Moving out of their comfort zone

Building relationships between peer researchers is quickly facilitated through the breaking down of the barriers and initial tension that can exist when strangers meet. The importance of icebreakers, some of which are detailed below, contribute to this while energising participants for the session ahead. However, opportunities to bring peer researchers out of their comfort zone throughout the training, not just the start, should be considered.

Exercises should incorporate opportunities to speak publicly, standing up to the group, whether that be presenting back the work that they have done, or pitching a solution to the group to take forward. In later sessions, around campaigning and influence, there is a strong element of public speaking training as these are the core skills that they will need to affect change. However, from the start of the project peer researchers should be given the opportunity to speak to stakeholders they would not have typically spoken to. This can be challenging, and peer researchers need to be supported on how to engage these stakeholders and given the tools on what to say. For example, one project ensured that all peer researchers very early on felt confident communicating their “elevator pitch” about the work they were doing, to be practised talking to external stakeholders.

The work of building a young person’s confidence by taking them out of their comfort zone needs to start early on, not just to build relationships, but also prepare them for the challenges of the fieldwork phase. While many projects teach research skills, for example how to conduct qualitative in-depth interviews, it is as important to ensure that peer researchers have sufficient confidence and essential listening and speaking skills to conduct those interviews to a high quality.

Trips or residentials as a form of team building

Allowing peer researchers, a space away from their usual environment, where they can spend time together doing activities that aren't necessarily linked to the research work is one of the most effective ways to build up the team. Projects can take peer researchers away to a space overnight at the start of the project, where they work on key decisions about the future of the project, but mainly get to know each other and participate in team activities. The supporting staff getting involved, as equal participants, can also support breaking down the inequity in power balances between them and the peer researchers too.

This can be time and budget intensive, but other projects have organised a trip to a landmark or cultural spaces in London too, paying for travel expenses or entry only. London is very well placed to have a range of free or budget friendly activities and finding an activity that also feeds into the themes or issue that is being examined can also be an effective way at stimulating conversation on the topic. This can be combined with eating out together, outside of a working environment, where in the context of a Nando's peer researchers are more aware of each other as individuals outside of the project.

Centre for Youth Voice Ambassadors Golf Range Trip

Co-designing a code of conduct

One of the first activities that can be run with new peer researchers is co-designing a code of conduct for their participation in sessions. This allows for a discussion about acceptable and unacceptable behaviours and ensure that peer researchers treat each other with respect. Especially where groups are larger, or less experienced with collaborative or classroom settings, this can be vital in establishing rules that make discussion and work effective. Allowing peer researchers to write this code of conduct themselves, as a group, not only provides a first example of the collaborative nature of the work but also ensures that as co-authors of the code of conduct that they are bought in and agree to it.

5.3 Training Spaces & Modalities

Ahead of designing the training and research design process should reflect on where this will take place: a physical space, online space, or a mix of both. Many projects will have a space that can be used for free or a low-cost, and a peer researcher team that are easily able to travel to it. However, some projects may have peer researchers based further apart from each other or lack a suitable physical space for training. Lastly, most projects will use a hybrid approach, with key training and decision-making reserved for a physical space, but check-ins, one to ones, and coordination meetings taking place online.

Training in physical spaces

Generally, most peer research training takes place in person. The process of building relationships between peer researchers is far easier when meeting in person at the start or at key points of the work makes it far easier.

- **Benefits:** Meeting face to face is far easier to track engagement too, especially if any cameras are off or not working, allowing the facilitator to tailor the session depending on the energy in the room. Physical activities too, such as theatre and art-based ice breakers, can only be done in person. These allow sessions to be more engaging over a more sustained period, with in-person work being able to be a full day compared to an online session. Especially when breaks are provided, with lunch being an opportunity to recharge, eat together, and to talk and create friendships. These experiences are far more likely to take young people out of their comfort zone than anything that can be done online, which helps build their confidence and break down barriers between them.
- **Disadvantages:** Arranging a group of young people, who often have many different things going on in their life at the same time, to journey into a single space can be difficult. There can also be unforeseen circumstances, such as rail strikes or protests, that can be out of your control that will end up cancelling the session.

It can also be a challenge to find a suitable physical space to host the training, with the facilities that you need, a quiet environment with no distractions, and a feasible distance from the peer researchers or the community. Lastly, in-person training can be time and budget intensive, with travel time that is often expensed by the organisation and a budget for lunch, drinks, and snacks needed.

Physical space setups:

- **Classroom style setup:** A classroom setup, where peer researchers are in rows facing the front rather than each other, is generally not recommended or necessary with small groups of peer researchers. Where it is used, it is usually for engaging a large number of people (30+) in a space that cannot accommodate a more collaborative setup. It can also be the default in some spaces, where tables and chairs cannot be rearranged. This setup is best managed with technology present at the front, with opportunities to engage via their phones.
- **World café style setup:** A series of roundtables, where there are a larger number of people (15+), allows them to work in individual groups and have a high quality of discussion on their tables. This works well when each group on each table, runs their own parallel design processes by completing exercises and tasks in individual groups. Additional time does need to be built in for groups to share their thinking, and for reflection as a wider group. This does, however, allow for a far more iterative way of working within the session.
- **Single roundtable:** A single table, where a small group of people (5+), sit around facing each other to work collectively as a team. This is the most common setup, given the smaller size of peer research groups typically. It creates a sense of equity, with staff not being at the front but sitting with the young people as part of the research team.

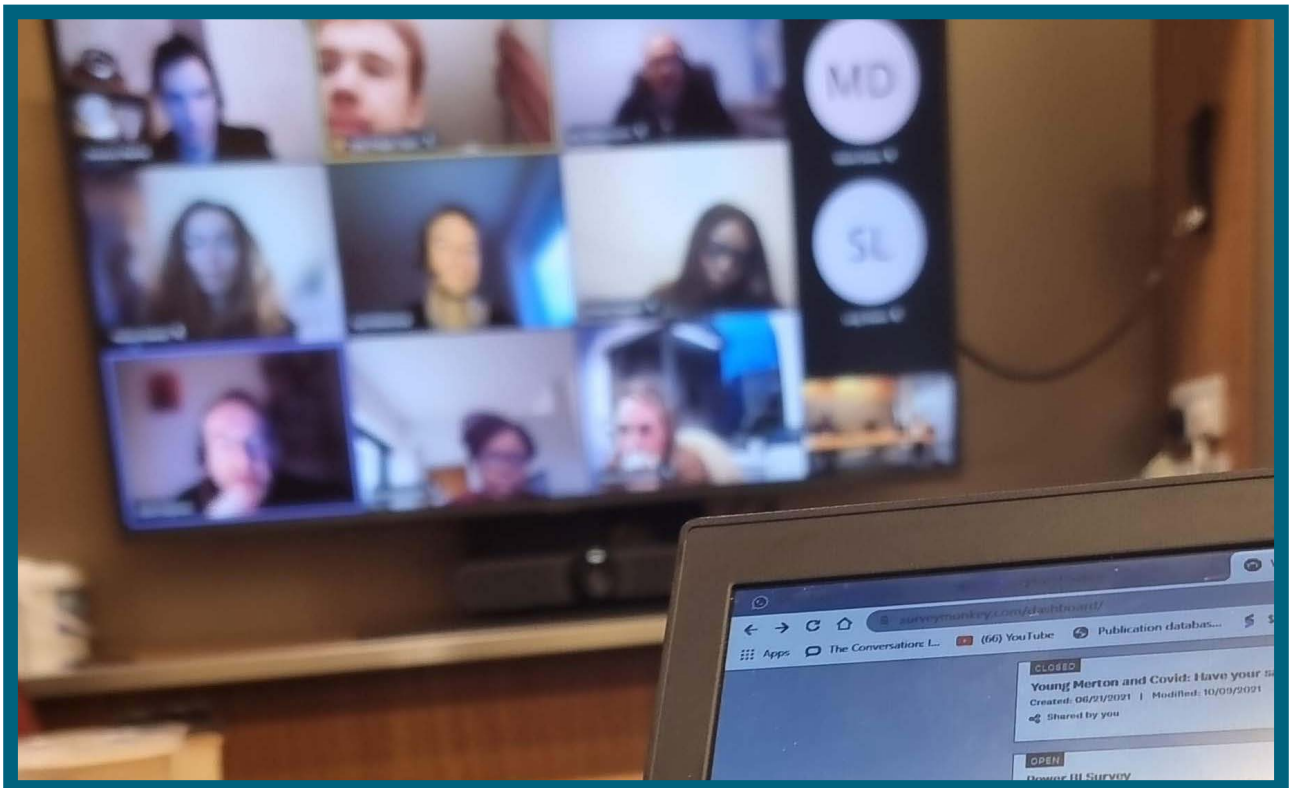
Additionally, if there are adjacent quiet spaces available, it provides greater flexibility in terms of breaking the peer researchers into groups to work during training sessions. Many of the training sessions use exercises that require smaller group working.

Training in online spaces

Benefits: There are peer research projects that will have to be conducted mostly, or entirely online. This allows young people to come together from across a range of geographical locations, where they would not be able to meet otherwise. It also allows far greater flexibility, to accommodate the working schedules of the peer researchers, and is less time intensive as it removes the need to travel to a location and back.

Disadvantage: The biggest disadvantage is the challenge that projects will have building the relationships between peer researchers and sustaining engagement over a period of time. Online sessions are best delivered when short and frequent, because concentration online can really drop off after an hour or two because of the physical nature of having young people just sitting on their computers.

In terms of delivering skills, and collaborating on research design, online can be just as effective or more effective than in-person delivery. However, this is dependent on a far greater level of planning, time to create exercises that incorporate digital tools and ways of working, and expectation management about peer researchers' responsibilities when attending online.



"Sorry, you're on mute!"

Online space setups:

- **Single space for all:** All online sessions should ideally start with everyone in the same space for introductions, but with a small number of peer researchers and staff this can be how all sessions are setup.
- **Breakout rooms:** Creating a number of breakout rooms, on platforms such as Zoom, allow peer researchers to work in smaller groups for activities. This should not be done exclusively, but as a way of increasing engagement and accountability online through smaller working groups.
- **One to one meetings:** Online spaces are far easier to engage with peer researchers on a one-to-one basis, without them having to meet up in person. This can be to check in on progress or their wellbeing privately or support them with roles or responsibilities.

Hybrid approaches

There is no need for a single approach (in-person, or online) to be used when bringing peer researchers together as part of the project. Many projects are hybrid in nature, with different purposes to both.

Peer research projects that are predominately in-person may use online sessions for:

- **Online as a meeting and check in space:** Many projects reserve time with the peer researchers to meet up regularly, check in how the work is going, or share the current work with wider stakeholders. These meetings, given their frequency and short running length, are often conducted online to supplement an in-person training programme.
- **Online as a space for additional work or learning:** Online can also be a less-time intensive way of providing shorter pieces of additional information or working with an individual or small section of the peer researchers to support them with their specific role or responsibilities in the wider team. This recognises that some peer researchers may need more support than others, with online being effective for one-to-one sessions.
- **Online as a space for technology approaches to research:** The online space is also one that young people might use as part of their research, such as conducting interviews on Zoom or Teams. However, during the training, online might be used where the facilitator wants the group to focus exclusively on using a digital platform for work, such as Adobe Express or Miro. In this case, it is best to bring people together online that have a session where they work on their own phones/laptops individually in-person.

Peer research projects that are predominately online use in-person sessions for:

- **In-person engagement to build relationships:** Given the challenges with building relationships online, some projects will opt to have one intensive face to face engagement at the start. This can be an overnight trip away as a group, or a longer day session together with food. This is an opportunity for peer researchers to meet, interact, and get a clear understanding of what the project will entail and their responsibilities over its course.
- **In-person stakeholder engagement:** The ability of peer researchers to hear from but build relationships with key external stakeholders is vital to the success of the project. We find that, despite busy schedules, stakeholders greatly benefit and enjoy hearing from and having the opportunity to speak to young people in-person. Having a well-attended session of stakeholders in-person can also inject projects with a sense of energy and momentum, and a greater sense of responsibility in the peer researchers.
- **In-person engagement as a celebration:** It is important to bring peer researchers together at the end of the project too, to celebrate the work that they have done. If relationships have been built over the course of an online project, this will likely be something that the peer researchers will ask for themselves. This celebration is a great opportunity to influence change and create impact, if key external stakeholders and decision makers are invited too.

5.4 Training structure

Peer research projects can vary in the time allocated to training, and the structure of training, depending on the budget and scope of the work. Some projects do not have capacity to conduct a survey, and will mainly focus on in-depth interviews, which will mean that training on different research methods is not needed. While it is important to provide as much learning as possible, it is better for projects to only teach peer researchers about that which they will be asked to make a meaningful decision about.

Outlined is a basic peer research structure, with the sub-sections of training in methodology and analysis being dependent on what research methods are chosen by peer researchers or by organisational capacity. All training sessions are paired with a key decision to be made, as that is how it would be delivered. There is also a suggestion about where external stakeholders are engaged in the process, to support hone and improve the research question, research methods, and recommendations. We have not placed timings, or number of days, on each stage as that will look different for different projects.

1. Introduction to research > Determining research question

Peer researchers are introduced to research at the start, what it means, what the role of research is, and what the values of peer research are. They will also start to have conversations about the issue to be explored and learn about how to format a research question.

Decision to be made: Creating a first draft of the research question that they will answer.

Stakeholder engagement session > Revising research question: The first opportunity to bring in external stakeholders is to discuss the scope of the initial research questions drafted by the peer researchers.

2. Introduction to research methodology > Deciding on research methods

Peer research are introduced to the difference between quantitative and qualitative data, and what the benefits and drawbacks are of both. They will be then given an overview of different research methods.

Decision to be made: Deciding on which research methods they want to use for the project.

3. Research method design > Designing chosen research methods

Depending on what they selected, peer researchers will learn how to design and conduct those research methods in greater detail. These could be:

a. Introduction to survey design > Designing a research survey

b. Introduction to interviews and focus groups > Designing an interview guide

c. Introduction to creative methods > Designing a creative method

Decision to be made: What questions to ask in the survey/interview, or what the creative approach they want to use will be delivered.

Stakeholder engagement session > Revising research methods: The second opportunity to bring in external stakeholders is to discuss the design of the research methods, either offering revisions or support with outreach.

4. Safeguarding and research ethics > Co-designing a consent form and information sheet

Before peer researchers are asked to deliver fieldwork, it is vital that they are taught safeguarding, research ethics, and consent. This will enable them to conduct ethical research, safely in the field.

Decision to be made: As much as possible, the peer researchers should support with the co-design of consent forms and information sheets, so they understand them and they are accessible to those who will be receiving them.

5. Training to conduct fieldwork > Designing an outreach plan

Peer researchers will be then trained on how deliver the research methods that they have chosen and designed. This can also vary depending on what is decided on, from teaching interview skills, to being familiar with the survey platform.

Decisions to be made: Peer researchers will decide on an outreach plan, potentially dividing the work up into roles and responsibilities, and thinking about how they plan to reach their target sample.

6. Introduction to analysis > Creating key findings

Peer researchers are introduced to the process of analysing data, and how we organise the data they have gathered into key themes and findings. The learning will depend on what methods they have used, and the data gathered. These could be:

a. Introduction to qualitative analysis > Creating key themes from qualitative data

b. Introduction to quantitative analysis > Creating key findings from quantitative data

c. Introduction to analysing creative outputs > Creating key themes from creative data

Decision to be made: Deciding on what the key findings or key themes are from the data that they have gathered.

7. Introduction to campaigning and public speaking > Designing recommendations

Peer researchers are introduced to campaigning, social change, and are supported to develop their public speaking skills. This will move on to learning about the role of recommendations in research and examining where power and influence is.

Decision to be made: Creating a first draft of recommendations from the research, which address the key findings or themes that have emerged.

Stakeholder engagement session > Revising recommendations: The final opportunity to bring external stakeholders in informally, where peer researchers present the key findings and initial recommendations. This can be refined or looked to be actioned on.

Resources for training

- **Technology:** While not essential, it can be extremely useful to have basic technological equipment available to the facilitator during training. A computer, a project or screen, can enable the use of PowerPoint slides to increase the accessibility of information and provide structure to longer sessions. Wi-Fi in the room can also enable collaboration or engagement of the room with quick online quizzes, surveys with Mentimeter, or other contributions. Many young people do not have unlimited data and need free Wi-Fi to access this. If you can have a number of laptops that young people can safely use too, this can enable another range of activities that can be done, as well as enable digital note taking.
- **Flipcharts, pens, blue tack, post it notes:** Ubiquitous in the youth sector, working collectively on flipcharts, pens, and post it notes is the simplest form of effective co-working. Peer researchers can either each write what they want or nominate a scribe with the most legible handwriting. Post-it notes allow them to write information that is either colour coded, or easily moved and re-organised by topics, or themes, in post-discussion reflections. Blue tack allows flipcharts to be pinned to walls, letting young people stand and move around the space.
- **Recording devices:** This is essential in some form when conducting fieldwork, but it is always useful to bring in the non-smart recording devices that peer researchers will use. This is to help familiarise them with how to record properly, but also can be used to record any test interviews that they might do.
- **Print outs:** As part of the training programme, a number of A3 and A4 print outs are useful for peer researchers to work on as part of their learning. This can be exercises designed for them to demonstrate and apply a concept that has been taught, or print outs that provide useful information and guidance as a reminder during any design work. For example, a guide of the different types of survey question when tasked to come up with survey questions.

Flipcharts and pens are essential

5.5 Icebreakers and team building exercises

Icebreakers are a great way of energising peer researchers at the start of the session, while getting to know each other. Different icebreakers have different roles that they can play, with each being more suitable to what is needed, depending on what stage of the process they take place, or what the topic of learning is.

1. **Introduction to research > Determining research question:** These icebreakers are designed to shift the peer researchers' mindset from "passive observer" to "active investigator." They encourage the group to challenge assumptions, realize that "facts" can be subjective, and understand that research starts with asking "why."

- **The "Why" Chain:** Pairs face each other. Partner A makes a statement about a problem ("Young people are tired"). Partner B asks "Why?". Partner A answers. Partner B asks "Why?" to that answer. They repeat this 5 times to get to a root.
- **Fact or Opinion:** The facilitator reads out statements ("It is raining outside" vs. "It is miserable outside"). The group moves to the left of the room for "Fact" and right for "Opinion." This introduces the concept of bias and evidence.
- **What would you research:** Ask the group to break into pairs and discuss what they have a shared interest in. They will then be asked to describe what research project they would do based on this, and how they would do this.

2. **Introduction to research methodology > Deciding on research methods:** These exercises physically demonstrate the difference between quantitative data (numbers/hard facts) and qualitative data (stories/feelings/nuance). They help peer researchers understand that both are valuable, but they tell the story in very different ways.

- **The Human Bar Chart (Quant):** Ask a question like "How many hours of sleep did you get?" or "How far did you travel to get here?" Have the group physically line up in order or cluster by number. This visualizes quantitative data.
- **The Human Opinion Scale (Qual):** Ask a a question like “We should scrap the monarchy.” or “London is the best city in the world.” The group then moves to stand where their opinion lies, with one end being strongly disagree and the other end strongly agree. You then invite them to speak about why they stood where they did.

3. **Research method design > Designing chosen research methods:** These icebreakers are practical warm-ups that highlight the importance of checking your own bias, active listening, and how the way a question is framed can drastically change the answer.

- **The "Leading" Game:** One person tries to get another to say a specific word (for example "Pizza") by asking questions, but they aren't allowed to say the word themselves. This highlights how easily we can bias answers with our questions.
- **Bad Listening Roleplay:** In pairs, one person talks about their weekend. The other person acts as the "worst listener ever" (looking away, interrupting, checking phone). Then, switch to "active listening." Discuss the difference in how the speaker felt.
- **Draw Your Mood:** Everyone gets a piece of paper and 2 minutes to draw how they are feeling right now using only shapes and colours (no words/stick figures). They share (if comfortable).

4. **Safeguarding and research ethics > Co-designing a consent form:** Ethics can feel dry or scary. These icebreakers make concepts like "informed consent," "power," and "personal boundaries" tangible and relatable, helping peer researchers understand why these rules exist to protect both them and their participants.

- **A written secret:** Young people are asked to write down a secret that they don’t want anyone in the room to know about themselves on a piece of paper. They fold it, and pass it to another person in the room and asked to reflect on how it feels for them to have it in their hands.

- **Traffic Lights:** Give everyone Red, Amber, and Green cards. Read out scenarios ("Someone asks for your phone number," "Someone asks what food you like"). Participants raise the card corresponding to their comfort level. This visually demonstrates that everyone has different boundaries.
- **Explain it to a 5-Year-Old:** Give the group a complex paragraph (like a standard Terms & Conditions text). Challenge them to rewrite it or act it out so a 5-year-old would understand it. This preps them for writing accessible consent forms.

5. **Training to conduct fieldwork > Designing an outreach plan:** These icebreakers are designed to build social confidence and resilience. They help peer researchers get comfortable with approaching strangers, articulating their pitch quickly, and "desensitizing" the fear of rejection.

- **The "No" Game:** The goal is to get rejected. Pairs ask each other for ridiculous things ("Can I have your shoes?", "Will you give me £100?"). The partner must say "No" firmly. The asker celebrates the "No." This desensitizes the fear of rejection during recruitment.
- **The 60-Second Pitch:** Everyone stands in two concentric circles facing each other. They have 60 seconds to explain the project to the person opposite them before the circle rotates. This builds fluency in explaining the research.
- **Network Web:** Young people are asked to draw a spider web of their networks and connections, with those closest to them in the centre, before mapping out all the different people, places, and services they might be connected with.

6. **Introduction to analysis > Creating key findings:** These exercises get peer researchers thinking about how to group disparate pieces of information into coherent themes, turning a "mess" of data into a clear story through pattern recognition.

- **Sort and categorise:** Divide the group into teams and present a collection of images or items, like animals or pens. Ask them to sort them into categories. Do not give instructions on how to sort. Compare how different tables analysed the same "data" differently.
- **The Pattern Detective:** Show the group a series of 5 random photos. Ask them to come up with a "Theory" that connects all 5 photos together. This mimics finding a theme across different interview transcripts.
- **Headline Writer:** Show the peer researchers a graph or polling data from YouGov and ask them to write a sensationalist headline from it. They share this with the group and discuss any differences in the angle/data point they used.

7. **Introduction to campaigning and public speaking > Designing recommendations:** These icebreakers activate "agency," encouraging peer researchers to step into a leadership role, own their voice, and imagine concrete changes rather than just listing problems.

- **If I Ruled the World:** Pass a pen around. Whomever holds it has 30 seconds to decree one law they would implement immediately if they were King/Queen/Ruler of the world. They stand and then invite challenge on their decree from others.
- **Recommend me:** The group is presented a range of mundane challenges (“I never get out of bed on time”) and are asked what changes they would recommend to my life to overcome the challenges. They should think of easy fixes and larger structural changes.
- **The Magic Wand:** Ask: "If you had a magic wand and could fix the problem we researched instantly, what would it look like?" Then ask: "What is the closest real-world version of that magic spell?" This moves from fantasy to practical recommendation.

5.6 Introduction to research training and research question

Introduction to research > Determining research question

Peer researchers are introduced to research at the start, what it means, what the role of research is, and what the values of peer research are. They will also start to have conversations about the issue to be explored and learn about how to format a research question.

Decision to be made: Creating a first draft of the research question that they will answer.

The first session of peer research training tends to have far more on the agenda than the rest. It is often the first-time peer researchers meet, and they need to be introduced to the project and each other. Project housekeeping, such as outlining timelines, creating a code of conduct, familiarising peer researchers with the space, and establishing contact, also should be done at the start.

Learning objectives

Peer researchers should be able to:

1. Describe what research is, and how it is used to affect change
2. Explain what peer research is, and why it is used compared to traditional research
3. Summarise some of the key concepts and context around the issue/topic of the research
4. Define a research question, and describe what the role it plays in a research project

Learning output

- **Research elevator pitch:** Peer researchers should by the end of the first session be able to do an 'elevator pitch' for their project. Initially they should be able to communicate what they're trying to achieve, and why it is important.
- **Peer research question draft:** Peer researchers should have a draft research question that they have created and agreed on as a group, with the decisions they have taken being able to be communicated clearly to external stakeholders.

Example agenda

Introduction and icebreaker	10.00am – 10.30am
Introduction to research	10.30am – 11.30am
Peer research vs traditional research	11.30am – 12.00pm
Lunch	12.00pm – 1.00pm
Context – why are we here?	1.00pm – 2.00pm
Introduction to research question	2.00pm – 2.30pm
Designing our research question	2.30pm – 3.30pm
Next steps	3.30pm – 4.00pm

1. Introduction to research

Key learning: Understand what the definition of research is

We start by discussing research, and what they understand to mean by research. It is important to have as many examples, relevant to their lives as possible, with a mix of research relevant to the topic being explored but also fun examples like silly polls from YouGov.

We then invite young people to define research in their own words, and discuss how their definitions differ from each other. We then provide a definition of research:

> *"a detailed study of a subject, especially in order to discover (new) information or reach a (new) understanding"*

It is important that young people understand that research it is not always about finding new information but also to get new understanding. This is where specificity really matters for projects, as peer researchers need to be aware of why they were recruited and how their lived experience, and how the specifics of the project they're working on with inevitably lead to new information or new understanding.

Key learning: What the purpose of research is and the impact it has

We then provide a number of clear examples of research projects, and how it has impacted on policy and practice. These are three examples we have used in the past:

1. **Minimum wage:** We provide the research of "Minimum Wages and Employment: A Case Study of the Fast-Food Industry in New Jersey and Pennsylvania" that explored the impact of raising the minimum in one area and not in another. This allows us to discuss barriers to a minimum wage, and the important role that the research did in making the argument for it.
2. **Sugar Tax:** Research from the British Medical Journey which examined the introduction of a 10% levy on sugar-sweetened drinks in Mexico, which led to a 10% fall in sales. However, we get young people to explore the short- and long-term impact of the tax in the UK, which allows us to discuss unintended consequences of policy and the difficulty in drawing from learnings from a different country or cultural context.
3. **Research related to the topic:** We lastly find a piece of research that has created impact on policy and practice that is relevant to the topic. For example, if the research is about mental health, we would look at the research that supported the creation of CAMHS as a model.

The idea that we want peer researchers to take away is the role that research plays in our society, and the decision-making process. It also starts by grounding research in action and impact, so they know we are trying to create change with the research they are conducting.

2. Peer research vs traditional research

Key learning: Understand what the definition of peer research is

We now shift to the definition of peer research, and what a peer means. The definition we provide young people to discuss is:

> *"Peer research is research that is steered and conducted by people with lived experience of the issue being studied."*

It is important to give clear examples that just make sense to young people. We provide examples like training people from the Jamaican community to conduct interviews with people in the Jamaican community and discuss what the advantages or disadvantages would be of this.

We then provide a number of research topics and ask the young people who they feel the peer researchers should be for each. For example, if you were to conduct research on how to improve a local park, who should

the peer researchers be? Young people will often say young people who live locally, who use the park, but it is important for them to recognise that you would recruit peer researchers who do not use the park as well, so we have all opinions.

Key learning: The history of peer research

We speak about the origins of peer research, participatory action research, and the history of the term "lived experience". The definition of lived experience we use is:

> *"Personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events rather than through representations constructed by other people."*

We then invite them to, in pairs, explore what they lived experience is of someone else in the room and share it with the group. The challenge is to not focus on protected characteristics like race or gender, but the first-hand direct experiences that they feel define them. Once they share this, they are asked to think about what peer research project the person would be suitable for based on their experiences.

Key learning: The difference of peer research vs traditional research

Lastly, we explore the idea of power in research and why peer research can play an important role in shifting power back to communities and people.

Feature	Traditional Research (Academic)	Peer Research (Participatory)
Core Philosophy	Research is done "on" a community. The community is the subject of study.	Research is done "with" or "by" a community. The community acts as partners or leaders,
Who is the Researcher?	Professional academics or scientists (outsiders) who are trained in theory and standard methods.	"Experts by experience" (insiders) who share the background or lived experience of the group being studied.
Power Dynamics	Hierarchical. The professional researcher holds the power to design questions, interpret data, and publish results.	Shared/Egalitarian. Power is shifted to the community to define what questions matter and how data is interpreted.
Primary Goal	To generate objective knowledge, test theories, or fill gaps in academic literature (often for publication).	To empower the community, build skills, and generate actionable social change alongside knowledge.
Data Quality	Prioritizes Objectivity & Standardization. Focuses on removing bias and using consistent, replicable measures.	Prioritizes Authenticity & Nuance. "Insiders" can elicit more honest answers and reach "less heard" voices that outsiders cannot access.
Main Limitation	Distance Bias. Researchers may misunderstand cultural context or miss the "real" story because they are outsiders.	Subjectivity. Critics argue it may lack neutrality or that peer researchers may over-identify with participants.

3. Context – why are we here?

Key learning: The context of the topic being researched

Projects will usually have a rough idea of what the topic the peer researchers are looking at, who have usually been recruited for their lived experience which is relevant to it. It is important to arm peer researchers with the context that they are entering into. This includes:

1. **Existing research, and gaps in research:** For example, if the topic is youth violence, what are all the relevant pieces of research on youth-violence, and what does it tell us?
2. **What is the system in place, and how it works:** For example, if the topic relates to housing associations, understanding what a housing association is, how it is structured, funded, and operates.
3. **Where power resides:** For example, if the topic is about transport, who are the key decision makers on transport policy in their area, and where power resides across local, regional, and central government.

4. Introduction to research questions

Key learning: What makes a strong research question

Peer researchers will be taught about the concept of a research question in research, why it is important, and how it guides the rest of the work. We explain that the research question is "the central issue to be resolved". We then go over the different aspects of a strong research question:

1. **Feasible:** The project is realistic given your constraints. Do you have the time, money, and access to answer this? A feasible question ensures you aren't trying to interview the President or survey 10,000 people when you only have two weeks and zero budget.
2. **Original:** The question offers a fresh perspective or fills a gap in knowledge. You aren't just repeating what has already been proven. You might be looking at a new demographic, applying a new theory to an old problem, or contradicting existing assumptions. It answers: "What new insight will this generate?"
3. **Relevant:** The question matters to your field, society, or a specific community. This passes the "So what?" test. The answer should solve a problem, inform policy, or advance an academic debate. It ensures your research isn't trivial.
4. **Complex and arguable:** The answer requires analysis, interpretation, and argument, not just a fact. You avoid simple "Yes/No" questions or questions that can be answered with a quick Google search. A good research question requires you to weigh evidence and build a case.
5. **Researchable:** The question can be answered using actual data and evidence. You avoid questions based purely on opinion, morality, or hypothetical futures that can't be tested. If you can't observe it, measure it, or find documents about it, you can't research it.
6. **Focused:** The scope is narrow enough to be manageable but broad enough to be significant. Instead of asking about "Global Warming," you focus on "The impact of rising temperatures in London on schools." It prevents the project from becoming a sprawling mess.
7. **Specific:** The terms, variables, and population are precisely defined. You avoid vague language. Instead of asking about "students" (which students? what age? where?), you specify "undergraduate engineering students in the UK." This ensures you know exactly what you are measuring.

Depending on the group we might break down different example research questions in simpler terms too. For example, focusing on Who, What, Where, and Why? This can be done by providing an example research question and having them identify the who, what, where, and why of it.

5. Designing a research question

Key learning: How to write and refine a research question

Lastly, we get the peer researchers in pairs or groups to design several research questions for the project. There will be a huge variation depending on the lived experience and interests of the different peer researchers. They will then come together to discuss the different drafts and think about the commonality between them. The aim is, by the end of the first session, to have a draft research question that everyone is happy with.

What data do you wa

- Transcripts of interviews and answers
- Statistics of girls aged 11-18
- How many girls aged 11-18 live in Westminister.
- How many other girl focused organizations are
- Trends young girls have been following /focus

youth club?

Research question: What are the Barriers ~~for~~ for young girls aged 11-18 years to attending girls only sessions in their local youth clubs in Westminister (+ surrounding Boroughs).

What resea

surveys. (online & in person)

focus groups. (zooming in on the qu

Using pre-found statistics (google etc.). - Secondar

Workshops (benifits of youth clubs

Scale from 1-10 to show the diffe

Stakeholder engagement: Research question

After or as part of the first training, the peer researchers should engage with relevant external stakeholders. This is the first opportunity them to discuss the project, the scope of the research, and get feedback on their research question draft. It is important to get buy-in from stakeholders from the very start, and being involved in influencing the overall research question is a great way of doing that. This session is the first opportunity for peer researchers to test their ideas in the "real world." Having drafted a research question, they now present it to external stakeholders (such as youth workers, local councillors, or service providers) to test its feasibility and relevance.

The real challenge for all stakeholder engagement is navigating the power dynamics. It is a critical moment for peer research values, and peer researchers should be briefed beforehand that they own the final decision. We are transparent with them about the power that different stakeholders have to affect change, and the pros and cons of listening to their feedback. We need to be cautious of scope creep, where different stakeholders with competing interests may push and pull peer researchers in different directions and away from their original aims. We teach peer researchers to listen to all advice but to politely push back if stakeholders try to steer the research away from the young people's priorities.

For this first engagement, peer researchers should take the lead in three main stages:

1. The "Elevator Pitch"

We start by revisiting the "Research elevator pitch" prepared in the previous session. We explain that stakeholders are busy and need to understand the Why and the What immediately. We ask peer researchers to present their draft question using a simple structure:

- The Issue: What is the problem?
- The Research Question: What are we looking to find out?
- The Goal: What change do we want to see?

It is important that the peer researchers lead this presentation to establish their authority as the drivers of the project right from the start.

2. Stress-testing the question

We break the room into mixed groups of peer researchers and stakeholders. The goal is not for stakeholders to change the topic, but to help refine how it is investigated. We provide stakeholders with specific criteria to critique the question (drawing from the "Designing a research question"):

- Is it Feasible? Do we have access to the data/people needed to answer this?
- Is it Specific? Is the language too broad?
- Is it Actionable? Will the answer help decision-makers?

3. Feedback consolidation and Agreement

After the stakeholders leave (or in a closed final circle), we regroup to discuss the feedback. This is the opportunity for peer researchers to reflect on the feedback, asking questions like:

- "What did they say that worried us?"
- "What advice helps make the research easier?"
- “How can we use what was said to make our research question better?”

We then use these reflections to redraft the research question as a group. Once the group agrees on the final wording, this becomes the fixed anchor for the rest of the project.

5.7 Introduction to research methodology training

Introduction to research methodology > Deciding on research methods

Peer research are introduced to the difference between quantitative and qualitative data, and what the benefits and drawbacks are of both. They will be then given an overview of different research methods.

Decision to be made: Deciding on which research methods they want to use for the project.

Learning objectives

Peer researchers should be able to:

1. Summarise some of the key concepts and context around the issue/topic of research, identifying gaps in knowledge and questions that they want to answer.
2. Explain the difference between qualitative and quantitative data, the strengths and weaknesses of both, and the benefits of a mixed-methods approach.
3. Describe different relevant research methods for gathering qualitative and quantitative data, understanding the benefits and drawbacks of both.

Learning outputs

- **Peer research question finalised:** Peer researchers should now have a finalised research question, that has been reiterated from the feedback of external stakeholders, that will guide the rest of the research process.
- **Research methods chosen:** Peer researchers should have a clear plan, with a timeline of dates, of what data they want to gather to answer their research question, and which research methods they're using to gather it. This plan has to be underpinned by appropriate support and capacity from the organisation.
- **Question mindmap:** Peer researchers will have produced questions that they want to answer over the course of the research which will help them answer their key research question. These initial questions could be groups thematically, or by stakeholder.

Example agenda

Introduction and icebreaker	10.00am – 10.30am
Qualitative vs quantitative	10.30am – 11.30am
Research methods	11.30am – 12.00pm
Lunch	12.00pm – 1.00pm
Stakeholder mapping	1.00pm – 2.00pm
Question generation	2.00pm – 2.30pm
Research methodology design	2.30pm – 3.30pm
Next steps	3.30pm – 4.00pm

1. Qualitative vs Quantitative

Key learning: Understand the difference between "Breadth" and "Depth"

Starting with the difference between qualitative and quantitative, we start by stripping away the academic jargon and asking peer researchers to think about how they prefer to tell a story or prove a point. We ask: "If you wanted to prove that school dinners are bad, would you count how many chips are left on plates, or would you ask a student to describe the taste?"

We then introduce the two core concepts:

- **Quantitative (The "What" and "How Many"):** We explain this is about numbers, statistics, and broad patterns. We use the example of describing a cabinet, by the weight, how much it cost, how many books it holds, and it's dimensions.
- **Qualitative (The "Why" and "How"):** We explain this is about words, stories, and feelings. It tells us why people feel that way. We then describe the cabinet with rich description (mahogany, dull shine), and what it means to me (sentimental, was my grandad's, grew up with it).

Key learning: Strengths and Weaknesses

We facilitate a discussion on the pros and cons of each of qualitative and quantitative.

- **Quantitative strengths:** Good for convincing politicians with "hard facts" and showing the scale of a problem. Weakness: Can miss the nuance; you can't ask "why?" to a tick-box.
- **Qualitative strengths:** Good for understanding complex emotions and getting human stories that change hearts. Weakness: People might say "that's just one person's opinion."

We invite young people how they would investigate example research questions using quantitative and qualitative data, then ask them to speculate on why there might be disparities between them. For example:

- **Am I good at football?**
- **Quantitative:** Look at how many games I win, how many times I score, make successful passes, make successful tackles, and the distance I run on the pitch.
- **Qualitative:** Interview, me, my coach, and spectators. Conduct a focus group with my team. Record footage of me playing and show it to a professional to comment.
- **Disparity to reflect on:** Everyone you speak to say that I'm the best footballer they've ever seen or played with, but the data shows I never successfully score, pass, or tackle. Why?

This helps illustrate some of the limitations of either quantitative (not measuring something important), or qualitative (subjectivity, bias). We typically conclude by introducing Mixed Methods: using both to get the "best of both worlds": but we manage expectations about the time this takes.

2. Research Methods

Key learning: Matching the method to the goal

Once they understand the type of data (Qual/Quant), we introduce the tools (Methods) used to get it. To keep it simple, we usually teach three main categories: qualitative research, quantitative research, and creative research methods. This is slightly misleading, with creative research being a subset of qualitative research. However, while focus groups and interviews have a lot of cross over in teaching, creative research methods can be wide ranging and complex, so to combine them can be confusing. As such, we simply teach three different types of research methods:

1. **Quantitative Methods (Surveys):** We explain that surveys are great for reaching lots of people quickly. We discuss how these can be done online (TypeForm, Google Forms) or in person (street surveys).
2. **Qualitative Methods (Interviews and Focus Groups):** We explain that interviews are 1-on-1 conversations for deep personal stories, while focus groups are discussions where participants bounce ideas off each other.
3. **Creative Methods:** We introduce arts-based approaches (photography, mapping, drawing) to get data from young people who might find surveys boring or interviews intimidating. We treat this as a form of qualitative data.

We ask the group to critique these methods based on their own lives: "Would you fill in a 20-minute survey? Would you feel comfortable talking in a focus group?" This helps them think about feasibility early on.

3. Stakeholder Mapping

Key learning: Identifying who holds the answers

Before designing questions, peer researchers need to know who they are asking. We use a "Bullseye" or "Target" exercise on a flipchart.

- Centre: The peer researchers/young people directly affected.
- Middle Ring: People who work with them (teachers, youth workers, parents).
- Outer Ring: Decision-makers (councillors, commissioners, heads of service).

We ask the peer researchers to place sticky notes on the target to identify who has the information they need to answer their research question. For example, if the question is about "unsafe parks," they might need to speak to young people (for their experience) and the lighting engineer (for the technical reason).

This also helps think about who they might be able to reach as part of this research, and which research methods are most suitable for them. For example, you might take a more qualitative approach to the outer rings, where the sample size of decision-makers or heads of services is lower than the centre, where there is a large population of young people.

We then ask peer researchers which stakeholders need to be involved in refining the research question after the session. Ideally, you want a few stakeholders from each section, however the priority should be on the middle and outer ring, with the peer researchers providing the perspective of young people directly affected.

4. Question Generation

Key learning: Reflecting on what questions are relevant to the research

We now have a Research Question (from the previous session) and a list of Stakeholders. Now we ask: "What do we actually need to ask these people to find out the answer?" At this stage, we don't want young people to think about creating survey questions or focus group questions, but simply mapping the questions or lines of enquiry they think need to be asked in some form to get the answers they need.

We run a "Question Storming" session. Peer researchers work in pairs to write down as many questions as they can think of on post-it notes. We encourage "open" questions (Why/How) over "closed" questions (Yes/No) at this stage. We then group these post-its into themes on a wall ("Questions about safety," "Questions about cost," "Questions about feelings"). This forms the skeleton of their future interview guides or surveys. These questions are then brought into subsequent sessions when designing research methods, so young people don't have to start from a blank slate, which helps them focus solely on the challenge of translating these into effective survey or interview questions.

5. Research Methodology Design

Key learning: How to choose methods appropriate for

This is the most critical part of the session. The peer researchers must decide exactly what they will do. They cannot do everything. We bring back the Scope Triangle (Ambition vs Feasibility vs Influence). We ask them to choose a package of methods that fits their timeline and budget.

We ask the group to vote on or agree to a final plan, considering their research question, their stakeholders, and the pros and cons of different research methods. For example:

- Example Plan A: "We will do a survey of 100 students and 2 focus groups with teachers."
- Example Plan B: "We will do 15 deep-dive interviews with young carers and a photo-voice project."

We challenge them on feasibility: "Do we actually have access to 100 students? Do we have time to transcribe 15 interviews?" We also need peer researchers to think about, if project time allows, whether to have staged approach to the research methods. For example:

- We will start by doing 2 focus groups with teachers, which will help inform and refine our survey that goes out to 100 students. It also ensures teachers are onboard and help push the survey."
- "We will start by doing a survey of 100 students, and then the findings will be used to design an interview guide that invites teachers to reflect on the findings from their students."

5.8 Designing research methods training

Research method design > Designing chosen research methods

Depending on what they selected, peer researchers will learn how to design and conduct those research methods in greater detail. These could be:

1. Introduction to survey design > Designing a research survey
2. Introduction to interviews and focus groups > Designing an interview guide
3. Introduction to creative methods > Designing a creative method

Decision to be made: What questions to ask in the survey/interview, or what the creative approach they want to use will be delivered.

Learning objectives

Peer researchers should be able to:

1. Understand how to formulate questions for different research methods, for example, interview questions, or multi-choice survey questions.
2. Understand different approaches to creative research methods, and how to use them
3. Understand how to critically evaluate research methods and provide feedback

Learning outputs

- **Draft research methods designed:** The peer researchers will have produced a draft design of their chosen research methods, for example a draft interview guide or draft survey.
- **Roles and responsibilities:** If there will be roles and responsibilities assigned as part of the project, this is where peer researchers will decide on which methods they want to use/lead on.

Example agenda

The designing research methods training is the stage that can differ the most from project to project, depending on methods chosen and capacity. There are different ways of approaching it:

1. **One session per method to be designed:** Peer researchers spend a whole session learning about in-depth interviews and designing their interview guide. This works especially combined with stakeholder engagement in the second half, so interview guides can be refined and finalised on the same day.
2. **One session for all methods to be designed:** Peer researchers spend the session learning about and designing all the research methods chosen. This is achievable but can be a very long and tiring session for young people, so a longer day with more breaks is needed. I would also limit the session to the design of two research methods (interviews, surveys), as three can be too much in one day (interviews, focus groups, creative methods).
3. **One session to design and train peer researchers on one method:** Peer researchers spend the morning learning about and designing a research method, and the afternoon being trained in how to conduct fieldwork (next session).

In terms of structuring the sessions themselves, rather than exact agendas (given how changeable it is), we focus more on dividing the time spent on designing a research method into two: learning about the method and designing the method. If the session is all day focused on interviews, then the morning is spent learning about in-depth interviews, strengths and weaknesses, interview guides, and then the afternoon is about designing an effective interview guide.

1. Qualitative research methods

Key learning: Introduction to interviews and interview design

We explain that interviews are about getting "deep" stories rather than broad numbers. However, high-quality interviews require preparation, or peer researchers risk getting one-word answers. We go into far more detail about in-depth interviews that we did in previous sessions, providing examples of interview transcripts, or footage of in-depth interviews online.

We focus on teaching about interview guides too, providing examples, and teaching young people a “funnel” approach. The interview must start broad and comfortable to build trust (the warm-up), move to the specific, difficult questions (the exploration), and end on a neutral note (the cool-down) so the participant leaves safely. As an example, we source questions from the peer researchers that they would like to know about each other, draft it into an interview guide and have them try interviewing each other and feeding back what they learned.

Key learning: Designing an interview guide

We move to drafting the actual questions. We emphasize that this is a guide, not a script. We bring in the questions that were written during the previous session’s question mapping as a starting point, asking them to reflect on how they would be worded as an interview question. We teach peer researchers about the following types of questions:

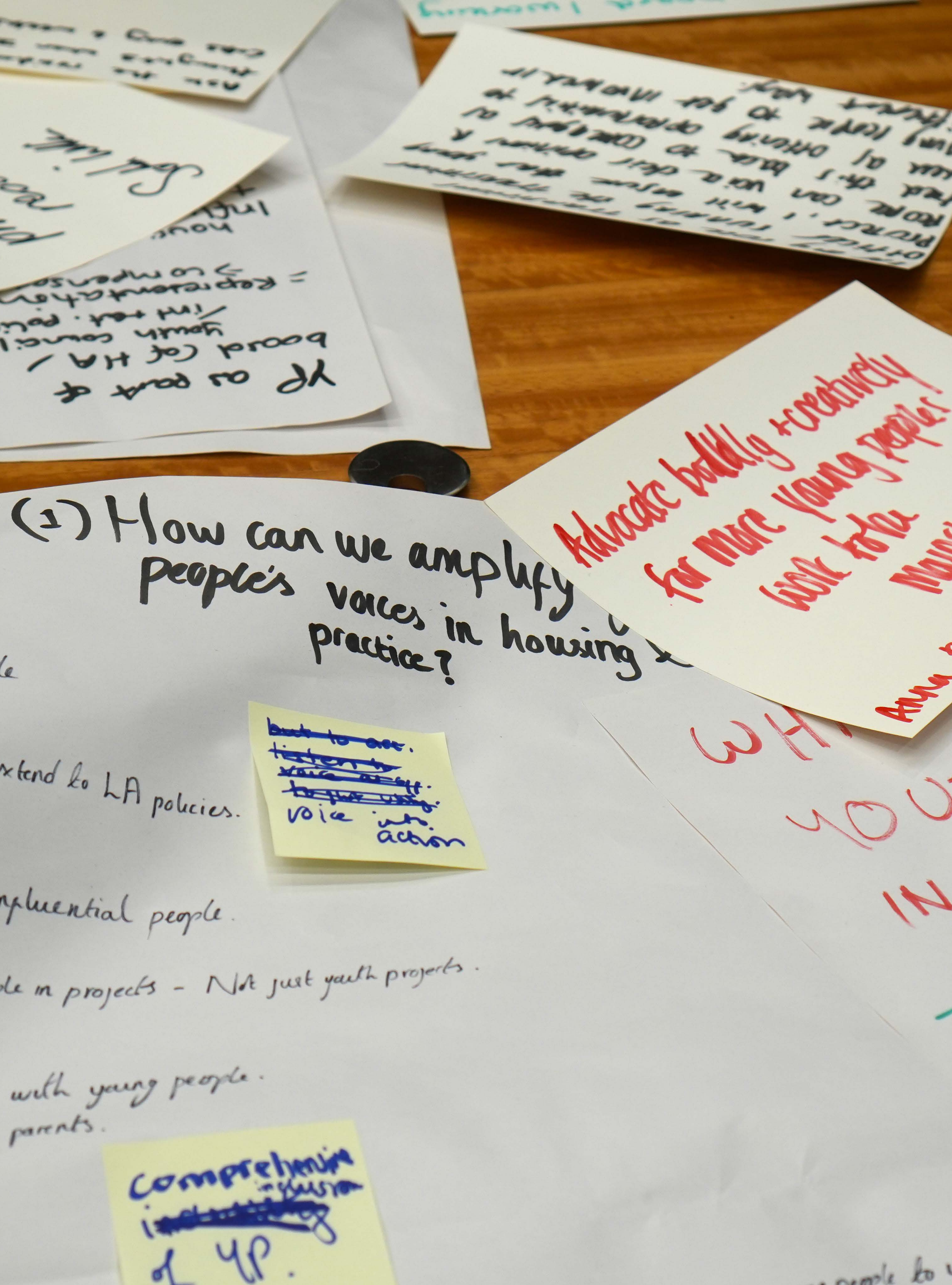
- **Open vs. Closed questions:** We do a sorting exercise. We give the group a list of questions and ask them to sort them into "Closed" (Yes/No) and "Open" (Why/How). We explain that interview guides should rely almost entirely on open questions. We also give them a number of closed questions and ask them to reframe them as open questions.
- **Leading questions:** It’s really important that peer researchers understand what a leading question is. We describe it simply as a question where you can tell what the interviewer’s opinion is from it. The theatrical example we use is American courtroom dramas, inviting peer researchers to play the lawyer posing a number of leading questions to a witness to convict them of a crime (You were always jealous of them, weren’t you?)
- **Follow up questions:** We teach peer researchers that follow up questions, those not necessarily written on the interview guide, are some of the most important questions. This is especially true for the questions that come from them, and their active listening to the answers from participants. We teach several neutral probes and follow up in a number of categories, for example clarification (Can you explain what you mean by X?) or elaboration (Can you tell me more about X?).

We typically get peer researchers to then design several interview questions in pairs or smaller groups on post it notes. We then bring the groups or pairs together to discuss the different questions they wrote, before working together to arrange these to find a logical “flow” of the conversation. They are asked to reflect on whether the first sets of questions allow the participant to “warm-up” before moving onto the more complex questions, as well as identify any duplication.

Key learning: Introduction to focus groups and focus group design

We explain that focus groups are different from interviews because they are about the interaction between participants. We provide examples of focus group transcripts and how it compared to in-depth interviews. There are also a lot of great focus group example videos on YouTube, especially of politics that can be shown as examples.

We explain that a focus group guide needs fewer questions than an interview guide because the discussion takes longer. Often young people will look at focus groups afterwards, and then it becomes about adapting an existing interview guide to a focus group guide. For example, we get young people to think about how questions become more prompts that spark debate or a difference in opinion, or how to word questions to invite everyone to join in.


(1) How can we amplify
people's voices in housing
practice?
voice with action
policies.
Not just youth projects.
with young people.
parents.
comprehensive inclusion
of YP.
Advocate boldly + creatively
for more young people

2. Quantitative research methods

Key learning: Introduction to survey design

We introduce surveys as a tool for reaching lots of people to understand broad patterns. We explain the concept of "Rubbish in, Rubbish out", that if the questions are bad, the data will be useless.

We also provide far more examples of survey data, ranging from fun polls about what animals people think they could take in a fight (Which animals could Britons beat in a fight? | YouGov), to health data on baby growth charts (RCPCH-WHO baby growth charts for 0-4 years).

We try to teach some golden rules for survey design, for example:

- **Keep it short:** We ask the group: "What is the longest survey you would fill in?" Usually, the answer is 5–10 minutes. We agree to keep our survey within that limit. We also typically warn against the use of too many open box questions for this reason.
- **One idea per question:** We warn against "double-barrelled" questions ("Is the park safe and clean?"). We explain that a participant might think it is safe but dirty, so they won't know how to answer.
- **No leading questions:** We show examples of biased questions in survey design ("Don't you agree that X is bad?") and ask the group to rewrite them to be neutral ("How would you rate X?").

We then provide some examples of surveys with clear errors, and ask them to evaluate them and think about what changes they would make (shorten, make certain questions less leading).

Key learning: Understand the different types of survey questions

We explain the different tools available in a survey and when to use them. It is important that young people practice turning a line of enquiry into each of these different formats before attempting to design a survey, so you can check that they understand the purpose and pitfalls of each. In particular we focus on:

- **Multiple Choice (Factual):** Best for simple facts (Which borough do you live in?), usually in the "About You" section of the survey at the start. It is good to get young people to reflect on the different equalities questions and how useful they might be to collect for the research question.
- **Multiple Choice (Attitudinal):** These questions are for presenting participants with a range of options to choose one, multiple, or as many as they like (What form of transport do you use to get around London?). For these, we stress the importance of providing a comprehensive list of options and not relying on the "Other" option (For example, leaving out walking as a form of transport would undermine the findings of the question).
- **Likert Scales:** We explain this is a fancy term for "On a scale of 1 to 5". This is best for measuring feelings or attitudes ("How safe do you feel?"). We explore the advantages and disadvantages of using a 1 to 5 scale compared to a 1 to 10, or visual scales like smiley faces.
- **Ranking questions:** Ranking questions allow peer researchers to provide a range of options that participants can rank in a range of different ways (importance, likelihood to attend, most desirable to least).
- **Open box:** Best for catching things we missed ("Is there anything else you want to say?"), but we warn them that this takes longer to analyse later.

Key learning: Designing a survey

We ask the group to critique their question ideas from the previous "Question Generation" session and use them to turn into survey questions. Like our approach with interview guides, we typically ask them to design survey questions in pairs or groups, before coming together to reflect and organise all the design questions into a logical order. However, with survey design we put more emphasis on having a good mix of different question types, and a limit on certain question types (open box).

3. Creative methods

Key learning: Introduction to creative methods

We explain that creative methods (drawing, mapping, photography) are a way to get data from young people in a more engaging way. It is also a way of using young people's existing interests, in arts or crafts, while providing very rich data.

Method	What it entails	Strengths	Weaknesses & Risks
Arts-based approaches (Drawing, Zines, Poetry)	Young people create visual art, zines, or poetry to express their feelings, experiences, or ideas regarding the research topic.	**Engagement:** Effective for engaging young people who find surveys boring or interviews intimidating. **Emotional Depth:** Can express emotions and ideas that may not surface through standard surveys or interviews.	**Interpretation:** The "data" is not just the art but the explanation; without a debrief, the meaning can be lost or misinterpreted. **Ownership:** Issues regarding who owns the piece and how they are credited must be managed carefully.
Photography / Photo-voice	Peer researchers or participants take photos to document their daily lives, barriers they face, or environments they interact with.	**Visual Evidence:** Provides powerful visual evidence of "daily challenges" or physical barriers (in housing or public spaces). **Accessibility:** Allows participation from those who may struggle with written methods.	**Anonymity:** Photos may inadvertently capture faces, locations, or details that identify individuals, posing privacy risks . **Consent:** Ongoing consent is required if images are used publicly (social media vs. internal reports).
Mapping (Social or Physical)	Using digital tools or paper to map out specific locations, such as safe vs. unsafe spaces, or social connections.	**Systemic Insight:** Helps identify systemic issues like environmental design, lighting, or gaps in youth provision. **Pattern Recognition:** Visualizes clusters of issues ("no safe places") effectively.	**Identifiability:** Detailed maps might reveal specific locations of vulnerable young people, requiring careful management of data privacy.
Video Diaries / Digital Content	Participants record "day in the life" video diaries or create digital content to document their lived reality.	**Nuance:** Captures tone, expression, and context in a way written notes cannot. **Storytelling:** Strong for creating "human stories that change hearts" and engaging decision-makers.	**Equipment/Skills:** May require equipment or technical skills (editing) that necessitate extra training or stakeholder support. **Data Protection:** High risk regarding the storage and sharing of identifiable video data.
Walk-along Interviews	Researchers conduct interviews while walking through a specific environment (a park or estate) with the participant.	**Contextual triggers:** The environment itself prompts memories and comments that might be missed in a static room.	**Safety:** Conducting research in public or uncontrolled spaces presents higher physical safeguarding risks for peer researchers. **Recording:** Capturing clear audio for analysis is significantly harder in outdoor/noisy environments.

It is important to reflect with the peer researchers that the process is often as important or more than the end result. For example, the “data” isn’t just the photograph or art piece, it’s the participant explaining and reflecting on their choices when making it. This can be done through debriefs or interviews, where the peer researchers can ask why a certain colour was used, or why they chose a certain subject.

Creative research can be challenging for young people to understand, so it is important to provide really clear examples of practice. The emphasis is on showing how creativity is utilised in a research-style approach, with stages documented. For example, we use Authoring Our Own Stories or Know Your Roots as an example.

Digital creative methods

Lastly, we teach about digital creative methods, almost separately to creative methods that require in person engagement and physical resources (paints, paper, cameras). Being digital natives, young people can engage with a range of digital tools and social media intuitively, for example:

Method	What it entails	Strengths	Weaknesses & Risks
Digital Collage / Art (Adobe Express, Canva)	Peer researchers use online design platforms to create visual representations (collages, posters, or social media tiles) that express their feelings or experiences regarding a topic.	**Accessibility:** Allows young people to create professional-looking visuals without needing advanced artistic skills. **Familiarity:** Many young people are already familiar with these tools, making the "barrier to entry" lower.	**Interpretation:** As with physical art, the "data" is the explanation, not just the image. A "debrief" interview is essential to understand why they chose specific images or colours. **Copyright:** Using stock images or online assets can raise questions about ownership and copyright in final reports.
Video Vignettes / Digital Diaries (TikTok style)	Participants record short "day in the life" clips or video reflections on their phones to document their lived reality.	**Rich Data:** Captures tone, emotion, and environment in a way written text cannot. **Autonomy:** Gives participants control over what they show and how they tell their story.	**Identifiability:** Highly likely to capture faces or locations, making anonymity difficult to maintain. **Consent:** Requires specific consent for different uses (internal analysis vs. public sharing on social media).
Digital Mapping (Google Maps, Miro)	Using digital tools to drop pins or mark areas on a map to identify safe/ unsafe spaces or community assets.	**Visualizing Hotspots:** excellent for identifying patterns in specific locations ("unsafe parks") that text descriptions might miss. **Systemic Insight:** Highlights environmental or systemic issues like poor lighting or lack of provision.	**Privacy Risks:** Detailed mapping can reveal where vulnerable young people live or hang out, requiring careful data management. **Access:** Requires participants to have reliable internet access and devices.
Interactive Boards (Miro,	Using collaborative online whiteboards for "live" brainstorming, voting, or arranging ideas during online workshops.	C**ollaboration:** Allows peer researchers to work together in real-time, even if geographically separated. **Anonymity:** Tools like Mentimeter allow for anonymous voting, which can encourage honesty on sensitive topics.	**Digital Exclusion:** Relies on good Wi-Fi and data; those with limited access may be excluded from the activity. **Facilitation:** Requires strong facilitation to ensure the technology doesn't distract from the discussion.

Digital collage from Latin American Women's Service Peer Researchers

Digital Collage from Young Residents in Partnership Peer Researchers

Key learning: How to design a creative method

We start by outlining what the peer researchers have access to, and being transparent about which creative approaches we can support effectively given the resources or time available. It is important that the creative method designed, often very time-consuming to conduct properly, can be delivered to a high quality.

It is useful, if available, to bring in the survey or interview guide designed by peer researchers. This allows them to reflect on how the creative approach will fill potential gaps in the data, with creative approaches able to provide a large amount of rich, visual, narrative data.

Depending on the method chosen, it is good to road test it extensively, proportioning time in the session for peer researchers to try it themselves and reflect on the process before conducting it with external participants.

4. Research design

Key learning: Creating a timeline and order for research methods

This section of research design is usually done in the final parts of the session, often in the next steps, depending on how much planning needs to be done. This is about providing a space to think about practical delivery.

First, we want to think about a project timeline, and sequence of different research methods. We discuss the difference between "Linear" and "Non-linear" (iterative) approaches. It is important that peer researchers decide the order, for example:

- Should we do focus groups first to understand the issues, and then a survey to test those ideas (Exploratory)?
- Or should we do a survey first, and then interview people to explain the results (Explanatory)?

Lastly, we do an exercise of timeline mapping, either digitally or on a long piece of holiday. A simpler more visual version of a Gant chart, with peer researchers placing the different elements of fieldwork on the timeline, highlighting where they may have other commitments like holidays or exam periods.

Key learning: Understanding roles and responsibilities as a research team

Peer researchers have to work collectively as a team. While we encourage all peer researchers to participate in design and analysis, we often see fieldwork divided into different teams of responsibilities. We explain that not everyone has to do everything.

We ask young people to think about what skills they would like to gain, which aspects of the different research methods they are most interested in, and attempt to assign roles and responsibilities. This can be as simple as two young people focus on disseminating the survey, while two young people conduct in-depth interviews. However, this can be broken down further, for example two young people conduct in-depth interviews together, with one responsible for using the interview guide and another solely focused on asking to follow up questions between questions.

This can also allow you to tailor the next training session, providing training on conducting qualitative fieldwork to only those peer researchers who will be doing them.

Stakeholder engagement: Research methods

After the peer researchers have designed their specific research tools, whether that be an interview guide, a survey, or a plan for a creative workshop, they should engage with relevant external stakeholders again. This is the second major "checkpoint" in the project. While the previous engagement focused on what the project is asking, this session focuses on how they will ask it. It is an opportunity to stress-test the practical tools to ensuring they are accessible, safe, and effective before they go into the field. This is also a vital moment for securing access, as stakeholders who feel confident in the quality of the survey or interview guide are far more likely to help distribute it to the young people they work with.

As with the research question, power dynamics play a major role here. Professionals often have strong opinions about methodology. We teach peer researchers that they are the experts on the experience, while the stakeholders are often the experts on the system. Peer researchers need to be prepared to defend their design choices if they believe they will yield better data ("We know this question is bold, but young people won't answer honestly if we use formal language"). However, they must also be open to technical advice on safeguarding or logistical feasibility. For this engagement, peer researchers should take the lead in three main stages:

1. The "Methodology Walkthrough"

We start by having peer researchers present their chosen methods. Unlike the "Elevator Pitch" which is about the idea, this is a practical walkthrough of the user journey for a participant. We ask peer researchers to present their tools:

- **For Surveys:** "Walk us through the survey flow. How long does it take? What are the hardest questions?"
- **For Interviews/Focus Groups:** "What are our warm-up questions? How do we handle the difficult topics?"
- **For Creative Methods:** "Demonstrate the activity. What will participants actually be doing?"

This establishes the peer researchers' competence and shows stakeholders that the team has thought carefully about the participant experience.

2. Stress-testing the tools

We break the room into mixed groups. If multiple methods are being used, you can set up "stations" (a Survey Station and an Interview Station) and have stakeholders rotate. We provide stakeholders with specific criteria to critique the tools, ensuring feedback remains constructive. Is it accessible? Is it safe or appropriate? Is it feasible?

This last question is crucial. If a stakeholder says, "I wouldn't send this survey to my youth club because it feels too intrusive," peer researchers need to listen carefully, as this will block their access.

3. Feedback consolidation and the "Go/No-Go"

After the stakeholders leave, the peer research team regroups to process the feedback. This is the final quality control step before fieldwork begins. Once the group agrees on the edits (rephrasing a survey question or shortening an interview guide), the tools are finalized. We explain to the group that once fieldwork starts, we generally cannot change the questions again, or the data will be inconsistent. This is the "point of no return" for the design phase.

5.9 Research ethics, in the context of peer research

One of the most important aspects to involve peer researchers with is ethics, safeguarding, and data protection. Many projects will have staff taking a lead, providing clear guidelines and standards that peer researchers must understand and adhere to. However, there are elements of this that can and should be co-designed with the peer researchers, as part of the process of fully understanding and applying good practice.

The ethical concerns of research

We teach peer researchers about research ethics and try to apply what it means in practice to the work that they will be carrying out. These include:

Concern	What does it mean?	How do we mitigate this?
Language	Using language that stigmatises or "problematises" young people can reinforce negative stereotypes and cause harm.	We use asset-based language that focuses on the positive potential of young people rather than just their problems. We ensure questions are framed neutrally and respectfully.
Equity of access to study	Ensuring that the research does not exclude young people because they lack resources to take part.	We budget for "hidden costs" like data bundles for those without Wi-Fi, and prepaid travel cards.
Access to the results of the study	Participants to the research should have access to the research findings, and any outputs.	We make sure that peer researchers, as part of the information sheet provided to participants, signpost clearly to the project and where the results and outputs will be.
Consent and agreement	Consent is not just a signature, it is ensuring participants genuinely understand what they are signing up for, including risks and how data is used.	We treat consent as an ongoing conversation, checking in throughout the process. We co-design accessible, jargon-free information sheets. We accept "no" as a valid answer.
Minimising harm to participants	Research can be "extractive" or re-traumatising if participants share difficult stories without seeing any benefit or receiving support.	We provide remuneration (incentives) to thank them for their time. We signpost to support services if topics are sensitive.
Researcher-participant relationship	Peer researchers hold power when they have the "clipboard." There is a risk of them unintentionally pressuring friends or acting unethically.	We provide clear training on boundaries and the responsibilities of a researcher. Staff supervise early interviews to model good practice.
Anonymity and confidentiality	Protecting participants' private data. Peer researchers might use insecure methods (like personal phones) that risk data leaks.	We use non-smart recording devices provided by the project, not personal phones. We teach the difference between privacy (keeping data safe) and safeguarding (reporting harm).
Minimising hard to researcher	Peer researchers may be exposed to difficult stories or "triggering" conversations that impact their own mental health. They may also be exposed to risk during fieldwork in unsafe spaces or places.	We use Trauma-Informed Practice, ensuring there is a system for debriefing after fieldwork. Organising and supporting peer researchers to gather data from participants in spaces and places that are verified or have limited risk, for example youth clubs.
Serious concerns and safeguarding	Sometimes a participant discloses that they or someone else is in significant danger. Confidentiality must be broken here.	We have a clear mandatory-reporting flowchart. We ensure peer researchers know exactly who to call if a disclosure happens.
Recruitment of participants	There is a risk of "stacking the deck" (only asking friends who agree) or recruiting participants who are more at re-traumatisation.	We aim for a diverse sample rather than just convenience sampling. Organisations support young people with a wide recruitment of participants not known to them.

The ethical considerations of peer research

While we teach research ethics to peer researchers as part of their training, there are several additional ethical considerations for the supporting organisation unique to this approach.

1. The independence of peer researchers: Peer researchers can participate in a project where their decisions are less than meaningful. This can be for a variety of reasons, for example the illusion of choice that is limited by pre-agreed scope, budget, or capacity. Unfortunately, this is the reality that many projects must contend with, and this can be mitigated by being upfront and transparent with peer researchers. However, more concerning, is when the independence is undermined by the imbalance of power relationships between them, adult staff, or stakeholders, who may influence the process for their own agendas.

- Peer researchers should be trained in how to engage stakeholders and provided an understanding of competing interests. Being transparent about the interests of stakeholders allows peer researchers to take onboard feedback, understanding where it comes from, rather than feeling a pressure to acquiesce.
- Organisations should be supporting peer researchers should reflect, before recruitment, their own aims in the peer research. Being aware of, and communicating these to peer researchers is important, followed by inviting pushback.
- Projects should document the decision-making process as much as possible, providing clear structures and exercises for peer researchers to think about what they would like to do. As much as projects can detail this process, the more reassured peer researchers are in their role in decision making process.

2. Peer researchers do not act ethically during the research: While not acting ethically is a concern across all research, there is a particular risk for peer research. Often this is not intentional, but the result of young people who are less familiar with the different boundaries of being a researcher. Mitigation strategies:

- Having a clear training programme on research ethics, so they understand the responsibilities and power they have as researcher. This includes mapping out the ways in which they could impact on participants negatively, and the mitigating strategies they should take with them.
- Providing clear supervision, especially in the early instances, of peer researchers interacting with participants, for example attending focus groups and in-depth interview. You can also co-lead early sessions can help model practice and behaviour, with responsibility gradually passed to the peer researchers.
- Creating a risk assessment of the research process internally, identifying ways in which the design of the research project may creative incentives for peer researchers to act unethically. For example, falsifying data or pressuring participants because level of renumeration is tied to number of participants.

3. Challenging interactions with adult participants or stakeholders: Throughout the process, peer researchers will have to engage with external adults either as participants or stakeholders. These conversations can be intimidating for young people, especially with decision-makers who are perceived to have power. Additionally, adult participants or stakeholders can potentially dominate a conversation and undermine the ability of the peer researcher to participate meaningfully. Mitigation strategies:

- Ensuring that the peer researchers have learnt and memorised the knowledge around the project, like contextual information or the data they've gathered, helps build their confidence to speak about the project.
- Peer researchers should be provided with clear training so that they feel confident in the way that they're engaging adults, whether that's in in-depth interviews, focus groups, or chairing meetings.
- Preparation ahead of engagement is key, from going over the agenda and what to expect, and providing strategies for young people to deal with any challenges that might arise. Meeting

just the peer researchers beforehand, as well as having time and space to debrief after each interaction can help them feel supported throughout.

- While there is often a focus on the peer researchers and building their skills, there should be work done with adult participants or stakeholders to prepare them on how to engage meaningfully with young people. Decision makers or policy makers may benefit from information beforehand about the peer researchers, and what to be aware of when speaking with peer researchers.

4. Ownership over the dissemination of data, findings, and publications: When peer researchers are meaningfully involved in the process of developing and conducting research, they must have ownership over the resulting data, findings, and publications. This is to avoid the research process being extractive, and the successes of the work being taken away from them. Mitigating strategies:

- Being clear about what the outputs of the research will be from the outset, and the various decisions that can either be made about them by the peer researchers, or the various ways that they can be involved in contributing to those.
- Giving clear authorship to all peer researchers in any output and crediting them and their work when it is being disseminating. As much as possible, providing opportunities for the peer researchers to talk about their own work by inviting them to speak to decision makers.
- Ensuring that peer researchers are trained in data analysis and are supported to create their own findings from the data gathered. What they produce or decide should be clearly used to inform the final publication, with their input into it as much as possible.

Peer researchers presenting their findings

5.10 Consent and information sheets

In peer research, consent is not only a legal requirement – it is one of the main ways we show respect for young people's rights, autonomy and safety. Because peer researchers are often working with people they know, in informal spaces, it is especially important to be clear and careful about how consent is explained, recorded and revisited throughout the project.

This section focuses on practical consent in youth-led projects: what needs to be in place, who needs to agree to what, and how peer researchers can talk about consent in ways that are honest, age-appropriate and non-pressurising.

What we mean by informed consent

Informed consent means that people understand what the research is about and what taking part involves, know the possible risks and benefits, are free to choose whether to participate, and can change their mind at any point without negative consequences.

In youth peer research projects, consent is best treated as an ongoing conversation rather than a single tick-box. It should be revisited whenever:

- Someone is asked to take part for the first time.
- What is being asked of them changes (for example, adding filming or a new activity).
- Wata is going to be used in a new way (for example, a public exhibition or media piece).

Informed consent, where participants are provided information about the project and understand fully what they're consenting to is extremely important. Peer researchers, especially if they are unsure about the process of consent themselves, can often rush through the form and obtain a signature without ensuring participants fully understand what they're consenting to. Mitigation strategies:

- Providing training to peer researchers to understand consent, and the practical process of obtaining informed consent is vital. Involving the peer researchers in the co-production of consent forms can improve understanding and accessibility of that process.
- Monitoring and supervising the obtaining of consent of participants, especially in early instances of data collection, can help ensure that peer researchers are correctly collecting informed consent.
- Making consent forms, as much as possible, accessible and youth friendly is important to make the jobs of peer researchers easier.

Who needs to consent, and to what?

Several different people and organisations may need to give consent in a project:

- **Participants:** the young people (and sometimes adults) who are being surveyed, interviewed or involved in workshops
- **Parents or carers:** where required for younger participants or by organisational policy
- **Host organisations:** schools, youth clubs, or housing providers where activities take place
- **Peer researchers:** as co-researchers, they should also understand and consent to their role

It is helpful to separate consent for taking part in the research from consent for specific activities such as recording, photography or public use of creative work. For example, a young person might agree to take part in an interview but not to be filmed or might agree that a poem they wrote can be used in a report but not on social media.

Example consent form

Project Name: [Insert Project Name]
Lead Organisation: [Insert Organisation Name]
Contact Person: [Insert Staff Name & Email/Phone]

1. What is this project about?

We are a team of young peer researchers from [Organisation Name]. We are researching [Insert 1-sentence goal, "what stops young people from using local parks"]. We want to use what we find to [Insert Impact Goal, "ask the Council to improve lighting and safety"].

2. What will happen today?
We would like you to take part in a [Interview / Survey / Focus Group].

- It will take about [Insert Time, 30 minutes].
- We will ask you questions about [Insert Topics].
- You do not have to answer any question you don't want to.

3. How will we keep your information safe? (Privacy)
Anonymity: We will not use your real name in our report. We will use a fake name if we quote you.
Storage: Your answers will be stored safely on a password-protected computer.
Deletion: We will keep your information until [Insert Date], after which it will be deleted.

4. The "Safety Rule" (Safeguarding)
Everything you say is confidential, EXCEPT if you tell us that you or someone else is in serious danger. If that happens, we have to tell a worker at [Organisation Name] to keep everyone safe.

5. Your Rights
Taking part is voluntary: You can say "No" today and that is fine.
Right to Withdraw: If you change your mind later, you can contact us to remove your answers up until [Insert Date when analysis begins].

Please tick the boxes if you agree:
Participation:

[ ] I agree to take part in this research project.

[ ] I understand that I can stop at any time.

Recording:

[ ] I agree to be audio recorded (so we don't miss what you say).

Using Your Words:

[ ] I agree that you can use my quotes in reports and presentations (without my real name).

Future Contact (Optional):

[ ] I am happy for you to contact me later to show me the results or ask more questions.

My contact details: _____

Your Signature: _____ Date: _____

Peer Researcher Signature: _____ Date: _____

(I confirm I have explained this form and answered any questions)

How peer researchers explain and check consent

Peer researchers are often the people who explain the project and ask for consent. They need simple, honest ways to do this which do not feel like sales pitches. Projects should give them time in training to practise explaining the project in their own words, answer common questions, and get feedback.

Rather than memorising a script, it is helpful to work with a short set of prompts, for example:

- What the project is about and why it matters.
- What the person will be asked to do and how long it will take.
- That they do not have to answer questions they are uncomfortable with.
- That they can pause or stop at any time.

These explanations should be given in a calm moment, ideally in a space where the person does not feel watched by others. Peer researchers should be encouraged to check understanding – "does that make sense?" – and to treat "no" as a completely acceptable answer.

Consent with younger participants and in groups

When working with younger children or mixed-age groups, language and format may need to change. Short sentences, concrete examples and visual explanations (for example using icons or simple diagrams) can help. Where organisational policy or ethics approval requires parental consent, this should be sought in advance, but children should still be asked on the day whether they personally feel comfortable taking part.

In group sessions, such as focus groups or workshops, consent also needs to cover group dynamics. At the start, facilitators and peer researchers should explain any ground rules, including how confidentiality will be handled and what cannot be guaranteed (for example, that other participants might still repeat something outside the room). Participants should be reminded that they can sit out of particular activities or questions without having to leave the project entirely.

Ongoing consent and the right to withdraw

Participants should know that they can pause or end an interview, group activity or survey at any point. They should also be told what will happen if they withdraw – for example, that recordings will be deleted and their quotes will not be used, up to a certain point in the project.

Peer researchers need a clear procedure for what to do if someone changes their mind: how to end an activity respectfully, how to record that a person has withdrawn, and who to inform so that data can be removed. Projects should be honest about what is and is not possible to fully withdraw, especially for data that has already been anonymised and combined into statistics, or comments made in group settings.

Recording and storing consent

Consent decisions must be recorded and stored safely. This might involve paper forms kept in a locked cabinet, or digital records on a secure, password-protected system. A simple log can help staff and peer researchers check who has consented and to what, without digging through every individual form.

Peer researchers should know where completed forms go, who is responsible for checking them, and how to respond if they are unsure whether consent has been given. Because consent records are personal data, they should be handled in line with the organisation's data protection policies.

Consent for images, audio, video and creative work

Where projects use photos, film, audio recording or creative outputs, consent for these should be treated as specific, additional agreements rather than assumed. It should be clear what kinds of use are being proposed – for example, internal learning only, inclusion in a written report, presentations to partners, public exhibitions, websites or social media – and whether images will be identifiable or anonymised.

Participants should have the option to opt in to some uses and not others. The same applies to creative work: young people may want their work to be seen but might not want their full name attached to it, or might be comfortable with a piece being used in a community exhibition but not online. Peer researchers need to understand and respect these choices in practice, including in informal moments such as sharing photos from sessions on their own phones.

By treating consent as a relationship and a continuing process, rather than just a signature, peer research projects can protect participants, uphold young people's rights, and build the trust needed for honest conversations and meaningful findings.

Information sheets

Before asking anyone to consent, projects should prepare clear, accessible information sheets. These should briefly explain what the project is about, who is running it, what taking part will involve, what topics will be discussed, how information will be used, what steps are taken to protect privacy, what support is available if someone becomes upset, and who to contact with questions or concerns. It should be obvious that participation is voluntary and that people can stop at any time.

Different audiences may need different versions, for example, one for young participants, one for parents and carers, one for host organisations, and one for peer researchers outlining their role and support.

Consent forms should match the information sheet and give people simple ways to indicate what they agree to. A typical form might have separate tick boxes for participation, audio recording, use of photos, use of creative work, and follow-up contact. It is important that the form reflects real choices, not an "all or nothing" situation.

5.11 Consent, ethics, and data checklist

We haven't really spoke about the joys (importance) of GDPR and data protection, but organisations should have this in place. This checklist tries to combine all the different things organisations should think about ahead of conducting fieldwork.

1. Data Collection

- Types of Data: Define what data will be collected (qualitative interviews, surveys, etc.).
- Data Sources: Specify sources such as beneficiaries, staff, partners, or public datasets.
- Formats: Outline the formats used (CSV, Excel, audio recordings, images).
- Collection Methods: Detail how data is gathered (online forms, field research).

2. Ethical Considerations & Compliance

- Informed Consent: Ensure participants understand how their data will be used.
- Privacy & Anonymity: Define measures to protect participant identities.
- Regulatory Compliance: Adhere to legal frameworks (GDPR, UK Data Protection Act).
- Data Ownership: Clarify who owns the data and any intellectual property rights.
- Risk assessments: Having a clear risk assessment system, collected from partners, or created by us for events, workshops, or participant engagements.

3. Data Storage & Security

- Storage Locations: Cloud-based (Google Drive, SharePoint) or on-premises.
- Access Controls: Define who can access what data and how.
- Encryption & Protection: Implement safeguards like password protection and encryption.
- Backup Strategies: Establish automatic backups and disaster recovery plans.

4. Data Documentation & Metadata

- Data Standards: Define consistent labeling, coding, and classification.
- Metadata Requirements: Ensure adequate descriptions for data reuse.
- Version Control: Track changes to datasets.

5. Data Sharing & Accessibility

- Who Can Access? Define internal and external access permissions.
- Data Repositories: Identify if and where data will be shared (open-access, internal databases).
- Data Licensing: Specify conditions for reuse (Creative Commons, restricted access).
- Publishing Plans: Determine if anonymized data can be published in reports.

6. Data Retention & Disposal

- Retention Periods: Define how long data will be kept.
- Archiving Policies: Determine what data will be stored long-term.
- Secure Disposal: Outline how data will be deleted when no longer needed.

7. Roles & Responsibilities

- Data Stewardship: Assign responsibility for data management.
- Training Needs: Ensure staff are trained in handling sensitive data.
- Governance Structures: Set up committees or policies to oversee compliance.

5.12 Safeguarding & Ethics Training

Safeguarding and research ethics > Co-designing a consent form and information sheet

Before peer researchers are asked to deliver fieldwork, it is vital that they are taught safeguarding, research ethics, and consent. This will enable them to conduct ethical research, safely in the field.

Peer researchers often have a "dual role": they are researchers, but they are also peers, friends, or community members. This training helps them distinguish between these roles, understanding where the "friend" stops and the "researcher" begins.

Decision to be made: As much as possible, the peer researchers should support with the co-design of consent forms and information sheets, so they understand them and they are accessible to those who will be receiving them.

Learning objectives

Peer researchers should be able to:

- Understand their safeguarding responsibilities: Knowing how to keep themselves and participants safe, and exactly what to do if a participant discloses harm.
- Understand research ethics in practice: Moving beyond "rules" to understanding power dynamics, anonymity, and the principle of "Do No Harm".
- Navigating boundaries: Understanding the difference between a "friend" conversation and a "research" conversation.
- Co-design consent tools: Creating an information sheet and consent process that is accessible and jargon-free for their peers.

Learning outputs

- **Draft Information Sheet & Consent Form:** A finalised, youth-friendly version of the documents that will be used in fieldwork.
- **"Researcher Script":** A short, agreed set of words peer researchers will use to explain the project and ask for consent verbally.

Example Agenda

Introduction and icebreaker	10.00am – 10.30am
What is research ethics?	10.30am – 11.30am
Introduction to safeguarding	11.30am - 12.00pm
Lunch	12.00pm – 1.00pm
Safeguarding scenarios	1.00pm - 1.30pm
Consent and agreement	1.30pm - 2.30pm
Designing consent forms	2.30pm – 3.30pm
Next steps	3.30pm – 4.00pm

1. Research Ethics: Power and Harm

Key learning: The "Do No Harm" Principle

We start by defining ethics not as a list of rules, but as a way of behaving that ensures nobody gets hurt: either the participant or the researcher. We explore the specific ethical risks in peer research using the "Traffic Lights" icebreaker 10 to discuss boundaries. We focus on three key areas:

- **Power Dynamics:** Even though they are "peers," holding a clipboard or recording device gives the researcher power. We discuss how to avoid pressuring friends into taking part11.
- **Anonymity vs. Confidentiality:** We teach the difference between keeping data safe (Anonymity) and the legal duty to report harm (breaking Confidentiality).
- **Extractive Research:** We discuss how to ensure the research gives back to the community (through incentives or sharing findings) rather than just "taking" stories.

Key learning: Ethics in the context of research

Once peer researchers have a fundamental understanding of ethics and why they exist, we go into the detail of research ethics. We teach them a number of ethical concerns, asking them what it means and what the mitigating strategies are, however the list is not exhaustive and there are a number of different research ethic frameworks.

Ethical concern	What it means	Mitigating strategies
Language	Using language that stigmatises or "problematises" young people can reinforce negative stereotypes and cause harm.	We use asset-based language that focuses on the positive potential of young people rather than just their problems. We ensure questions are framed neutrally and respectfully.
Recruitment of participants	There is a risk of "stacking the deck" (only asking friends who agree) or recruiting participants who are more at risk of re-traumatisation.	We aim for a diverse sample rather than just convenience sampling. Organisations typically support young people with recruitment.
Equity of access to study	Ensuring that the research does not exclude young people because they lack resources (money, technology) to take part.	We budget for "hidden costs" like data bundles for those without Wi-Fi, and prepaid travel cards. We schedule research to be flexible to participant's time and commitments.
Consent and agreement	Consent is not just a signature, it is ensuring participants genuinely understand what they are signing up for, including risks and how data is used.	We treat consent as an ongoing conversation, checking in throughout the process. We co-design accessible, jargon-free information sheets and accept "no" as a valid answer and allow participants to withdraw up to research output publication.
Minimising risk of harm to the researcher	Peer researchers may be exposed to difficult stories or "triggering" conversations that impact their own mental health or exposed to risk during fieldwork in unsafe spaces.	We use Trauma-Informed Practice, ensuring there is a system for debriefing after fieldwork. We support peer researchers to gather data in spaces that are verified or have limited risk, such as youth clubs or schools.
Minimising risk of harm to participants	Research can be "extractive" or re-traumatising if participants share difficult stories without seeing any benefit or receiving support.	We provide remuneration (incentives) to thank them for their time. We signpost to support services if topics are sensitive.

Ethical concern	What it means	Mitigating strategies
Researcher-participant relationship	Peer researchers hold power when they have the "clipboard". There is a risk of them unintentionally pressuring friends or acting unethically or inappropriately.	We provide clear training on boundaries and the responsibilities of a researcher. Staff supervise early interviews to model good practice.
Anonymity and confidentiality	Protecting participants' private data. Peer researchers might use insecure methods (like personal phones) that risk data leaks.	We use non-smart recording devices provided by the project, not personal phones. We teach the difference between privacy (keeping data safe) and safeguarding (reporting harm).
Serious safeguarding concerns	Sometimes a participant discloses that they or someone else is in significant danger. Confidentiality must be broken here.	We teach peer researchers about safeguarding, and ensure peer researchers know exactly who to speak to if a disclosure happens.

3. Safeguarding: Responsibility and scenarios

Key learning: Understanding safeguarding as everyone's responsibility

Peer researchers need to understand that safeguarding is not just a policy document for staff, but a culture of looking out for one another. We explain that in peer research, they are the "eyes and ears" on the ground. Because they are peers, young people may tell them things they would never tell an adult professional. However, this privilege comes with a responsibility to pass that information on if someone is at risk.

The most important lesson for peer researchers is that it is not their job to investigate or solve a safeguarding issue. They are researchers, not social workers or counsellors. We teach the simple mantra: "If you have a worry, pass it on." Young people often value loyalty and keeping secrets. We must explain the difference:

- Confidentiality: We keep private data safe (like names and addresses) and don't gossip about what people said.
- Safeguarding: We always break confidentiality if we believe someone is in danger of being hurt, hurting themselves, or hurting others.

We conclude by agreeing on a clear division of labour, so peer researchers do not feel burdened by responsibility:

Peer Researcher Responsibility	Staff Responsibility
To listen without judgement.	To make the difficult decisions.
To stop an interview if they feel uncomfortable.	To step in and manage any distress.
To record exactly what was said (if a disclosure happens).	To contact external services (police, social care) if needed.
To never promise to keep a secret if it involves harm.	To hold the legal duty of care.

Key learning: Traffic light scenarios

The challenge for peer researchers is recognising when a safeguarding disclosure has been made. We teach them what a disclosure means, and what needs to happen. It is important to reiterate that it is never their job to solve a problem, only report it.

We present a range of scenarios to peer researchers and ask them if it is red (100% safeguarding disclosure, needs to be reported), amber (potential safeguarding disclosure, speak to staff), or green (not a safeguarding disclosure). For example:

- **Scenario:** "A participant tells you her anxiety has become so severe she is considering hurting herself to make the feelings stop.“
- **Scenario:** “A participant says that they’re really stressed about a math test next week and that she feels stupid.“
- **Scenario:** "Your participants says, 'I want to tell you something, but you have to promise not to tell anyone, not even the youth worker.'"
- **Scenario:** “A participant tells you she feels sick to her stomach every morning before school, but she doesn't know why.“

Certain scenarios also get them to think about what they would say, and how to communicate ideas around confidentiality and duty to report if, for example, asked to keep something secret by a participant. We also get them to reflect on other aspects of identifying abuse, such as visual clues like body language or signs of harm.

3. Co-designing Consent

Key learning: Consent needs to be informed

We explain that consent is not just a signature on a piece of paper; it is checking that the person truly understands what they are signing up for. It is treated as an ongoing conversation that should be revisited whenever the request changes. Peer researchers must understand that consent is a continual process, not a one-off form, and crucially, participants need to understand their Right to Withdraw:

- They need to be able to contact the team and withdraw from the research at any time without negative consequences.
- However, peer researchers must learn to be honest about the limits of this. For example, once data has been anonymized and combined into statistics, it is not possible to remove one person's data.

Key learning: Consent and information should be accessible

We ask peer researchers to critique a standard, dry academic consent form. They usually find it boring, confusing, or intimidating. We then task the group with rewriting the Information Sheet and Consent Form for their specific target audience. We ask them to “Jargon Bust” the forms:

- **The Challenge:** How do we explain "Anonymity," "Data Protection," and "Voluntary Participation" to a 14-year-old?
- **The Output:** Peer researchers produce a "Researcher Script": a simple, 3-point explanation of the project they can say verbally before handing over the form.
- **Example:** "This is voluntary. You can stop whenever you want. We won't use your real name."

By co-designing these tools, peer researchers are far more likely to use them correctly in the field because they understand exactly what they are asking participants to sign.

6. Fieldwork & Participant Recruitment

6. Fieldwork & Participant Recruitment

This chapter guides practitioners and peer researchers through the practical delivery of data collection, moving from the design phase into active fieldwork.

It details the principles of conducting safe and effective research in the real world, covering the logistics of securing neutral spaces, managing timelines, and the importance of treating the start of fieldwork as a "point of no return" for methodology design .

It explores specific strategies for sampling and recruitment across both qualitative and quantitative methods, outlining how to define a population, use incentives ethically, and reach beyond the "usual suspects" to ensure a representative sample .

The aim is to operationalise the research tools created in the previous stage, ensuring that peer researchers are trained not just in what to ask, but how to listen, facilitate, and manage power dynamics during interviews and surveys .

By the end of the chapter, teams should have a robust outreach plan and a clear understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and safety protocols required to gather high-quality data in the field.

6.1 Principles of Good Peer Fieldwork

Fieldwork in peer research looks very different depending on the subject matter, the research methods used, and a whole host of practical considerations. However, there are a consistent set of principles that all projects can benefit from:

- **Recognising it as the point of no return:** The start of the fieldwork phase is, in many ways, the point of no return. Projects should only start the fieldwork phase when they are confident in the design of their methods, with revisions to it (interview guides, or survey questions) after this point undermining consistency and comparability of the data collected. There are exceptions, for example, projects which take an iterative design approach from the outset, with rounds of fieldwork followed by re-iterations of research methods. A project may conduct design, fieldwork, and analysis and use the learnings to inform the delivery of a second round of design, fieldwork, and analysis.
- **Space, place, and times:** Successful fieldwork can depend on a range of factors that are outside of the peer researchers' control, and projects should be conscious of these when arranging opportunities. The space should be as neutral as possible, quiet, and private. The place should be somewhere participants feel comfortable and safe. The time should be when participants are likely to be engaged, not tired, or busy with commitments like during exam season.
- **Opportunities to conduct fieldwork built in from the start:** Opportunities for young people to conduct fieldwork should be built in from the start of the project, with ideas on how fieldwork will be conducted formulated before young people are even recruited or trained. Projects should have a clear idea about what research methods they will likely be supporting, and who the young people will be speaking to as part of those. For example, projects with less access to young people would already identify and engage with partners like youth clubs from the start, who will then be ready to support the peer researchers with opportunities to speak to participants.
- **Supported but not directed:** Peer researchers conducting fieldwork should have support from projects or stakeholders but not overstep to interfering or directing the conducting of chosen research methods. For example, project staff can accompany peer researchers into spaces where they will be conducting research, but not necessarily sit in during interviews.
- **Opportunities are provided, but with flexibility:** The opportunity for peer researchers to conduct research, like arranging visits to conduct in-depth interviews or organising focus groups, should be supported by project staff. Very few projects put the responsibility for finding participants solely on the peer researchers, and there should be support for them to reach the sample they need. However, opportunities should not only be curated for them, and projects need to be flexible to where peer researchers find their own opportunities or want to speak to participants not initially planned for.
- **Review, reflect, and reiterate phase:** In the early stages of fieldwork, peer researchers should be supported with time to debrief between speaking to participants. This enables them to review how they felt after speaking to a participant, reflect on what went well and what they found difficult, and reiterate the approach they will take for the next opportunity. While it might be difficult to change certain elements, for example the research question or interview guide, they can refine how they approach gathering data.

Planned stakeholder support, and problem solving the unexpected

Fieldwork can throw up both expected, and unexpected challenges, that are beyond the scope of the organisation and the peer researchers to solve. There also may be other aspects of the research process, like research design or analysis too, that you might want more support with.

Organisations who have engaged stakeholders early, or have a range of partners, can anticipate challenges and build in the support they need from the outset. This is alongside having a range of stakeholders who can provide support fort those unexpected challenges that are thrown up.

Project	Problem	Stakeholder	Solution
Peer researchers from a local youth club want to run a survey	The youth club only has access to a limited number of young people	The nearest local secondary school, where a teacher is supportive of the project	The school agrees to work with the peer researchers to put out any survey they design.
Peer researchers want to interview young people about feeling unsafe on local streets.	Doing interviews on the street is identified as a high safeguarding risk for the peer researchers.	Local library or community centre located on the high street.	The library or community centre provides a neutral "third space" for peer researchers to conduct interviews safely indoors.
A group of peer researchers want to use film and photography to document barriers to employment.	The group has great ideas but lacks high-quality cameras and editing software skills.	A local arts organisation or media college	The stakeholder lends equipment and runs a technical workshop on video editing for the group.
Peer researchers want to understand the challenges of young private renters.	Private renters are hard to reach because they are dispersed and don't congregate in one specific place.	A Housing Association or local Citizens Advice Bureau.	The stakeholder agrees to include a link to the peer research survey in their monthly tenant newsletter or induction packs
Peer researchers want to explore the topic of mental health	The research question they have designed is too vague and broad	The local NHS trust, particularly staff working at the Children and Adolescent mental health service	Health staff work with young people to identify gaps and improve the peer research.
Peer researchers from a local authority conduct a huge survey	The peer researchers and supporting staff do not have the research expertise	A local university, or an individual academic who is supportive of the work	The university or academic comes to support peer researchers and staff, with training or supporting process the data.

6.2 Sampling and participant recruitment

Sampling is the action or process of taking samples of something for analysis. To do this, projects will need to have an understanding of what the population is for the work. The population is the group, or groups, that you want to draw conclusions about in the research. Projects will attempt to take a sample of the overall population, with the sample being as representative of that overall population as possible. For example, for a project that looks at the experience of care experienced young people in the London Borough of Wandsworth:

- **The population:** The number of care experienced young people who live in the London Borough of Wandsworth. Let's say, hypothetically this population identify as 57% male.
- **The sample:** A smaller number of care experienced young people who live in the London Borough of Wandsworth.
- **Representative sample:** A smaller number of care experienced young people who live in the London Borough of Wandworth, with 57% of participants being male.

The sample for a peer research project can completely vary depending on the scope of the work, and the research methods taken. For example:

- **Qualitative research sample:** Projects which involve in-depth interviews, or focus groups, tend to have samples of around 20 to 40 participants.
- **Quantitative research sample:** projects which conduct surveys, tend to have samples of around 150 to 3000 participants.
- **Mixed methods:** Projects which involve both qualitative and quantitative may want to aim for the lower end of the participation sample size for both.

There are different factors that can determine the size of the sample that you will realistic be aiming for:

- **The scope of the research:** There needs to be a pre-determined judgement by projects about what the realistic size of the sample will be based on the scope of the research. For example, if the research looks at the views of young people living in Manchester, the sample will need to be far greater than if it looked at the views of young people in a single postcode.
- **The power of participants:** Some projects consider not necessarily the number of participants, but the level of insight the participants might provide. Projects may aim for a smaller number of in-depth interviews; with participants whose voices are typically marginalised or participants where the insight will be valuable. For example, interviews with marginalised groups such as refugees, or CEOs of major organisations.
- **The ability to deliver:** The approach to sampling needs to be realistic given the budget, capacity, or relationships that a project has. If projects are on a tight timeline, it might be more effective to aim for a smaller sample that provides the insight that you need.

It is important that peer researchers understand what sampling is, and what a representative sample looks like for their research. There are a range of approaches to sampling, and peer researcher should decide on which approach to take (contingent on the support available to) based on the advantages and drawbacks of each.

There are often two approaches to sampling: probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling, in simple terms, involves an element of random selection. Non-probability sampling involves no randomised element. We will be focusing mostly on non-probability sampling as that is the most common approach seen with peer research.

Non-probability sampling	Benefits	Drawbacks
Convenience sampling: Sample and participants are chosen based on convenience. For example, who is available or willing to take part already.	This is the most common approach because it is the easiest. The focus is recruiting as many young people as possible to take part, in the easiest way possible. As a result, you will generally reach the most people for the least cost.	The sample is potentially unrepresentative of the population you want to look at. Young people recruited as participants can be 'the usual suspects' rather than necessarily the voices you need to reach for the research.
Snowball sampling: Recruitment of participants is done through existing participants, or peer researcher networks. For example, a peer researcher interviews their friend, who then invites her friend to an interview.	This is a great approach for projects that have recruited peer researchers with a specific lived experience or from a specific marginalised group. They, and the participants they reach, will have access to young people that you might not be able to reach as a project otherwise.	The sample will likely be smaller, and we mainly see snowball sampling used for recruitment of interviews. It also relies on the effort of peer researchers or young people who have already taken part to recruit participants.
Quota sampling: Sample is comprised of a predetermined number of different quotas. For example, aiming for 30 young people from each borough, or aiming for 50% male.	This approach is the most common we see for quantitative research methods, like surveys. It can provide a structure for projects to guide their survey advertising or outreach. Done correctly, the sample will be far more representative of the population you are looking to research.	The main drawback to quota sampling is the additional work and cost associated. You may end up turning away young people from having their voices heard as they might begin to be overrepresented, while having to spend addition budget to reach other groups.
Purposive sampling: Similar to quota sampling, but less structured. Participants are intentionally selected based on your judgement of their characteristics, knowledge, or experience. For example, choosing an organisation for a case study because you believe them to be a good example.	Purposive sampling is most commonly used for case studies and can allow projects to focus on researching examples or participants that they believe would be compelling. If the participants are selected by peer researchers, then using that judgement and insight into what would be compelling creates an additional layer of insight.	Samples can be subject to the subjective biases of the peer researchers or those working on the project. The sample is entirely chosen based on their opinion on what would be interesting, or insightful.
Stratified sampling: Similar to quota sampling, but participants are randomly selected. For example, you want to study Year 5s in schools in a single borough. You would randomly select a proportion of schools, then randomly select students in Year 5s for participation.	Providing a randomised element to the structure enables a far more representative sample, that is proportional to the overall population. Random selection enables the sample to be representatively sampled, rather than participation by those who are predisposed to take part.	Stratified sampling, where it has worked is where there is a captive audience (for example schools buying in and reserving time for survey completion). Most projects do not have the budget or ability to select five schools, or five youth clubs, and ensure that the participants they random select from the overall population will participate in the survey.

6.3 Qualitative fieldwork (interviews, focus groups)

Qualitative fieldwork can be straightforward or complex, depending on the wide range methods that can be employed under the qualitative umbrella. For the purposes of this toolkit, we will be looking at interviews and focus groups.

Recruitment of participants for interviews and focus groups

A good recruitment strategy for participants is important, as it determines the strength of the sample. Unlike surveys, where the key findings are averaged out potentially across a thousand young people, research from focus groups and interviews can rest the opinions of twenty or thirty young people.

1. **Participants have relevant lived experience to the issue being investigated:** Young people are not homogeneous, and participants must have relevant first-hand experience of the issue being investigated. Projects should avoid inviting participants to speculate that they are unfamiliar.
2. **Participants should have a diversity of experience:** While young people should have relevant lived experience, diversity of experience is vital. For example, researching how to improve access to a service, participants should be those who have and have not accessed the service.
3. **Diversity and representation:** Unless a topic is focused on a specific community or group, participants should be sampled from a range of genders, ethnicities, and backgrounds.

Projects recruit participants through a range of ways, but recruitment comes into three main categories:

1. **Recruitment through delivery:** The participants are recruited from young people already known to the organisation, through work previously or currently delivered. This is the most common and straightforward type of recruitment and can make the most sense to the project.
    - **Example:** Sports club wants to research the positive impact of sports on young people's educational performance -> Recruit participants from young people taking part in the sports activities that the club provides.
2. **Recruitment through sector networks:** The participants are recruited from young people already know to external organisations, in the same sector. This may be asking another organisation to directly recruit and host a focus group, or putting a call out for participants out in their communications with young people.
    - **Example:** Sports club wants to research the positive impact of sports on young people's educational performance, but doesn't have a swimming pool -> Recruit participants from a nearby sports club that has swimming activities for young people
3. **Recruitment outside of the sector:** The participants are recruited from young people with a specific lived experience that is relevant to the research, from organisations in a different sector. This is usually done purposefully, to ensure a specific lived experience.
    - **Example:** Sports club wants to research the positive impact of sports on young people's educational performance -> Recruit participants from a local secondary school, who can provide a diversity of experience of education and sports activity.

Incentives for participants in qualitative research

There are a range of different ways that participants can be incentivised to take part in interviews and focus groups. Ranging from informal (rounding up whoever is in the space at the time with the promise of pizza), to more formal (inviting participants to attend at a specific time with a £20 voucher as a thank you).

Incentive	What is the incentive?	Risks
Opportunity to have their voice heard on decisions that impact them	Participants are often, first and foremost, made aware of the impact their participation has. Many young people want to have their voices heard and influence decisions that impact on them.	Projects should not overstate the impact of research, participants may be disappointed. Recruited participants may be more politically active, or more likely already involved in existing youth voice work.
Financial incentive, such as vouchers or payment	Participants are provided a financial payment or cash voucher for participating. This may be increased to different amounts to cover the variation in participant travel costs. This can, however, widen participation for those who would not be able to participate without financial payment.	Participants may look to take part for financial gain, either not having experience of the issue being taken or being less willing to participate and speak.
Offer of support or signposting to support	Participants are provided with a clear offer of support, such as employment or mental health support, or are signposted to services. These are often related to the issues being explored, or tailored for the community participants are drawn from.	The level of support available can be inadequate for the level of need a young person is experiencing, or for the risks their participation presents.
Opportunities for further engagement, or development	Participants are made aware of further opportunities in this project, or others, and will participate in the research as the start of on an ongoing relationship with an organisation for further opportunities.	Opportunities for engagement may not be fully planned out, which leads the participants to have a offer of further opportunities that isn't realised.

Projects with the budget may wish to provide incentives for young people to take part in qualitative research. The first reason is that incentives, or remuneration, can reduce the extractive nature of research for young participants. Participants are giving up their time, travelling to a space, to take part in a conversation where they might be asked to provide honest reflections and thoughts. Depending on the issue studied, participants may be experiencing economic or social hardship and sharing this in conversation can be exposing. Providing incentives either in terms of additional support, or renumeration for taking part, can ensure that participants leave with something in-kind for their insight and participation.

The second reason to provide incentives, or renumeration, is to improve the available sample of participants. Recruitment can be challenging, especially if the issue to be discussed seems abstract or if the sample needed draws from marginalised groups. Incentivising participation can be an effective way to increase engagement and make recruitment easier and quicker, especially when recruiting through partner organisations who have a clear offer to communicate back to young people for them to be involved.

More commonly, projects recruit participants as volunteers. There are advantages to not providing financial remuneration, as it means that there is no financial incentive for participation. This can lead to focus groups or interviews from participants that are disinterested in the issue, or dishonest about their lived experience of this issue, focused on the financial incentive alone. As peer researchers will be conducting fieldwork, these scenarios can be particularly difficult for them to navigate.

Setting up in-person qualitative fieldwork

There are some key considerations for when setting up interviews or focus group that organisations should be mindful of, to support peer researchers. Project staff should be responsible for these, not the peer researchers, who should be allowed to focus on their role as interviewer/facilitator only.

- **A quiet space:** Interviews and focus groups should be conducted, as much as possible, in a private and quiet space. The quieter the space, the better for the quality of audio recording, which makes it far easier for transcription later. It also allows participants to better listen to each other and reflect on their own thoughts.
- **Privacy:** Interviews and focus groups should be in private spaces, where participants feel like they can speak without strangers listening or observing them.
- **Audio recording positioning:** The recording device(s) should be positioned as close to the mouths of participants as possible. This means elevated, not on the floor, and in-front of speakers. It is worth learning where the microphone is on the device being used, and position this towards speakers. Check the microphone with a test recording first. It is recommended that peer researchers are provided with non-smart audio recorders that they use and return to organisations. Recording on a peer researcher's phone can be tempting and easier, but it is harder from a data protection perspective, with organisations unable to verify if the original recording has been deleted or not been sent anywhere through the internet.
- **Minimal staff or adult presence:** Unless there is a safety consideration, staff presence should be kept to a minimum. This potentially allows participants to speak more freely. Generally, peer researchers should be supported by one member of staff, who would sit out of sight from the participants, who can intervene if need be. Projects may also want to have a staff member with a relationship to participants, for example during a focus group, if there is a concern that the behaviour of the group may be difficult to manage for the peer researcher alone.
- **Ground rules:** These can be set out by the peer researcher, but often it is done by a trusted adult or member of staff who can have more recognised authority. Having a number of rules for conduct from the outset, for example to not talk over each other, can lead to higher quality conversations, better audio, and less intervention from the peer researcher.
- **Setup:** The space should be setup prior to participants entering the space, and configuration differs depending on whether it is an interview or focus group:
    - **Interview:** Two chairs positioned at 10am and 2pm, with a table in-between to position a single recording device. However, the priority is to create a safe and informal environment, with peer researchers often finding participants more willing to speak in less formal settings like on a sofa, in a grassy field in the park, and over a game of pool.
    - **Focus groups:** One chair per person positioned in a crescent, with one or two recording devices positioned to capture the voices of participants. The idea is that each participant should be able to easily see each other, which encourages dialogue between them. The facilitator will have a single chair in front of them.

Setting up online qualitative fieldwork

Interviews and focus groups conducted online are a different challenge and generally not recommended, as in-person is easier to manage. However, projects may find participants located in places across the UK where in-person interviews are not possible. Qualitative research conducted in online spaces can be as effective but simply requires more from the planning or peer researcher who is conducting the conversation. Key considerations include:

- **Online ground rules:** There are several additional ground rules that you might want to set, for example keeping cameras on, muting the microphone if not speaking, and using the raise the hand function on the chat.
- **A quiet space:** The need for participants to be in a quiet space in the interview and focus group needs to be communicated ahead of time. We've seen before focus groups attended by young people on a loud bus, or in a busy café, and it can be very disruptive.
- **Online platform:** Organisations usually have a platform that they are familiar with, such as Zooms, Teams, or Google Meets. Peer researchers should be given the time, even if just before the participants are let in, to familiarise themselves with the platform.
- **Recording on the specific platform:** We encourage staff to setup and attend the online session, so that they can start the recording and make sure it is working.

Suggested length of interviews and focus groups

There is no ideal time for in-depth interviews and focus groups, but we tend to recommend a minimum time for recordings depending on the number of questions on the interview guide. A minimum recording time helps peer researchers to understand the level of answers, or in the case of a non-communicative participant, number of follow up questions they need to ask.

We find that the biggest risk with peer researchers, especially where they lack the confidence or hands on experience to tackle a uncommunicative participant, is that the interview or focus groups results in a five-minute recording of mostly one-word answers. Typically, we look for interviews to be between 15 and 30 minutes long and focus groups to be between an hour and an hour and a half.

6.4 Quantitative fieldwork (surveys)

Quantitative fieldwork is primarily focused on gathering data from a larger number of people to identify broad patterns, trends, and statistics. While qualitative work looks for the "story," quantitative work looks for the "scale." For the purposes of this toolkit, we will be looking at online and in-person surveys.

Recruitment of participants for surveys

Recruitment for surveys is often a "numbers game." While an interview seeks deep insight from a few, a survey needs a sufficient volume of responses to be considered valid. If a peer research project claims to speak for "young people in the borough" but only has 30 survey responses, the findings will be easily challenged.

1. **Reaching a critical mass:** Projects needs to set a realistic target for the sample size (100, 200, or 500 responses). This requires a far more aggressive and widespread recruitment strategy than qualitative work.
2. **Avoiding the usual suspects:** Because surveys are often distributed via social media or existing networks, there is a high risk that only young people already engaged with the organisation will respond. Peer researchers must actively plan how to reach young people unlike themselves.
3. **Representative Sampling:** Projects should monitor the demographics of respondents as they come in. If 80% of respondents are from one specific school or one gender, the peer researchers need to pivot their fieldwork to target the under-represented groups.

Projects recruit participants for surveys through three main distribution channels:

1. **Digital/Online Distribution:** The survey link is shared via social media, newsletters, and group chats. This is the most cost-effective method but suffers from low engagement if not pushed consistently.
    - » **Example:** Peer researchers create a TikTok video explaining the project with a "Link in Bio" to the survey and ask their friends to share it in their class WhatsApp groups.
2. **Partner/Network Distribution:** Asking external organisations to send the survey to their own lists. This is vital for reaching high numbers.
    - » **Example:** A youth organisation asks the local secondary school Headteacher to email the survey link to all students or asks a Housing Association to text the link to young residents.
3. **In-Person "Intercept" Distribution:** Peer researchers go to physical locations (street surveying) to get young people to fill out the survey on the spot, or QR codes are distributed to be put up in physical spaces. This is labour intensive but ensures you reach young people who are not online or wouldn't click a link.
    - » **Example:** Peer researchers set up a stall with an iPad at a local youth centre or shopping centre and ask passers-by to spare 5 minutes to fill out the form.

Incentives for participants in quantitative research

Because surveys require a much larger number of participants, it is rarely financially viable to pay every respondent £20. Incentives for surveys tend to be lower value or probability-based (prize draws).

Incentive	What is the incentive?	Risks
Prize Draw (Raffle)	All respondents who complete the survey are entered into a draw to win a larger prize (Win one of three £50 vouchers).	Participants may rush through the survey ticking random boxes just to get to the entry form. It requires collecting contact details (email/ phone), which creates GDPR/data storage implications for what would otherwise be an anonymous survey.
Instant Small Reward (In-person)	For street/intercept surveys, offering a small, immediate reward like a chocolate bar, a drink, or a branded pen for completing the survey on the spot.	Can be costly if the target sample is large. Can attract young people who are only interested in the snack and provide low-quality data.
Collective Incentives	Offering a reward to a group rather than an individual. For example, "The youth club with the most responses gets a pizza party."	Can create unhealthy competition or pressure where young people force others to fill it out. May skew the data heavily toward that one specific group/club.
"Data for Change"	Marketing the survey on the premise that the data will directly improve a service they use ("Tell us what you hate about the bus service so we can fix it").	If the change doesn't happen, trust is broken for future research. Only appeals to young people who are already engaged or frustrated; might miss the "silent majority."

Setting up online quantitative fieldwork

Most peer research surveys are hosted online. While this removes the need for physical logistics, there are key technical considerations peer researchers must be supported with:

- **Platform Selection:** Choose a platform that is mobile-friendly (Microsoft Forms, Google Forms, SurveyMonkey, Typeform). Most young people will complete the survey on a phone, not a laptop.
- **The "Welcome" Screen (Consent):** The first page of the survey must act as the consent form. It must clearly state what the data is for, that it is anonymous, and that they can stop at any time. The first question should be a tick box: "I agree to take part."
- **Testing:** Peer researchers must test the survey before it goes live. Send it to 5 people to check for typos, confusing questions, or technical glitches (for example a question that requires an answer when it shouldn't, or a question that says select all that apply but only lets you choose two).
- **Data Safety:** Ensure the peer researchers know who has the password to the account and that data isn't being downloaded to personal devices.

Setting up in-person quantitative fieldwork

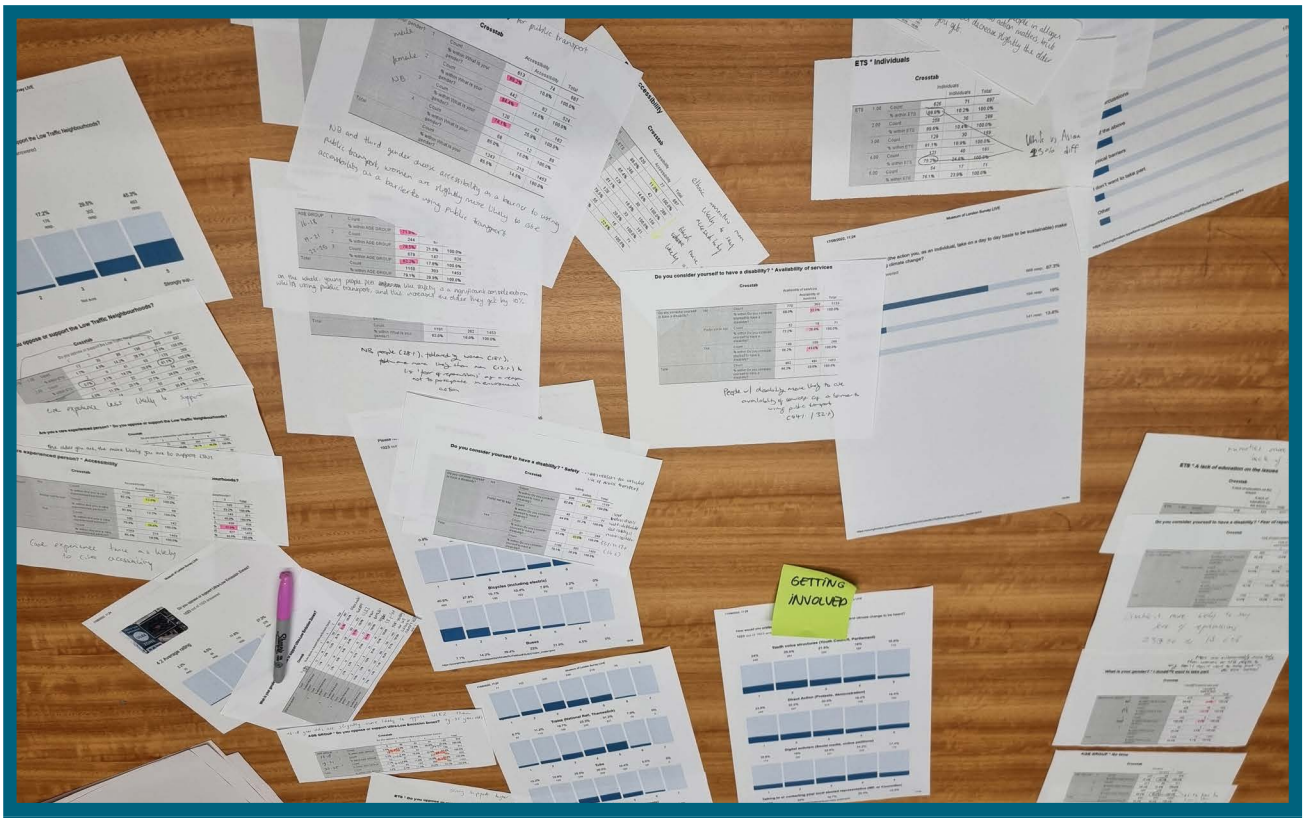
Sending peer researchers out to conduct surveys in public spaces (street research) requires careful management to ensure safety and data quality. We have seen projects do this successfully, but given how risky it can be and how digitally native young people are, online is far more common.

- **Equipment:** It is highly recommended to use tablets or phones with the survey loaded, rather than paper forms. Paper surveys require hours of manual data entry later, which is prone to error and boring for peer researchers.
- **Safety in numbers:** Peer researchers should never conduct street surveys alone. They should work in pairs or small groups, ideally with a staff member nearby or present in the venue.
- **Location permissions:** You cannot just turn up and survey anywhere. If peer researchers want to survey in a shopping centre, school, or private youth club, permission must be secured by staff beforehand.
- **The "Pitch":** Peer researchers need to be trained on a 10-second "hook." People walking by are busy. "Do you want to do a survey?" usually gets a "No." "Do you want to win £50 and fix the local park?" gets a better response.

Suggested length of surveys

The most important thing we stress to peer researchers is not to have surveys that are too long. Survey fatigue is a real problem, especially depending on the subject. Young people will either get bored and give up, or start randomly pressing buttons to answer to get finished quicker.

There is not really a golden rule about how many questions there should be, as some questions take seconds (Likert scales), while others take five or ten times the amount of time (ranking or open box questions). This is where testing is so important, where we ask peer researchers to aim for a survey that takes no longer than ten minutes.



Survey data on the table

6.5 Fieldwork training and planning

Now that the research tools (surveys, interview guides, creative workshops) have been designed, the focus shifts to the skills required to deliver them effectively. A well-designed question asked poorly will yield poor data. This session moves the group from "designing" to "doing," ensuring they have the soft skills to engage participants and the logistical plan to reach their targets.

Decision to be made: Peer researchers will decide on an outreach plan, dividing the work into roles and responsibilities, and mapping exactly how they will reach their target sample.

Learning objectives

Peer researchers should be able to:

- Demonstrate active listening and effective questioning techniques (probing) for qualitative work.
- Deliver a concise, persuasive "pitch" to recruit participants for quantitative/survey work.
- Understand the "Fieldwork Protocol": how to keep themselves safe, manage consent, and store data correctly in the field.
- Create a realistic timeline and target list for data collection.

Learning outputs

The Outreach Strategy: A visual map or timeline detailing who they will speak to, where, and when.

Roles & Responsibilities: Agreement on who is doing what (who is interviewing vs. who is managing survey links).

The "Fieldwork Kit": A finalised script and checklist for when they go out to collect data.

Example agenda

Like designing research methods, fieldwork training will be tailored to the methods that the peer researchers have chosen to use. There is also the same set of approaches for training:

1. **One session per method to be trained in:** Peer researchers spend a whole session learning how to conduct effective in-depth interviews
2. **One session for all methods to be designed:** Peer researchers spend the day split into training on how to conduct some, or all of the different research methods.
3. **One session to design and train peer researchers on one method:** Peer researchers spend the morning learning about and designing a research method, and the afternoon being trained in how to conduct fieldwork (next session).

We tend to see, unlike designing research methods, more single sessions for training to conduct fieldwork. This toolkit only covers fieldwork training for qualitative, as we do not get peer researchers to conduct surveys in-person.

Fieldwork training sessions are far more practical hands-on learning, though there will be some theoretical learning at the start. For example, learning about active and passive listening, before practicing interview techniques in pairs.

Qualitative Fieldwork Skills (Interviews & Focus Groups)

Key learning: Active Listening and neutral probes

We explain that in an interview, the researcher's job is to listen to understand, not just to reply. We introduce the concept of neutral probes: the follow-up question that digs deeper ("Can you tell me more about that?", "How did that feel?"). We try to get peer researchers comfortable with silence, and able to utilise it, asking them to count to five in their head after a participant finish speaking which can often encourages them to say more.

We split the group into threes, with one person being an interviewer, one being a participant, and one being an observer. They then interview each other in two rounds:

- **Round 1:** The Interviewer asks the Participant about a mundane topic (their journey here) but is only allowed to ask closed (yes/no) questions.
- **Round 2:** The Interviewer asks about the same topic but must use open questions and at least two neutral probes.
- **Debrief:** The Observer shares the difference in the quality of answers between the two rounds.

Key learning: Neutrality and Managing Reactions

Peer researchers must learn to manage their own reactions. If a participant shares something shocking, controversial, or factually incorrect, the researcher must remain curious rather than judgmental.

We roleplay scenarios where a participant says something the peer researcher disagrees with, practicing neutral responses like, "That's an interesting perspective, can you explain why you feel that way?"

Key learning: Managing Group Dynamics

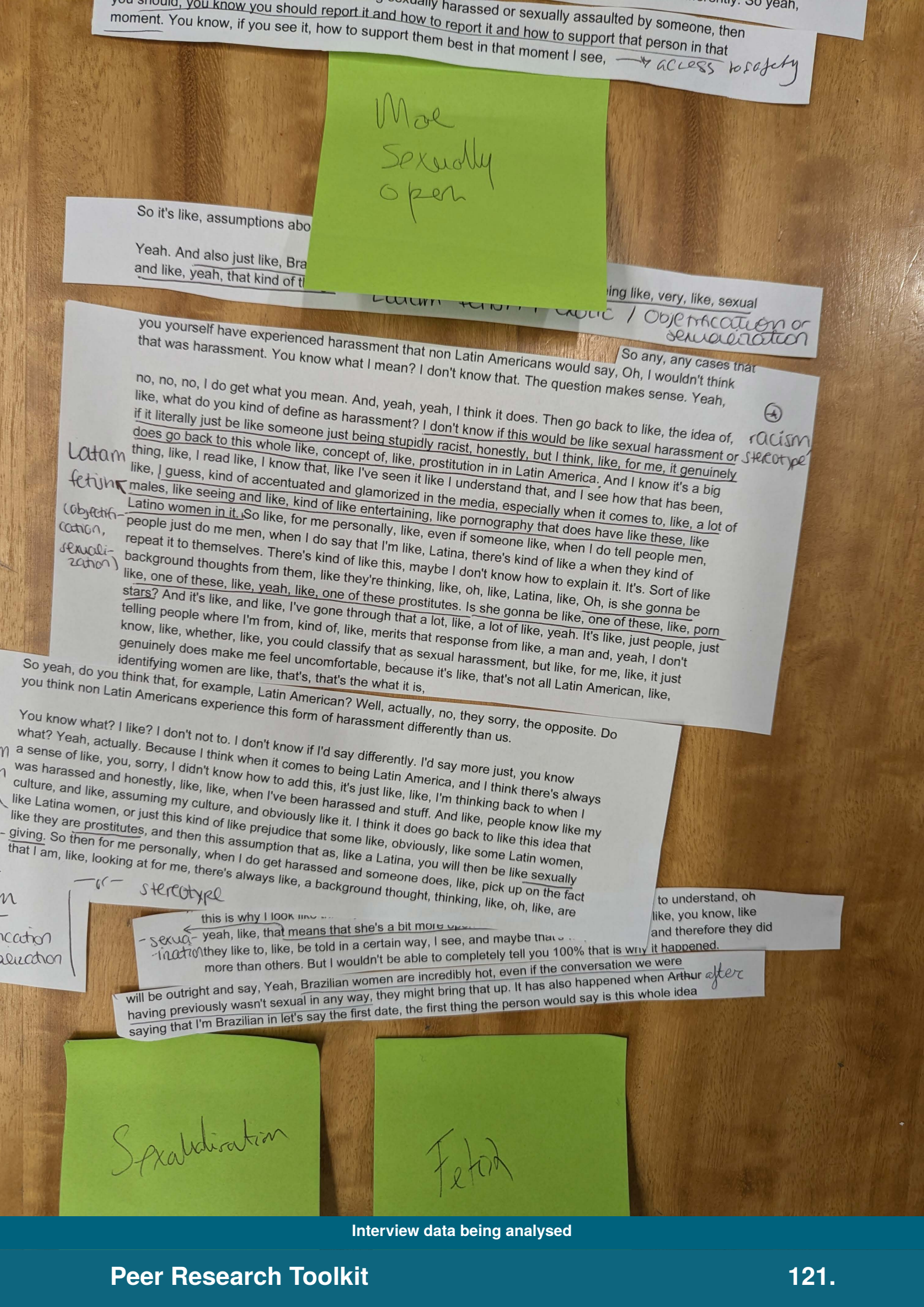
Facilitating a focus group is far harder than a one-on-one interview because the researcher has to manage the relationship between participants. It can be very daunting to have to chair a discussion, interrupt if needed, and ensure participants are given equal space to speak.

We teach peer researchers to spot different archetypes of focus group participants. For example, the "The Dominator" (who talks over everyone) and "The Passenger" (who stays silent). We teach practical steps, like remembering all participants names and where they're sitting, and phrases to balance the room, such as: "That's a really strong point, Sarah. I'd love to hear if anyone on this side of the table agrees with that?".

We then role play this, with peer researchers taking on the roles of "The Dominator", "The Passenger", neutral participants, or the facilitator. It's important that they practice conducting focus groups.

Key learning: Handling "One-Word Answers"

A common fear is that a participant just says "Yes," "No," or "It's fine." Peer researchers need strategies to open a participant without leading them. We teach neutral prompts that put the ball back in the participant's court, like the "Echo" technique (repeating the last word they said as a question) or simply asking "In what way?".



Interview data being analysed

7. Analysis & Research Outputs

7. Analysis & Research Outputs

This chapter details the collaborative process of transforming raw data into meaningful findings and actionable recommendations.

It challenges the traditional model where analysis is left to "experts," instead providing frameworks for peer researchers to lead the interpretation of both qualitative and quantitative evidence using their lived experience as a lens .

It outlines practical methods for coding transcripts, visualizing survey data, and synthesizing creative outputs, ensuring that the "mess" of fieldwork is systematically organised into clear insights .

The aim is to equip teams to produce rigorous outputs, from formal reports to creative campaigns, that maintain the authentic voice of young people while commanding the respect of decision-makers .

By the end of the chapter, practitioners can get a sense of how to facilitate an analysis process that protects youth ownership and generates specific, feasible recommendations for change.

7.1 Defining Data Analysis

Defining data analysis

Peer researchers should be provided with an understanding of the data analysis process, and why it is important. We define data analysis as:

> *"…the process of systematically applying statistical and/or logical techniques to describe and illustrate, condense and recap, and evaluate data."*

This definition allows us to focus on teaching some key principles of the data analysis process to young people:

1. **Systematic approach:** We want peer researchers to understand the need to have a clear plan, or system to analysing the data. This should be set out before the data is looked at, designed appropriately for the data gathered. Peer researchers should be able to communicate the system used, and provide a rationale for why they are taking that approach.
2. **Statistical and/or logical approach:** Often data analysis is perceived to be a statistical, computer orientated exercise. While this is an important aspect, especially with quantitative data, we want to encourage peer researchers to think about logical techniques. We want them to think critically about the data, and use their lived experience to interpret and draw conclusions.
3. **Describe and illustrate:** We want peer researchers to understand that often the first step is being able to understand and communicate what a piece of data is saying. They must describe what the graph displays, or what the interview said, and illustrate what meaning it might have.
4. **Condense and recap:** Peer researchers are taught that data analysis is a process of refinement, the condensing of large quantities of data into key findings. Recapping what was said in summaries, themes, or key findings.
5. **Evaluate data:** Lastly and importantly, we want peer researchers to critically evaluate data. They must be able to communicate the limitations of the data collected, for example gaps in their sample.

A participatory data analysis process

Data analysis is often the stage where power unintentionally slips back to the adults. In traditional research, the "experts" take the data away, interpret it, and write the report. In peer research, we resist this.

We view analysis not as a technical task of crunching numbers, but as a process of sense-making. While adult staff may need to support the administrative side (like typing up transcripts or creating graphs), the interpretation, deciding what the data means, must be led by the peer researchers.

Their lived experience acts as a lens. It allows them to spot patterns, understand slang, or interpret silence in a way that an adult researcher might miss. Therefore, the goal of this stage is to create a structured space where peer researchers can apply their "insider knowledge" to the evidence they have collected.

7.2 Preparing Data for Analysis

Peer researchers should be meaningfully involved in the analysis of the data they collect, and the creation of key findings from it. However, different aspects of the process may benefit more or less from their involvement, such as preparing data ahead of the peer researchers seeing it.

Projects must ensure that they are transparent about what process has been done to the data they have collected and that the preparation of any data simply serves to help peer researchers understand/analyse it more effectively. Data must not be removed, and inferences should not be made without the peer researchers.

There are some clear examples where projects may want to prepare data without involving peer researchers:

- **The creation of transcripts:** While peer researchers may benefit from learning the process of, and delivering transcripts from the interviews they collect, it can be often extremely time-consuming and difficult. Projects may want to create clean transcripts for the peer researchers, making it easier to read and analyse.
- **The preparation of survey data:** Many survey platforms create easy-to-digest summaries of data already, which eliminates the need for peer researchers to do basic descriptive statistics (calculating mean, medians, etc). Organisations may also want to create cross-tabs of statistical significance, rather than teaching peer researchers to navigate statistical software like Excel or SPSS.
- **Visualisations:** There may be additional ways to present data visually, such as word clouds or graphs, that can make data more accessible and easier to understand. As long as the data is not changed or skewed in a way with a purpose in mind.

Preparing creative materials for analysis

Projects should, if collected, ensure that creative materials are organised and accessible. This may include:

- Collecting and labelling all outputs clearly (for example, adding a simple code to the back of each drawing or file name for each photo or video).
- Checking consent for how each piece can be used (for example, whether it can be shown to others, reproduced in a report, or shared online).
- Printing or presenting materials in a way that can be easily viewed in a workshop – for example, printing photos on A4 sheets, creating screenshots of digital work, or preparing short video clips.
- Grouping by activity where helpful (for example, separating outputs from different workshops, or different exercises within a workshop).

The aim is that peer researchers enter the analysis session with a clear “bank” of creative material which they can look at, move around and discuss, rather than trying to remember individual pieces from memory.

7.3 Data analysis training

Introduction to analysis > Creating key findings

Peer researchers are introduced to the process of analysing data, and how we organise the data they have gathered into key themes and findings. The learning will depend on what methods they have used, and the data gathered. These could be:

1. Introduction to qualitative analysis > Creating key themes from qualitative data
2. Introduction to quantitative analysis > Creating key findings from quantitative data
3. Introduction to analysing creative outputs > Creating key themes from creative data

Decision to be made: Deciding on what the key findings or key themes are from the data that they have gathered.

Learning objectives

Peer researchers should be able to:

1. Describe the process of data analysis, and the different approaches to analysing data
    a. Understand how to analyse qualitative data
    b. Understand how to analyse quantitative data
2. Describe what key findings are, the purpose of them, and how they are created

Learning outputs

- The data gathered is understood and summarised: Peer researchers familiarise themselves with the data they have gathered, applying an understood system to examining it to draw conclusions that is sharable to interested stakeholders.
- Draft key findings created: Peer researchers will have created a draft of key findings from the data they have gathered and analysed.

Draft agendas

Like research methods, the session will depend on research methods were used and the data collected. We see project often combine the analysis of different methods on the same day, for example analysing survey data in the morning, and interview data in the afternoon. Though this can be extraordinary long for the peer researchers. A whole day might especially not be needing if the amount of data is not overwhelming (for example two interviews, or a short survey of five questions).

Introduction and icebreaker	10.00am – 10.30am
Introduction to data analysis	10.30am – 11.00am
Introduction to qualitative analysis/quantitative analysis/creative analysis	11.00pm – 12.00pm
Lunch	12.00pm – 1.00pm
Analysing the data	1.00pm – 3.00pm
Summarizing key findings	3.00pm – 3.30pm
Next steps	3.30pm – 4.00pm

1. Introduction to data analysis

Key learning: Defining data analysis as a systematic approach

Peer researchers should be provided with an understanding of the data analysis process and why it is important. We define data analysis as:

> *"…the process of systematically applying statistical and/or logical techniques to describe and illustrate, condense and recap, and evaluate data."*

This definition allows us to focus on teaching some key principles of the data analysis process to young people. We want peer researchers to understand the need to have a clear plan, or system, for analysing the data.

- This system should be set out before the data is looked at and designed appropriately for the specific data gathered.
- Peer researchers should be able to communicate the system used and provide a rationale for why they are taking that approach.

Key learning: Describe, Condense, and Evaluate

Peer researchers are taught that data analysis serves as a way of taking a vast amount of information and turning into a small number of insights. We teach peer researchers that analysis involves three main stages of interacting with the information:

1. **Describe and illustrate:** The first step is being able to understand and communicate what a piece of data is saying. They must describe what the graph displays, or what the interview said, and illustrate what meaning it might have.
2. **Condense and recap:** Data analysis is a process of refinement. Peer researchers learn to condense large quantities of data into summaries, themes, or key findings.
3. **Evaluate data:** Lastly, peer researchers must critically evaluate the data. They must be able to communicate the limitations of the data collected, such as gaps in their sample.

Examples of large data sets are provided to the group, who can reflect on how the process of data analysis can provide insight or intelligence, but also the pitfalls of it. For example:

- What could all the dentistry records in the UK tell you about the state of British teeth?
    - » What would you summarise and present?
- If we saved every WhatsApp conversation you ever had, could you summarise your personality from it in a few words?
    - » What are the dangers of condensing that much information into such a short summary?

2. Analysing quantitative research with young people

Quantitative data in peer research projects often comes from surveys, polls, or short questionnaires. It can be tempting to see this as the "technical" part of the project that adults or external researchers handle alone. However, it is important that peer researchers understand and participate meaningfully in the analysis of quantitative data, even if some of the more complex statistical work is completed by staff or partners.

The focus for peer researchers is not on learning statistical software, but on understanding what the numbers are saying, interpreting those numbers using their lived experience, and using them to create clear, accessible key findings.

Descriptive statistics: Understanding what the numbers are saying

Most peer research projects will work with descriptive statistics, which summarise what has been collected without trying to make wider statistical inferences. Peer researchers should be introduced to a small number of core concepts:

- **Counts (frequencies):** How many people gave a particular response. For example, "42 young people said they did not feel safe on public transport."
- **Percentages or proportions:** What proportion of the sample a response represents. For example, "This is 60% of the young people we spoke to." Peer researchers should understand that percentages help compare across different question options or subgroups.
- **Averages (means and medians):** For questions using scales or numerical values, peer researchers may look at simple averages. For example, the average score on a wellbeing scale or the average number of days a young person used a service in the past month.
- **Ranges and variation:** Peer researchers should be able to recognise that numbers often vary within a group, and that it can be helpful to know the lowest and highest values, not just the average.

The aim is that peer researchers can describe what a table of survey results is showing in clear language and can explain this to others.

Working with tables and graphs

Quantitative data is often easier to understand visually. Projects should prepare simple tables and graphs before analysis sessions, rather than expecting peer researchers to manipulate raw spreadsheets. Common visualisations include:

- **Bar charts:** Comparing how many participants chose each response option to a question.
- **Pie charts:** Showing how a whole group is divided into categories, for example the proportion of participants from different boroughs.
- **Line charts:** Showing change over time, for example how often young people used a service over several months.
- **Cross-tabulation tables:** Simple two-way tables, for example comparing responses to a question by gender, age group, or borough.

We show several tables and graphs and get them to describe what they're saying. When working with these, it is useful to structure the conversation in three steps:

1. Describe:
    a. "What does this chart or table show?"
    b. "Which category is largest? Which is smallest?"
3. **Interpret:**

a. “What does this mean for young people like us?”
b. “Does this fit with our experience, or does anything surprise us?”

4. **Question:**

a. “Who might be missing from this data?”
b. “Could anything about how we collected the data explain this pattern?”

Peer researchers should be supported to annotate printed graphs or slides with their own notes and reflections, which can feed directly into the creation of key findings. It also allows these annotated graphs or slides to be cut up and organised into key findings, prioritised by significance to the peer researchers later.

Looking at differences between groups (cross-tabulation)

One of the strengths of quantitative data is the ability to compare different groups within the sample. For peer research projects, the focus should be on simple and meaningful comparisons, rather than complex statistical tests. Examples include:

- Comparing responses by age group (for example, 13–15 vs 16–18-year-olds).
- Comparing genders or identities, where this is appropriate and safe.
- Comparing areas or settings, such as different boroughs, estates, or schools.
- Comparing those who use a service with those who do not.

Staff or research partners may prepare cross-tabulated tables in advance or highlight key patterns they have noticed. Peer researchers should then be supported to:

- Identify which differences feel most important or surprising.
- Discuss possible explanations, drawing on their knowledge of local services, schools, and communities.
- Decide which patterns should be turned into key findings or explored further through qualitative or creative methods.

Where more advanced statistical tests (such as tests of significance) are used, these should be explained in accessible language.

Limitations and data quality

Finally, peer researchers should be supported to critically evaluate their quantitative data. This includes:

- **Sample size:** Is the number of respondents large enough to be confident in patterns, or is it a very small group?
- **Who is missing:** Which groups of young people were not reached by the survey (for example, those not in education, those without internet access, those not using local services)?
- **Biases in collection:** Were surveys mainly completed in certain settings (such as youth clubs or schools) that might shape the responses?
- **Question design issues:** Are there questions that respondents often skipped, misunderstood, or answered inconsistently?

Making these limitations explicit in the analysis and reporting strengthens the credibility of the research and reinforces to peer researchers that no data set is perfect, and that being transparent about weaknesses is part of ethical practice.

By structuring quantitative analysis in this way, projects can ensure that peer researchers are not excluded from “the numbers” but instead develop a practical understanding of what the data shows, how it connects to their lives, and how it can be used to make a clear, compelling case for change.

Involving peer researchers in quantitative analysis workshops

Quantitative analysis should be treated as a participatory workshop, not a technical exercise done separately by adults. The general steps would be:

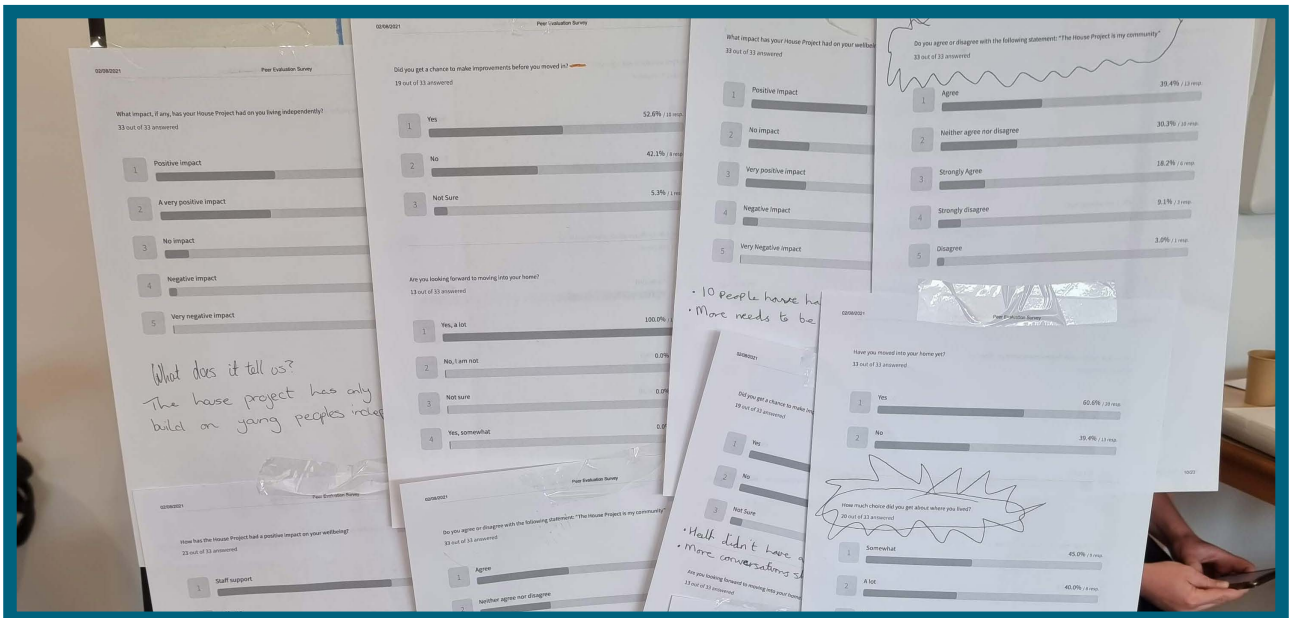
- **Familiarisation:** All of the data should be, as much as possible, put into graphs and tables and printed out for peer researchers. Each data table/graph should be printed on its own A4 page with space to make notes. As a group we go through each one, discussing what they found surprising, and learning how to approach analysing it.
- **Analyse the data:** The group collectively look at each data point, describe it in the simplest turns possible (75% said they agreed with X), and put their opinion on what they believe it means for the research question. These are noted down onto the paper.
- **Condense:** The peer researchers begin moving the papers around, sorting, ordering, and prioritising them. They will then be asked to start to remove data points that are less significant or have less to say about the research question, leaving only the headline data.
- Evaluate: Peer researchers are then, individually, asked for their top ten key findings based on what they think is most significant and interesting to the research question. We collated their rankings, and average it to make a group list of ten key findings.

Connecting quantitative and qualitative/creative data

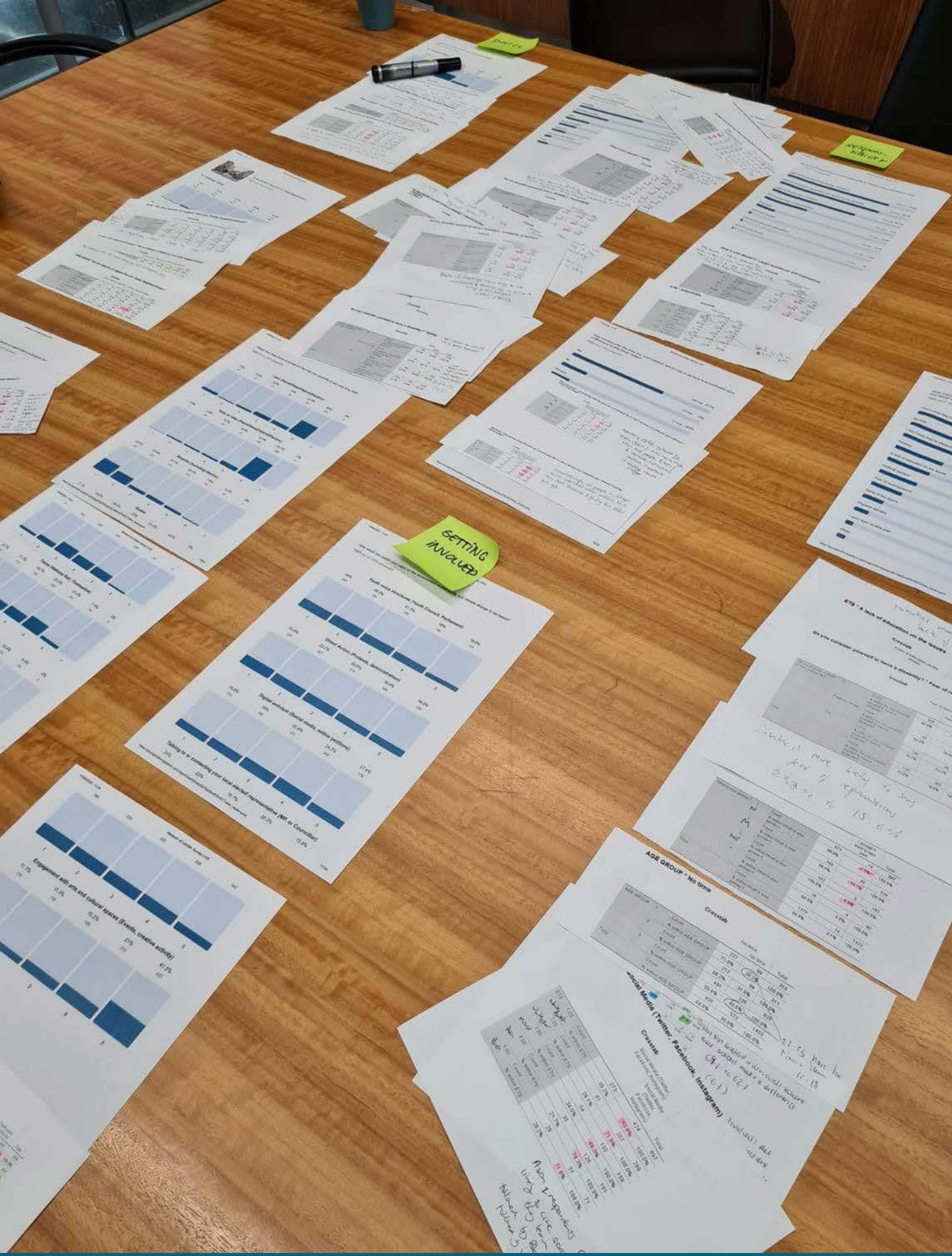
Quantitative analysis should not be done in isolation. Peer researchers should be encouraged to connect the numbers to the stories and creative outputs they have gathered. This could include:

- Using survey findings to frame qualitative themes (for example, “Two-thirds of young people said they do not feel safe on buses. In interviews, they explained this was due to…”).
- Using quantitative patterns to decide which quotes or creative pieces to foreground in the report or exhibition.
- Identifying where the numbers and the stories seem to contradict each other and discussing why that might be.

This helps peer researchers see quantitative data as another way of expressing young people’s experiences, rather than as something separate or more authoritative than their own voices.



Survey data



Sorting and prioritising survey data

3. Analysing qualitative research

Qualitative data in peer research projects usually comes from in-depth interviews, focus groups, or free-text responses in surveys. Unlike quantitative data, which arrives in neat rows and columns, qualitative data can feel messy and overwhelming, deriving from hours of audio and turned into hundreds of pages of transcripts.

Peer researchers lived experience plays an important role in analysing qualitative data, as they can use their own understand of cultural context, subtext, and language to better identifying the meaning from participants. The focus for peer researchers is not on learning complex academic coding software (like NVivo), but on becoming "detectives" who can spot patterns, group ideas, and tell the story behind the data.

Core Concepts: From "Mess" to Meaning

Just as we teach core statistical concepts for quantitative data, peer researchers should be introduced to the core concepts of qualitative sense-making:

- **Coding (Tagging):** The process of labelling a specific sentence or paragraph. For example, if a participant says, "I hate waiting for the bus in the dark," a peer researcher might code this as "Safety" or "Lighting." We often describe this to young people as "Hashtagging" the text. This is very time consuming, but thorough.
- **Themes (Patterns):** A theme is a pattern that appears across multiple participants. It is not just one person's opinion; it is a shared experience. For example, if ten people mention dark bus stops, "Public Transport Safety" becomes a Theme.
- **Quotes (Evidence):** In qualitative research, quotes serve the same purpose as statistics. They are the proof. Peer researchers need to learn to select "Golden Quotes": those that sum up a point perfectly: without taking them out of context.
- **Outliers:** Voices that disagree with the majority. Peer researchers should understand that these are not "wrong" answers but important alternative perspectives that add depth.

Approaches to qualitative analysis

While there are many academic approaches, peer researchers should be introduced to three main ways of looking at the data, deciding which fits their project best:

Type of analysis	What	Outcome
Content analysis	Peer researchers evaluate data to identify specific patterns, creating codes, labelling, or categorising what has been said.	Peer researchers are able to describe the contents of interviews or focus group, for example what issue came up and how frequently it came up.
Thematic analysis	Similar to content analysis, however the creation of codes, labels, and categories across all transcripts will be used to create larger themes that speak to the research question.	Peer researchers turn that systematic processing of transcripts into words, themes, or ideas and begin to extrapolate the key themes that addressing the research question.
Narrative analysis	Peer researchers will examine the data from participants, thinking about what it tells us about what the narrative or story of that young person is.	Peer researchers process data into a number of key stories, that potentially illustrate a large point or conclusion about the research.

It is only right to explain why I'm standing here as your new prime minister. Right now, our country is facing a profound economic crisis. The aftermath of COVID still lingers. Putin's war in Ukraine has destabilised energy markets and supply chains the world over.

I want to pay tribute to my predecessor Liz Truss. She was not wrong to want to improve growth in this country. It is a noble aim and I admired her restlessness to create change, but some mistakes were made, not born of ill will or bad intentions. Quite the opposite, in fact, but mistakes nonetheless and I have been elected as leader of my party and your prime minister, in part, to fix them and that work begins immediately.

I will place economic stability and confidence at the heart of this government's agenda. This will mean difficult decisions to come, but you saw me during COVID doing everything I could to protect people and businesses with schemes like furlough. There are always limits, more so now than ever, but I promise you this, I will bring that same compassion to the challenges we face today. The government I lead will not leave the next generation, your children and grandchildren, with a debt to settle that we were too weak to pay ourselves.

I will unite our country, not with words but with action. I will work day in and day out to deliver for you. This government will have integrity, professionalism and accountability at every level. Trust is earned and I will earn yours. I will always be grateful to Boris Johnson for his incredible achievements as prime minister and I treasure his warmth and generosity of spirit. And I know he would agree that the mandate my party earned in 2019 is not the sole property of any one individual. It is a mandate that belongs to and unites all of us, and the heart of that mandate is our manifesto. I will deliver on its promise, a stronger NHS, better schools, safer streets, control of our borders, protecting our environment, supporting our armed forces, levelling up and building an economy that embraces the opportunities of Brexit where businesses invest, innovate and create jobs.

I understand how difficult this moment is. After the billions of pounds it cost us to combat COVID, after all the dislocation that caused in the midst of a terrible war that must be seen successfully to its conclusions, I fully appreciate how hard things are, and I understand too that I have work to do to restore trust after all that has happened. All I can say is that I am not daunted. I know the high office I have accepted and I hope to live up to its demands, but when the opportunity to serve comes along, you cannot question the moment, only your willingness.

So I stand here before you ready to lead our country into the future, to put your needs above politics, to reach out and build a government that represents the very best traditions of my party. Together we can achieve incredible things. We will create a future worthy of the sacrifices so many have made and fill tomorrow and every day thereafter with hope. Thank you.

Practice coding of a Rishi Sunak speech

Involving peer researchers in qualitative analysis workshops

The way to involve peer researchers in qualitative analysis will depend on the approach taken, however we find that regardless there are some general steps that still apply:

1. **Familiarisation:** Transcripts should be completed ahead of the session, anonymised, and printed out for the session. The first step is for peer researchers simply to read the transcripts, familiarise themselves with what has been said, and take notes.

2. **Analyse the transcripts:** The group should break down into either smaller groups, pairs, or individuals. These are then given the same transcripts and asked to analyse in the way that peer researchers have chosen (coding, themes, highlight quotes). Ideally, each transcript is analysed by more than one peer researcher to reduce the bias of an individual.

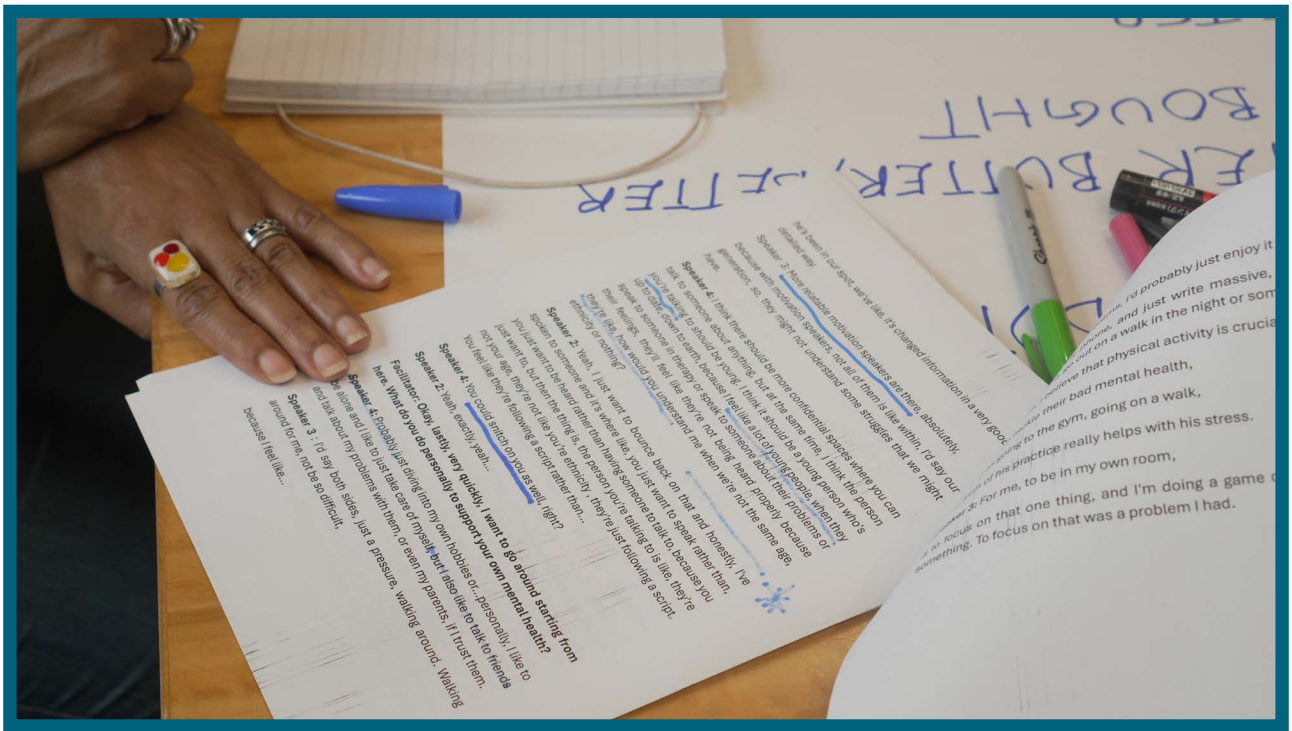
3. **Condensing:** The group should come back together to discuss the outcome of their initial data analysis. This is where you might want to categorise codes or themes, sort quotes by importance, or any group activity that begins to condense the data. For example:

    a. **Simple quote grouping:** All the best quotes identified by the peer researchers are highlighted, cut out from the transcript, and organised on a table. The top of the table is great significance, bottom of the table is less significant, with columns representing different topics or themes.

    b. **Collecting codes and examining frequency:** All the codes are collected from young people, grouped into similar themes or synonyms, and ordered by frequency.

    c. **Five themes:** Each peer researchers is asked to generate ten key themes that came out of the transcript they were looking at. These themes are collated together, and the group discuss what are the common ten themes from all the transcripts that have emerged.

4. **Evaluate:** Peer researchers bring all the work they've done together to come up with key findings or themes. This is a next stage of reiterating previous themes and findings, evaluating them for significance, and boiling it down to five key themes or findings that, importantly, answer the original research question.



Interviews being analysed

4. Analysing creative research

Creative methods are a core part of many peer research projects. Young people may produce drawings, photography, video, maps, zines, poetry, theatre, or digital content as part of the research process. These outputs are not just "nice extras" or illustrations for the report; they are data, expressing experiences, emotions and ideas that may not surface through surveys or interviews.

Analysis of creative data should therefore be treated as a deliberate stage of the project, not something that happens informally or only at the end. Peer researchers should be supported to look systematically at what they and other participants have produced, and to use this to generate and refine key themes and findings.

Spending time with the material

Analysis should start with careful looking and listening. It is important to give peer researchers time simply to experience the creative outputs, without immediately trying to categorise them. Common approaches include:

- **Gallery walk:** Creative pieces (drawings, photos, quotes, maps) are laid out around the room. Peer researchers walk around, in silence at first, looking at everything. They can then add sticky notes with words, questions or feelings that each piece evokes.
- **Shared viewing or listening:** For videos, audio pieces or performances, the group watches or listens together, possibly more than once, and notes initial reactions and standout moments.
- **Pair or small-group reflection:** Peer researchers discuss which pieces stand out to them and why – for example, which feel most powerful, surprising, upsetting or hopeful.

At this stage, facilitators should encourage peer researchers to focus on what they notice and how it makes them feel, rather than jumping straight to interpretation. These first impressions will be useful later when themes are developed.

Identifying recurring images, ideas and feelings

Once peer researchers have spent time with the material, the next step is to identify patterns across different outputs. This is like thematic analysis of qualitative data but uses visual or creative "clues" as well as words. Practical techniques include:

- **Sorting and clustering:**
    - » Peer researchers physically move pieces into groups that "feel like they belong together", explaining why.
    - » For example, they might cluster images that show closed doors, barriers or dark colours in one group, and images showing parks, light and open space in another.
- **Spotting recurring symbols or metaphors:**
    - » Noting repeated objects, colours or motifs (for example, CCTV cameras, broken hearts, crowded buses, empty wallets).
    - » Discussing what these might represent for young people in the project.
- • **Describing each cluster:**
    - » Giving each group of pieces a short description or working title, such as "feeling watched", "no safe places", or "finding support with friends".
    - » Writing these titles onto flipchart paper, which can later become draft themes.

This process works best when peer researchers are given freedom to move things around, challenge each other, and refine or rename clusters as they go along.

Linking creative work to words and stories

Creative pieces often sit alongside other forms of data, such as interviews, focus groups and surveys. Peer researchers should be encouraged to link what they see in the creative work to the words and stories collected elsewhere. This can involve:

- **Adding captions and quotes:** Pairing an image or drawing with a quotation from an interview or focus group that expresses a similar idea. For example, a photo of a locked gate might sit alongside a quote about being excluded from a youth club or public space.
- **Using creative pieces as "evidence" for themes:** For each draft theme, selecting one or two creative outputs that illustrate it particularly well. Discussing how these pieces help others understand the issue in a more emotional or immediate way.
- **Exploring tensions:** Noting where creative work seems to "argue with" or complicate more straightforward findings from surveys or interviews. For example, survey data might show high satisfaction with a service, while creative outputs depict feelings of isolation or stigma.

This stage reinforces to peer researchers that creative work is not a separate "art" activity, but part of the evidence base for their findings and recommendations.

Making decisions together about meaning

As with other forms of analysis, it is vital that peer researchers are involved in making explicit decisions about what the creative data is telling them. Creative works, like drawings, photos, or collages, can be open to interpretation. Without the peer researchers' input, there is a risk that adult facilitators might misinterpret the symbolism or emotional weight of the work based on their own biases. Facilitators should guide the group to move from "looking" at the art to "translating" it into actionable insights. This process can be supported by:

- **Agreeing on core messages:** Asking the group to collectively agree on 1–3 key messages that emerge from each cluster of creative work. This forces the group to synthesize complex visuals into clear statements.
- **Personifying the data:** Using creative prompts to help peer researchers articulate the "voice" of the artwork, such as:
    - » "If this set of images could talk to a decision-maker, what would they say?"
    - » "What are young people asking for, directly or indirectly, in these pieces?"
- **Drafting plain language summaries:** Once the group has discussed the meaning, the facilitator should write these key messages down in plain language. It is crucial to read these back to the group to check that they feel accurate and fair.

These agreed messages serve a dual purpose: they validate the creative expression of the participants and provide a solid foundation for thinking about key findings.


quick
stick glue
40g

5. Key findings

At this stage, peer researchers likely have walls covered in post it notes (qualitative themes), pages of graphs organised (quantitative data), and piles of creative artwork. They may have even come up with key findings for each of the different types of data. The challenge with mixed-methods approach is bringing them together and synthesizing it into a single set of key findings.

Peer researchers should be supported to synthesise different types of data, for example finding a theme from the qualitative data to match one of the headline quantitative findings. The easiest approach is to have a final key finding be one that is supported by data from all the approaches used, however this may not always be suitable. Peer researchers may feel strongly that a finding that only came up in interviews is vital to include, reflecting on why it might not have shown up in quantitative data (for example, we didn't include a question that spoke to it on the survey).

The aim is for peer researchers to come up with ten key findings, that accurately capture the most important findings across all the data that was collected.

Drafting Headlines

Once the peer researchers have agreed on their top ten key findings, we challenge them to turn these points into headlines that could appear on a front page. This is not about sensationalising; it is about communicating significance and impact immediately.

We teach them that a strong headline combines the Cause (The lack of lighting) with the Effect (Young people staying away).

- **Weak Headline (The Data Dump):** "34% of young people did not like using their park, with many describing it with words like unsafe, too dark, and dangerous."
    - » **Critique:** Too long. It lists data but doesn't tell a story.
- **Weak Headline (The Vague Statement):** "Young people think parks are scary and don't like the lighting."
    - » **Critique:** This sounds like an opinion, not research finding.
- **Strong Headline (The Impact):** "Poor lighting is effectively excluding one in three young people from using their local parks."
    - » **Why it works:** It uses active language ("Excluding") and creates a clear link between the problem (lighting) and the result (exclusion).

7.4 Stakeholder engagement in analysis

Once peer researchers have coded their data and identified draft themes, there is an opportunity to bring stakeholders back into the room before the final report is written. This session is not about asking stakeholders for permission to publish findings. It is about providing context, fleshing out recommendations, and building support. Peer researchers know what young people are saying, but stakeholders (commissioners, service leads) often hold the missing puzzle pieces explaining why a system is working that way.

Navigating Power Dynamics: The "Explanation vs. Excuse" Trap

This session carries a specific risk: stakeholders might try to "explain away" negative findings.

- Example: Peer researchers find that waiting times are too long. A stakeholder might say, "That's because of national funding cuts, so you can't blame us."
- We teach peer researchers: To listen for the explanation (it adds context) but reject it as an excuse. The finding remains true (waiting times are too long), but the analysis becomes stronger (waiting times are too long because of funding cuts).

For this engagement, peer researchers should lead the session in three stages:

1. The key findings presented

Peer researchers present the raw headlines from their data, usually on a presentation to all the stakeholders. This is an opportunity to practice their public speaking, and a rehearsal beforehand is essential. This is followed by a short Q&A from the stakeholders who will likely want to ask peer researchers about the process, as well as the findings.

2. The "Why" Workshop (Collaborative Analysis)

We break into mixed groups, with a peer researcher on each table. Each table could take a different theme, or a different key finding, chairing the discussion with stakeholders.

- **The Finding (Peer Researcher):** "Our data shows young people engage with the service once, then never come back."
- **The Context (Stakeholder):** "That might be because our funding only covers a short amount of time over school holidays."
- **The Combined Insight:** The final report won't just say "Service retention is poor"; it will say "Service retention is limited by the funding model."

This can turn a potential conflict (criticism of the service) into a shared systemic critique (criticism of the funding model).

3. Identifying the "Low Hanging Fruit"

Before moving to formal recommendations, peer researchers ask stakeholders to identify which findings surprise them and which confirm what they already knew.

- "Which of these findings gives you the most leverage to argue for change internally?"
- "Is there any data here that you can use tomorrow?"

This helps peer researchers understand which of their findings are "Open Doors" (easy to push) and which are "Locked Doors" (will require a fight), preparing them for the recommendations phase.

7.5 Introduction to campaigning and public speaking

This session acts as the bridge between Analysis (understanding the problem) and Action (proposing the solution). Peer researchers should be provided training around campaigning, social change, public speaking, and power mapping. They will then be supported to think about their draft recommendations/the impact they want to create.

A strong set of recommendations is vital in ensuring that young people can meaningfully act on the findings of the research. We want young people to act because of the research, and young people want to see change as a result of their involvement in the work.

Decision to be made: Creating a finalised list of recommendations that address the key findings, ready to be presented to decision-makers.

Learning objectives

- Use the Sheila McKechnie Foundation (SMK) Social Change Grid to identify what kind of change they are asking for (individual vs. systemic).
- Differentiate between a "Finding" (what the data says) and a "Recommendation" (what we want to happen).
- Identify where power resides in a system and who the specific "Targets" are for their advocacy.
- Draft recommendations that are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound).
- Articulate their ideas persuasively through public speaking and elevator pitches.

Learning output

- **Draft Recommendations:** A list of 5–10 clear, actionable recommendations linked to specific evidence points.
- **Power Map:** A visual map identifying exactly who has the power to enact these recommendations (naming the specific Head of Service rather than just "The Council").

Example agenda

Introduction and icebreaker	10.00am – 10.30am
Understanding Social Change & Power	10.30am – 11.30am
From Findings to Solutions	11.30am – 12.30pm
Lunch	12.30pm – 1.30pm
Drafting SMART Recommendations	1.30pm – 2.30pm
Public Speaking & The Pitch	2.30pm – 3.30pm
Stakeholder Engagement (Refining)	3.30pm – 4.30pm

1. Introduction to Social Change & Power

Key learning: The Sheila McKechnie Foundation (SMK) Social Change Grid

We start by helping peer researchers understand that "Change" is not just one big thing. It happens at different levels, and it moves and evolves. We use the SMK Social Change Grid to help them map where their project fits. This grid breaks change down into four quadrants:

1. Individual Change: Changing how people think, feel, or behave ("Young people feel more confident asking for help").
2. Community/Social Change: Changing social norms or relationships ("Ending the stigma around mental health in our neighbourhood").
3. Institutional/Service Change: Changing how an organisation works ("The youth club stays open until 9 pm").
4. Political/Systemic Change: Changing laws or national policy ("The government increases funding for all youth services").

2. Designing Recommendations

Key learning: The difference between a Finding and a Recommendation

Peer researchers need to be taught how to transition from a key finding to a recommendation. They need to map out a range of different actions they think will potential address the issues they have found in the evidence of their key findings.

We get the group to put each key finding on a flipchart and draft as many recommendations, or actions, they can think of. They then discuss all of them, and are asked to categorise them around the SMK quadrants of individual community, institutional, political change.

Key learning: Making it SMART

Once we have ideas, the peer researchers must sharpen them. We introduce the SMART criteria (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound). We ask the group to mark their recommendations based on this, and explain why a recommendation received a good mark or a bad mark:

- **Bad recommendation:** "Make mental health services better." (Too vague).
- **Good recommendation:** "The CAMHS service should introduce a text-message reminder system for appointments by January 2025 to reduce missed slots." (Specific and Time-bound).

3. Public Speaking & Pitching

Key learning: Passion backed by evidence

Before peer researchers engage with stakeholders it is important that we prepare them to present their findings and their ideas. This involves a careful balance of their own lived experience, underpinned by the evidence that they have collected from other young people.

There are two main exercises we get them to practice their public speaking skills:

1. **Soapbox:** Peer researchers have 60 seconds to speak passionately about a subject of their choice that is not related to the research. The focus is not on evidence, or the research, but on important speaking skills like good volume, eye contact, and body language.
2. **Elevator pitches:** Peer researchers are asked to think about how to speak about the research, the key findings, and recommendations in three minutes or less. They are given the structure of starting with a hook, following up with the evidence, and ending with an ask.

7.6 Stakeholder engagement on recommendations

While peer researchers own the findings (the truth of what is happening), the recommendations (what needs to change) require a bridge between the peer researchers' vision and the stakeholders' operational reality. This session is designed to stress-test ideas, identify owners for specific actions, and ensure recommendations land on desks where they can be implemented. Peer researchers should lead this engagement in three distinct stages to move from broad ideas to concrete commitments.

1. Outcomes vs methods

Peer researchers present their draft recommendations. However, they must clearly distinguish between the outcome they want and the method they are suggesting. For example:

- **The Outcome (Non-negotiable):** "We need shorter waiting times."
- **The Method (Negotiable):** "We think you should hire three more staff."

Stakeholders are often experts in the mechanics (budget, HR, logistics). By being flexible on the method but rigid on the outcome, peer researchers allow stakeholders to use their expertise to solve the problem without dismissing the need for change.

2. The Traffic Light Workshop (Feasibility Testing)

After establishing the outcomes based on the key findings, peer researchers split recommendations and stakeholders up in a world café style discussion. Each table has a peer researcher and a recommendation or outcome theme, and stakeholders rotate to the table they are most interested in/have the most expertise in. The tables are encouraged to review and refine draft recommendations, and suggest additional recommendations along a traffic light system:

- **Green (Quick Wins):** Changes that cost little to no money and can happen immediately (for example changing the language on an appointment letter).
- **Amber (Structural Shifts):** Changes that require budget approval or process redesign but are agreed upon in principle.
- **Red (Very challenging):** Recommendations that stakeholders say are very challenging due to legislation or strict funding constraints. These should not be discarded, but thought about how they can be reframed into amber or green changes.

3. Assigning "The Who"

A recommendation needs owners who will take it forward and work to enact it. The final stage of the session is strictly practical. Peer researchers ask stakeholders to place their names (or job titles) next to specific recommendations.

- **The Question:** "Who holds the budget or the decision-making power for this specific point?"
- **The Commitment:** "Who will be the person to write the formal response to this recommendation in six months?"

This ensures that when the final report is published, it does not land in a general inbox but arrives with a specific stakeholder who has already publicly engaged with the content.

Re-thinking Green Transitions peer researcher presenting recommendations to the council

7.7 Research Outputs & Involving Young People

Once the peer researchers have analysed the data and created draft recommendations, projects will shift into the creation of research outputs. There are a range of outputs that can be created, ranging from non-traditional to traditional.

- **Traditional research outputs:** Reports, briefings, articles/blogs, infographics and published data sets
- **Non-traditional research outputs:** Exhibitions, creative outputs like videos or art pieces, performances or events, and designs.

Traditional research projects will normally result in a report or briefing, but peer research projects need to reflect on the purpose of any research output, and the audience needed that needs to be reached. Reports and briefings might be suitable for reaching decision makers, while creative outputs like videos or exhibitions might reach young people or the wider public.

Reports

Reports are a written document that details the work of the project, and are very often the most common output from peer research projects. Generally, peer research reports cover the following:

1. **Introduction:** The project and research will be summarised in the introduction, often written by peer research or the peer research group.
2. **Methodology:** The approaches to research the project took will be summarised in the methodology section. This will often include information about the research sample, and research methods used. For peer research projects, it is important to detail the participatory approach taken, and how projects approached recruitment, co-design, and the decisions that peer researchers were responsible for.
3. **Key Findings:** Reports will summarise the key findings from the research, typically in a list of less than 10 key findings.
4. **Recommendations:** Reports will detail the recommendations that came from the young people, summarising what changes they would like to see as as a result of the conclusions drawn in the research.
5. **The research findings:** Reports will then typically go into more detail about all of the findings from the data gathered. This section may be several chapters, divided by emerging theme, or research approach. Each chapter can be introduced by a different peer researcher.

Peer researchers must be involved in some way in the creation or design of the final research report. They must feel a sense of ownership over the final outputs, like a report. However, the level of participation can vary depending on the time or budget available, or the interest or skills of the peer researchers. There are varying levels of participation in report production that peer researchers can participate in:

- **Authorship in all outputs:** Peer researchers, as a minimum, should participate in the crediting of the work to them. This means consenting to being cited as one of the authors at the minimum and agreeing to have their image featured at the most.
- **Joint or individual introduction writing:** Peer researchers should be supported, and remunerated, to write introductions for the report. This could be an overall introduction to the report, or introductions to individual chapters. They can do this as an individual peer researcher, or collectively as a group.
- **Writing key sections or additional insights:** Additional to introductions, peer researchers can be supported and remunerated to write sections of the report. This could be to speak to how a particular finding resonates with their own lived experience, or element of the process they enjoyed.

- **Writing the entire report:** There are peer research projects where the peer researchers themselves are responsible for writing the entire report. This is more likely with older groups, who tend to have existing skills in research or academia. This can be divided up, with each peer researcher writing a different section (ideally the one they are most interested in).
- **Designing the report:** Lastly, peer researchers can support with the design of the report. For example, peer researchers could decide on the colour scheme the want to use, the images that want included (including being asked to provide images themselves for the report), and other decisions around the design language of the report. Having peer researchers participate in any conversations with the inhouse or contracted report designer allows them to engage and contribute to this.

Briefings

Briefings are a smaller written output compared to a full report. They are typically created by projects who do not have the ability to create a full report, or as a supplementary output to the report that targets a specific stakeholder group (such as decision makers). Because briefings are short (often 2–4 pages), the editing process is difficult. The role of the peer researcher here is:

- **Gatekeep priorities:** Peer researchers should act as the gatekeeper on priorities, ensuring that the briefing includes the points that they really want to convey. They can vote on the top facts or findings they think should be the headlines for the briefing.
- **Tailoring the asks:** Different briefings target different people (a briefing for MPs vs. a briefing for school headteachers). Peer researchers should review the recommendations to ensure the language appeals to the specific power the reader holds.
- **Authentic voice:** Instead of a dry summary, peer researchers should bring their authentic written voice into the briefing (a smaller writing task compared to a full report), challenging the reader to take the briefing seriously.

Infographics

Infographics act as a visual translation of the data. They are essential for social media and for making findings accessible to young people who might not read a text-heavy report. The peer researcher's role here is not just about aesthetic design (choosing colours), but about visual metaphor. They ensure the images represent the feeling of the data, not just the numbers.

We often present initial drafts of infographics to peer researchers for feedback, to ensure that they're happy with how the data is being presented, the metaphors and icons used, and just simply if they think it just looks good.

Non-traditional outputs

Non-traditional outputs (exhibitions, Zines, podcasts, immersive theatre, videos) are very well suited to peer research projects, however, can be costly. These formats can be disruptive, challenging the language of traditional academia and allowing peer researchers to communicate in their own visual language and mediums (for example short form videos). The role of the peer researcher here is:

- **Medium selection:** Peer researchers decide how the story should be told. If the findings are emotional and raw, they might choose a podcast or spoken word performance. If the findings are about physical space, they might choose a photo exhibition. They may also choose to tell the story in a way that interests them or involves skills they want to build.
- **Involved in the creation:** Regardless of the output chosen, peer researchers should be involved in the creation. This could be on-screen for video, as the host of a podcast, behind the camera, or as part of the script writing process.

8. Creating impact, and a legacy of participation

7. Creating impact, and a legacy of participation

This chapter addresses the ultimate goal of peer research: ensuring that the insights generated lead to tangible action and a lasting legacy.

It distinguishes between influencing external policy, from changing frontline practice to shifting systemic norms and driving community-led social action, providing frameworks for peer researchers to design interventions and hold decision-makers accountable.

It explores how to sustain the momentum of youth participation beyond a single project, outlining models for retention, staff progression, and embedding youth voice into permanent organisational structures.

The aim is to help organisations close the "impact gap," ensuring that young people are not just listened to, but are empowered to shape the services and systems that affect their lives.

By the end of the chapter, practitioners will have tools to evaluate the true impact of the work and create a sustainable legacy where youth leadership becomes "business as usual".

8.1 Creating Policy Change

Policy change is often misinterpreted as exclusively the domain of national legislation or high-level government strategy. In the context of youth peer research, however, policy change encompasses a spectrum of shifts in rules, priorities, and resource allocations across multiple levels of a system. From a headteacher changing a school's detention policy to a local authority re-commissioning mental health service, policy change occurs wherever decision-makers formalise a new way of working based on evidence.

Frontline, Service/Organisation, and System/Policy

To create impact effectively, peer researchers and their supporting organisations must identify the specific level at which their findings can gain traction. This requires a nuanced understanding of the "Frontline, Service/Organisation, and System/Policy" framework, which helps categorise the spheres of influence available to a project.

- **Frontline-Level Change:** This refers to changes in individual behaviours, frontline practices, and immediate environments. For peer researchers, this might look like influencing how a specific youth worker interacts with young people or changing the "ground rules" in a local community centre. Impact here is often immediate and tangible but localised. For example, a study on youth interactions might lead to a teacher altering their classroom management style to be more inclusive.
- **Service/Organisation-Level Change:** This involves organisational or community-wide shifts. It includes changes to service design, institutional policies (school behaviour codes, housing association induction processes), or local funding priorities. The service/organisation level is frequently the "sweet spot" for local peer research projects, as decision-makers are accessible and the scope is manageable yet significant.
- **System/Policy-Level Change:** This encompasses systemic, societal, or national policy shifts. While a single local project rarely rewrites national law, it can contribute to macro change by adding to a broader evidence base, shifting public narrative, or influencing regional strategies (a London-wide approach to youth violence). Studies on migration or national identity often operate at this level, aggregating diverse local findings to challenge national discourse.
- **The blurriness of Change:** In the real world, change is rarely this neat. These levels are porous and often bleed into one another. A "Service" change, for example a single youth centre deciding to stay open an hour later on Fridays, can act as a pilot that proves the concept for a "System/Policy" policy shift across the whole borough.

Young Residents in Partnership presenting findings

Managing Expectations: Realistic vs. Aspirational Change

One of the ethical responsibilities of supporting adults is to manage the tension between the radical change young people often desire and the incremental change systems typically deliver, especially in the timeframes typical to peer research. Peer researchers may feel disillusioned if their work does not see some form of impact, or movement towards action.

It's important to frame impact in terms of "wins" of varying sizes. A "small win" might be a commitment from a single service to review its training; a "big win" might be a change in local funding. Organisations should celebrate small wins with peer researchers, while explaining the often-slow moving nature of larger change. When there are bigger wins, even if far down the line, this should be communicated back to peer researchers.

Level of Change	Definition	Typical Decision-Makers	Realistic "Asks" for Peer Researchers	Examples of Peer Research Impact
Frontline Practice	Changes in daily interactions, individual behaviours, and immediate service delivery.	Youth workers, teachers, reception staff, police officers, health practitioners.	"Change how you greet young people." "Use these specific words when explaining rights." "Create a quiet space in the waiting room."	Peer researchers in a hospital project influenced nurses to wear informal name badges to reduce anxiety.
Service /	Changes in organisational rules, service design, local budgets, or institutional culture.	Headteachers, service managers, charity CEOs, housing officers, local commissioners.	"Fund a new weekly support group." "Rewrite the behaviour policy." "Change the opening hours of the clinic." "Train all staff in trauma-informed practice."	A housing association changed its induction process for young tenants based on peer research findings.
System / Policy	Changes in legislation, national strategy, wide-scale resource allocation, or societal norms.	MPs, Councillors, Regional Mayors, Funders, National Bodies (NHS England).	"Endorse this manifesto." "Prioritise youth mental health in the regional strategy." "Change the law on stop and search."	A national peer research campaign influenced the government to review statutory guidance on school exclusions.

Peer-Led Influence Strategies

Peer researchers are often the most compelling advocates for their own work. Their dual authority, derived from the rigorous data they have collected and their own lived experience, makes them difficult for decision-makers to ignore. Effective influence strategies leverage this unique position.

- **Presentations and Dialogues:** Rather than standard PowerPoint presentations, peer researchers can facilitate dialogues or "human library" events where decision-makers engage with the data through stories. This shifts the dynamic from passive listening to active engagement.
- **Co-Authoring Policy Briefs:** Young people can co-write short, accessible briefings for specific audiences ("What Headteachers Need to Know"). These should focus on actionable steps rather than dense methodology.
- **Media and Campaigning:** For issues requiring public pressure, peer researchers can act as spokespeople. Training in media engagement and public speaking allows them to control the narrative. Projects like the Peer Action Collective demonstrate how young people can lead national campaigns on sensitive topics like youth violence.
- **Visual and Creative Advocacy:** Recommendations can be delivered through film, theatre, or zines. A creative output often travels further than a report, reaching emotional levers that data alone cannot touch.

Tracking Commitments and Accountability

There can be a challenge that after a successful launch event, where decision-makers attend and peer researchers successfully present their work, that action can quickly fade. Accountability requires a systematic approach to tracking promises, and a commitment tracker can be an easy way to do this.

This logs what was promised, by whom, and by when. It can give peer researchers a clear plan on which stakeholders they should follow up with, with responsibility split between the group for different stakeholders.

Toolkit: Impact Planning & Accountability

This template helps peer researchers translate a finding into a strategic plan for action. This can be either used during the planning of action and impact, or post-launch/stakeholder engagement to track existing commitments and stakeholders.

Finding	Desired Change (The "Ask")	Stakeholder (Target)	How do we reach them/ contact information	Timeline	Lead Peer researcher	Current Status
Example: 60% of young people don't know how to access mental health support.	*Launch a QR code sticker campaign in all school toilets.*	*Head of Student Support / Public Health Lead.*	*Presentation at Headteachers' Forum.*	*Nov - Dec*	*Team A*	*Meeting booked*

8.2 Designing Programmes & Policy Interventions

Research findings often describe a problem without automatically revealing the solution. The transition from "we know X is wrong" to "we should build Y" can often requires a design process, one supported by staff working with a service or organisation. Peer researchers are well placed to lead this co-design phase, ensuring that the voices of young people through their research is addressed.

Translating Findings into Design Principles

Before jumping to solutions ("let's build an app"), it is useful to establish some design principles with the peer researchers. Derived from the research, these are principles that must be adhered to when designing a solution. For example, if research finds that young people distrust services that require formal referrals, a design principle might be: "Any new service must be accessible without a professional referral."

Design principles act as a guide, focusing on what is a core non-negotiable that needs to be achieved to address the needs identifying by the research. They do allow flexibility and creativity in some form, allowing professionals to shape solutions into practical reality, but without moving away from the core issue that it is trying to address. These design principles should be designed by peer researchers before entering into any solution design phase.

Research Finding	Design Principle ("So any solution must...")	Possible Intervention Idea
Young people find clinical settings intimidating and sterile.	...feel like a living room, not a waiting room.	A drop-in mental health cafe with sofas and music.
Young people can't afford travel to existing youth clubs.	...be within walking distance or free to access via transport.	A mobile youth bus that visits estates; or free bus passes for club members.
Young people feel judged by reception staff.	...ensure the first point of contact is peer-led or non-judgmental.	A "peer greeter" role at the front desk; training for receptionists.

Co-Design Processes with Peer Researchers

Co-design workshops bring together peer researchers, practitioners, and technical experts (service designers, web developers) to generate solutions. The "Double Diamond" model, is a useful framework here to structure the workshops:

- **Discover:** Understand the issue rather than merely assuming what it is. Peer researchers will share evidence the work that they have done.
- **Define:** Given what the key findings are, and the insight it provides, how do we define the problem in a different way. This is the key findings and analysis from the peer researchers.
- **Develop:** Using the research, peer researchers brainstorm, prototype, and test their solutions with policy makers.
- **Deliver:** Solutions are tested at a small scale and reiterated or dropped depending on their effectiveness. Peer researchers support to understand unexpected successes or failures.

Effective co-design requires adults to step back from being "experts with the answers" to being "experts with resources." Adults should explain constraints (budget, legal duties) clearly at the start, not to shut down ideas, but as creative boundaries to work within. This prevents the "feasibility gap" where young people design impossible solutions and feel let down when they are rejected.

8.3 Social Action

While policy change relies on influencing those with power (commissioners, politicians), social action relies on building power amongst the community. In the Participatory Action Research (PAR) tradition, research is not just about generating knowledge, it is about generating action. Social action, involving the peer researchers, is the clearest form of this. The peer researchers shift from researchers and observers to advocates. Social action is particularly effective when the research reveals issues that cannot be solved by a single policy tweak, such as stigma, cultural attitudes, or lack of community cohesion.

The Spectrum of Social Action

Social action is not one thing. It ranges from "soft" power (raising awareness) to "hard" power (disruptive campaigning). Peer research teams should decide where on the spectrum their evidence leads them.

Type of Action	Goal	Target Audience	Peer Research Example
Awareness Raising	To change how people think or feel about an issue.	The general public, peers, or specific communities.	A poster campaign in schools challenging the stigma around free school meals, using quotes from the research interviews.
Community Mobilisation	To bring people together to build connection and collective strength.	The community itself (residents of an estate).	Organizing a "Reclaim the Park" event with music and food to demonstrate that young people want safe community spaces.
Digital Activism	To spread a message virally or disrupt a narrative online.	Online networks, media consumers.	A TikTok series or podcast where peer researchers share "myth-busting" facts from their data to counter negative media narratives about youth violence.
Campaigning / Lobbying	To pressure a specific decision-maker to say "Yes" to a demand.	A specific power-holder (MP, Headteacher).	A petition and letter-writing campaign demanding that the local council stops the closure of a youth center, backed by data on usage rates.

Delivering social action

Social action, designed by the peer researchers, has advantages and disadvantages as an approach to the impact phase of the work. On the one hand, it does not rely on decision-makers or those in power: peer researchers design their own programme of action and act themselves to make change. On the other hand, to do this effectively, social action can be very time intensive and costly. The best balance for projects is to involve stakeholders, who can provide access or platforms or funding, but still very much root action in the work of peer researchers.

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8.4 Embedding Participation into Organisational Structures

The ultimate legacy of peer research is when an organisation stops treating peer research as a one off "project" and starts treating it as a fundamental operating principle. This is the shift from doing participation to being participatory. This requires structural, procedural, cultural changes, and (as always) consistent funding.

We see this often in the work we do, where a single peer research project becomes the adopted model of youth participation, conducted annually or bi-annually. When staff have participated in a single peer research project, they tend to be more likely to take it forward in their practice going forward, become the default approach to evaluation or design.

Structural Changes

To embed participation, organisations need permanent structures that survive individual funding cycles. There are several established youth voice structures that organisations can adopt:

- **Standing Youth Advisory Groups (YAGs):** A permanent body that is consulted on strategic decisions, not just specific projects. They can commission peer research when needed.
- **Youth on Boards:** Appointing young trustees (with appropriate training and support) ensures youth voice is present at the highest level of governance.
- **Youth Insight Panels:** A pool of trained peer researchers who can be "activated" to review new services, policies, or communications on an ad-hoc basis.

There is a huge amount of literature that deals with effective youth voice structures and governance, but what this toolkit is particularly focused in on is how these can use peer research as an approach. This can enhance the accountability of organisations and provide a mechanism for the young people in these structures to explore the issues and create change.

Policy and Procedure Changes

Embedding participation will often be evident by the need of an organisation to rewrite existing or create new policies and procedures. Peer research projects can, for some organisations, prompt them to think about what their organisational policy is for key aspects of youth participation. For example:

- **Remuneration Policy:** A formal policy stating that young people are always paid for their expertise, with clear rates and processes that don't mess up benefits. This is a hallmark of "Flagship" participation standards.
- **Commissioning Frameworks:** Ensuring that when the organisation commissions external work, it requires bidders to demonstrate how they will involve young people meaningfully. It has a detailed policy that can communicate a level of participation that they would consider, and a level of participation they would challenge.
- **Recruitment Policy:** Making it standard practice to have a young person on interview panels for all staff roles, not just youth workers, and a support process to train and prepare them to do so.

We don’t always see organisations embed peer research as part of their organisational structures or policy, but it is about taking some of the core principles of it: valuing lived experience, training to support decision-making, participation in the research process, that we see embedded.

8.5 Retention & Generational Changeover of Peer Researchers

Peer research projects often operate in the short-term, with short-term funding. However, one effective way we see continuity beyond is through the retention of peer researchers, and their transition into a different role within the organisation. Organisations should think about the feasibility of a retention strategy, where the expertise and skills the peer researchers have gained is not lost once the project is over.

Models of Retention

Organisations should explicitly choose a model that fits their capacity:

1. **Fixed Cohort with Graduation:** A group is recruited for a specific project (for example, 12 months). At the end, they "graduate" with a celebration. Some may be invited to apply for the next cohort, but the expectation is turnover. This is good for allowing new voices to enter but risks losing institutional memory.
2. **Rolling Membership:** New members are recruited annually to replace those who leave, but the group continues either for an overlapping amount of time, or indefinitely. This allows for peer-to-peer mentoring, where experienced members train new ones. However, it requires more complex group management to prevent cliques.
3. **Alumni / Associate Model:** After a project ends, peer researchers become "Associates" or "Alumni." They are on a mailing list for ad-hoc paid opportunities (sitting on interview panels, speaking at conferences) but do not attend regular meetings. This keeps them connected without the burden of weekly commitment.

Progression Routes

Young people should not feel "stuck" as peer researchers forever. We find that many of the peer researchers on projects go on to be employed by the organisation, or an organisation in their network. Participation should be a journey of growth, with real employability skills leading to gainful employment. Progression routes might include:

- **Entry level role:** Peer researchers apply for an entry level role in the organisation.
- **Paid Sessional Worker:** Being employed as a junior staff member or facilitator.
- **Senior Peer Researcher:** Taking on leadership roles, training new recruits, or managing data analysis.
- **Youth Board Member / Trustee:** Moving into governance roles within the organisation.
- **External Opportunities:** Being supported to apply for jobs or university using their research experience as evidence of skills.

Organisations should work with peer researchers to think about their CVs and the skills they have gained as a result of their involvement. The emphasis here should be on core employability skills, and research skills, rather than their expertise as a result of their lived experience.

Voices of The Future: Peer research into widening access into youth services peer researcher groups

8.6 Evaluating Peer Research Participation

Lastly, we must consider how we evaluate peer research. This is a challenge across the many projects, each using a different approach to evaluation or no meaningful evaluation at all. Funders often have different reporting structures and do not specify specific evaluation frameworks or suggest evaluation frameworks that are unsuitable for peer research. More work needs to be done collectively in the sector to agree a consistent approach, which can in the long term improve standards of practice but importantly highlight the value and impact of this approach.

Outcomes in four areas

In the peer research we conduct, we focus on three main outcomes of peer research:

1. **The outcomes for the peer researchers:** What is the impact on the peer researchers involved in the process? What skills have they gained?
2. **The impact to the organisation:** What is the impact on the organisation who delivered the peer research with young people? How do they embed participation in the work they do more widely?
3. **The impact on policy and practice:** What is the policy change from the research generated by young people? How have peer researchers created change from social action?
4. **The research and process quality:** Was the process truly participatory? What would we do differently if we did it again? What was the quality of the research?

A project that changes the law but burns out the young people has failed ethically. A project that empowers young people but produces a report nobody reads has failed strategically. A project that empowers young people, creates policy change, but does not create a legacy of participation internally becomes a successful one off.

Reporting Back

Evaluating peer research is usually for the organisation to improve practice, or funder to prove effective use of funds. However, to build collaboration and increase good practice, evaluation data should be shared. Organisations should:

1. **Report to the Young People:** Show them the "Distance Travelled." It validates their growth and allows them to reflect on the skills they have gained.
2. **Report to the Funder:** Providing them the evaluation data with an ask, about what you have learned and how they should change about how this work is funded to benefit future grantees.
3. **Report to the Sector:** What could another organisation who is looking to do peer research learn from.

8.7 Participatory Evaluation Methods

Evaluation can often be a survey that young people must complete. However, there are a number of ways that young people can participation in evaluation creatively. It is important anyway for projects to have a space where peer researchers can reflect on their practice and growth but, if captured, this can be powerful evaluation data too.

Method 1: The River of Life (Timeline Mapping): A visual storytelling exercise. Peer researchers draw the project timeline as a winding river on a long roll of paper.

- **How to do it:**
    - » Mark the key milestones (Training, Fieldwork, Launch).
    - » Ask young people to draw "Rapids" (moments of high stress or difficulty).
    - » Ask them to draw "Pools" (moments of calm or waiting).
    - » Ask them to draw "Views" (moments of pride or achievement).
- **Why:** It captures the emotional journey that quantitative metrics miss. It reveals, for example, that the "waiting for ethics approval" phase caused a massive drop in motivation.

Method 2: Most Significant Change (MSC): A qualitative technique that avoids pre-set indicators. It asks for stories.

- **How to do it:** Ask each peer researcher to write down or record: "What was the most significant change that happened during this project? It could be about you, the team, or the organisation."
- **Selection:** The group reads the stories and votes on which one best represents the success of the project.
- **Why:** It captures unexpected outcomes ("I made a best friend" or "I stood up to a teacher") that you wouldn't think to put in a survey.

Method 4: After Action Review: A structured, blame-free debrief used immediately after major events (the first day of fieldwork).

- **The 4 Questions:**
    - » What did we expect to happen? (We thought 50 people would fill in the survey).
    - » What actually happened? (Only 10 people did).
    - » Why was there a difference? (We stood in a quiet spot / It was raining).
    - » What will we do next time? (Bring an umbrella / Move to the canteen).
- **Why:** It turns "failure" into immediate "learning".

Method 4: The "Lundy Scorecard": A quantitative scoring system for the quality of participation.

- **How to do it:** Create a scorecard where the group rates specific elements from 1 (Terrible) to 5 (Amazing).
    - » Metric: "Access to Decision Makers."
    - » Metric: "Transparency about Budget."
    - » Metric: "Support with Wellbeing."
- **Why:** It gives you data to compare year-on-year.

Example "Lundy Scorecard"

Quadrant	Evaluation Question	Score (1–5)	Comments / Evidence
Space	Did you feel safe to disagree with the staff?		
Space	Was the environment inclusive for everyone?		
Voice	Did you understand why we were doing this research?		
Voice	Did you write the questions, or did adults write them?		
Audience	Did the people in power turn up to hear us?		
Audience	Did they listen respectfully, or did they interrupt?		
Influence	Did they promise to change anything?		
Influence	Have we seen that change happen yet?		

Partnership for Young London

Trust for London
Tackling poverty and inequality

Centre for Youth Voice