

COMMUNITY COMPANION

YOUTH-LED COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH

COMMUNITY PARTNER GUIDE

A practical guide for listening, mentoring, advising and working alongside young people

● LISTEN

● QUESTION

● CONNECT

● RETURN



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YOUR GUIDE TO PARTNERSHIP

Inside the guide

Practical guidance for contributing knowledge, challenge, connection and support while protecting youth leadership.

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Welcome, community partner

Thank you for making time, knowledge and relationship available to young people. Community partnership makes the research more grounded, credible and consequential. Your role is not to approve every idea or solve every problem. It is to help students listen, test assumptions, understand real conditions and make increasingly responsible decisions.

THIS GUIDE IS FOR

PARTNER ROLE	POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTION
Conversation participant	Shares experience, knowledge, questions or a perspective during an interview, circle, panel or listening event.
Connector	Introduces students to relevant people, places, organizations, histories, resources or protocols.
Advisor or mentor	Meets with a team over time to question, model, connect and strengthen work without managing it.
Feasibility reviewer	Helps students test assumptions about value, costs, access, policy, risk, operations or sustainability.
Resource or decision partner	Clarifies authority, permissions or possible support such as space, materials, expertise or funding.
Showcase participant	Listens to findings, asks questions, offers feedback and helps students consider responsible next steps.

PARTNERSHIP CAN BE BRIEF OR SUSTAINED

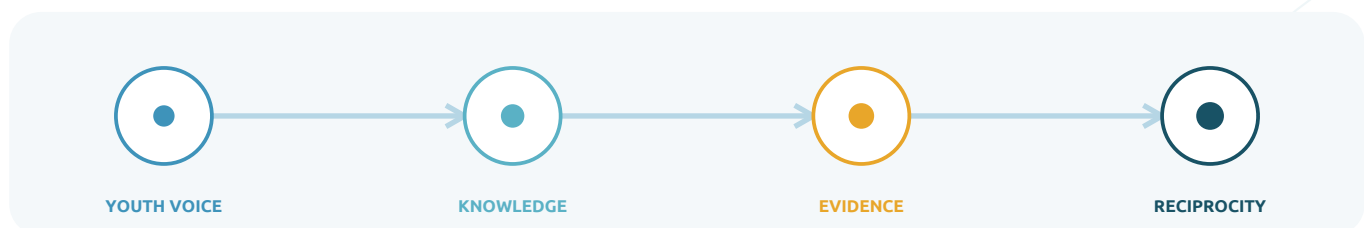


A single conversation can be valuable when purpose, consent and follow-up are clear. A longer relationship should have agreed boundaries, communication and an explicit end point.

What partnership commits us to

These commitments help partners, students and teachers work with integrity when the questions are authentic and the outcomes are not predetermined.

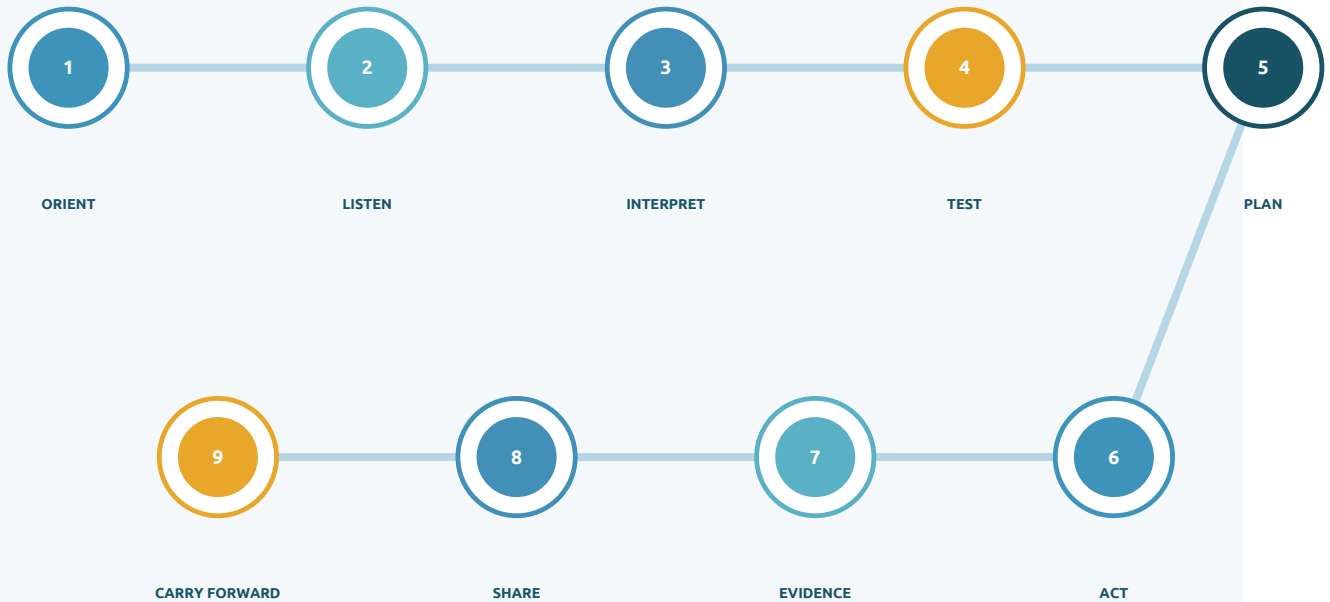
COMMITMENT	WHAT IT REQUIRES
Youth influence is real	Young people ask, interpret, decide and act within clear boundaries. Adults do not invite participation and then quietly make every meaningful decision.
Participation is informed	People understand why they are being invited, how information may be used and that they may decline, skip or stop.
Community knowledge has value	Partners are collaborators in learning, not simply audiences, judges, clients or sources of data.
Relationships come before transactions	Contact is prepared, respectful and followed by thanks, updates and responsible closure.
Assets and possibilities matter	Inquiry notices strengths, local knowledge and existing action as carefully as it notices challenges.
Evidence guides decisions	Students test assumptions and may revise, pause or conclude when what they learn changes the direction.
Access is designed	Partners and students are asked what communication, timing, language, mobility, sensory or cultural supports are useful.
Boundaries are honest	Partners name what they can decide, offer, recommend or explore - and what requires another person's approval.



Where partners enter the journey

Youth-led community-based research moves through nine modules. Partners may contribute at one point or return as the work becomes more developed.

WHERE PARTNERS MAY ENTER THE JOURNEY



A partner may contribute once or over time. The role should match the learning purpose, relationship, authority and capacity—not simply the partner's availability or status.

THE ROLE CHANGES WITH THE STAGE



Early partners help broaden understanding. Later partners may test feasibility, advise action, review interpretation or respond to findings. Ask what the students need at this point in the journey.

Choose an involvement pathway

Match the commitment to the learning purpose, relationship, authority and realistic capacity. More contact is not automatically better partnership.

PATHWAY	WHAT TO CLARIFY
One conversation A focused interview, panel, tour or listening session.	Clarify purpose, consent, information use and follow-up.
One event A pitch review, feasibility conversation, workshop, showcase or decision forum.	Know the criteria, role and decisions the event can actually influence.
Short advisory relationship Two or three meetings during idea development, planning or evidence review.	Agree on contact, preparation, response time and the end point.
Project mentor Recurring contact during action and adaptation.	Protect youth ownership, avoid becoming project manager and keep school staff informed.
Organizational partnership Access, expertise, space, materials, data, promotion, funding or implementation support.	Confirm authority, risk, privacy, public representation and written commitments through the responsible adults.

BEFORE SAYING YES

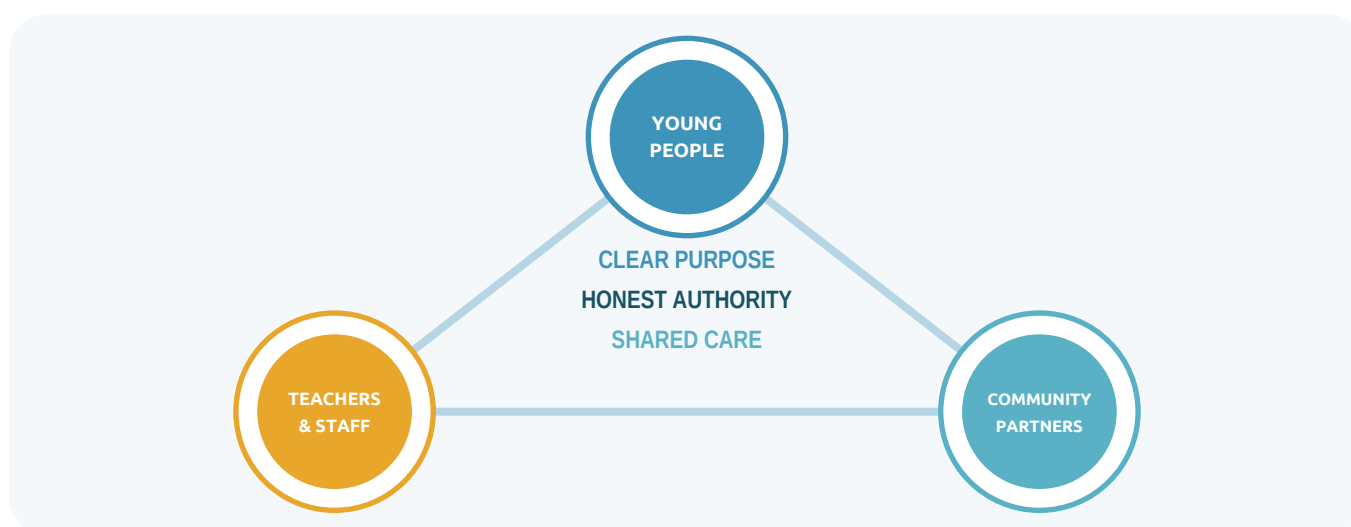


Ask who will coordinate, what preparation is expected, how students may contact you, what information may be shared, and when your role will be complete.

Clear roles protect youth leadership

Youth leadership is strongest when each group knows what it holds. Young people should have meaningful decisions; teachers retain adult responsibilities; partners contribute knowledge and challenge without becoming project managers.

WHO	PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITIES
Young people	Ask questions; listen; analyse evidence; develop and test ideas; plan and act; communicate; reflect; follow through.
Teachers and school staff	Hold safety, safeguarding, permissions, policy, supervision and assessment; prepare students and partners; coach without taking over.
Community partners	Share relevant knowledge; ask questions; test assumptions; clarify real-world conditions; give actionable feedback; connect where appropriate; communicate boundaries.



SHARED DOES NOT MEAN UNCLEAR



Name who can recommend, approve, decide, act and communicate publicly. If authority changes, update the agreement before the project proceeds.

Notice power in the partnership

Adults may carry professional status, resources, institutional authority, networks or experience that make a suggestion feel like an instruction. Thoughtful partners make that power visible and create room for students to disagree or decide differently.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

- 1 What knowledge, authority, status, resources or relationships do I bring into this conversation?
- 2 Could students feel that they must agree with me, impress me or accept my suggestion?
- 3 Whose experience am I able to speak from - and whose am I not entitled to represent?
- 4 Am I asking students to perform gratitude, disclose personal information or solve an adult responsibility?
- 5 How can I make uncertainty, disagreement and the option to decline safer?
- 6 What can I do to return the next decision to the students?

SPEAK FROM YOUR POSITION

Name the experience or role behind your perspective and its limits. Avoid presenting one personal, professional or organizational view as the voice of a whole community.

Consent, privacy and safety

Community work can involve personal stories, youth contact, public communication and real commitments. Follow the school's or organization's process even when the project feels informal.

AREA	PARTNER PRACTICE
Consent	Confirm what participation involves and ask before recording, photographing, quoting, naming or sharing.
Privacy	Use only the information needed for the agreed purpose. Do not request access to student records or personal information.
Confidentiality	Do not promise absolute secrecy. If a young person may be at risk, follow the setting's safeguarding process.
Sensitive information	Pause if a conversation reveals private, identifying or distressing information. Involve the responsible staff member.
Contact	Use agreed school or organizational channels. Do not create private or informal contact arrangements with students outside approved processes.
Public communication	Do not post names, images, quotations, work or project claims without the required permissions.
Commitments	Do not promise money, services, access, endorsement or continuation beyond your authority.
Safety	Raise physical, emotional, cultural, digital, reputational or operational concerns early. A pause can be responsible partnership.

✓ WHEN IN DOUBT, PAUSE

Contact the responsible teacher or staff member before recording, sharing, posting, promising, transporting, meeting privately or continuing an activity that may create harm.

Design access and belonging

Access is not a special favour added after plans are complete. It is part of respectful invitation, communication and relationship.

- Ask about preferred communication, timing, format and access needs rather than assuming.
- Use plain language and explain organization-specific terms, processes and acronyms.
- Offer time to think; do not treat rapid speech, eye contact or public confidence as proof of understanding.
- Make room for written, visual, spoken, demonstrated, interpreted or supported communication.
- Consider transportation, technology, mobility, sensory environment, language, caregiving and scheduling barriers.
- Follow local cultural protocols and ask the appropriate people about introductions, permissions, attribution, gifts or honoraria.
- Do not ask one person or student to represent an entire identity group or community.
- Discuss reimbursement, honoraria or expenses through the responsible organization when time or knowledge would normally be compensated.



Communicate like a partner

Clear communication prevents missed expectations and helps young people experience professional relationships without carrying responsibilities that belong to adults or institutions.

EXPECTATION	GOOD PRACTICE
Point of contact	Know which teacher or staff member coordinates schedules, safeguarding, permissions and unresolved concerns.
Response time	Agree on a realistic response window. Silence should not be treated as approval or rejection.
Preparation	Students should arrive with purpose, questions and relevant material; partners should know the role they are being asked to play.
Documentation	Record decisions, owners, next steps and permission boundaries. Verify important commitments in writing.
Changes	Communicate delay, cancellation, changed capacity or scope promptly.
Public representation	Confirm who may speak for the school, partner or project before publishing or contacting media.
Closure	End recurring contact with a summary of learning, remaining commitments, record management and thanks.

DOCUMENT COMMITMENTS



A short written summary should name the decision, owner, next action, timing and communication channel. If circumstances change, update the people affected.

Give feedback students can use

Feedback should strengthen learning and decisions while revision is still possible. It is not a ranking, endorsement or requirement to follow every suggestion.

QUALITY	WHAT IT REQUIRES
Connected	Link feedback to the students' purpose, evidence, criteria, audience or ethical commitment.
Specific	Name the choice, feature, assumption or effect you are responding to.
Actionable	Offer a next move students can take: test, clarify, compare, revise, ask, practise or seek approval.
Proportionate	Focus on the highest-leverage next step rather than everything that could be improved.
Dialogic	Ask questions and let students interpret, challenge or decide how to use the feedback.
Timely	Give feedback while students still have time and authority to respond.

A USEFUL PATTERN

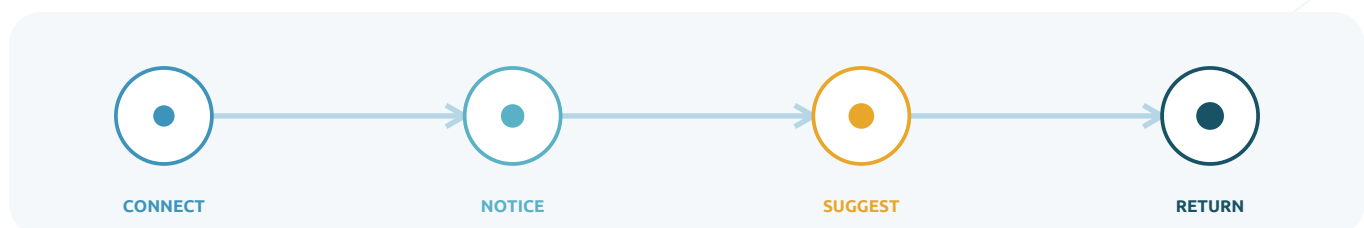


Connect to the purpose. Notice something specific. Explain why it matters. Suggest an action. Return the decision to the students.

From vague advice to actionable feedback

Compare the middle column with the final column. The strongest feedback makes the next responsible move visible without taking ownership from the team.

TYPE	LESS USEFUL	MORE ACTIONABLE
Praise only	This is a great idea!	Your evidence makes the need clear. Before moving ahead, identify who can approve use of the space and add that person to your feasibility plan.
Personal preference	I would do a fundraiser instead.	What alternatives did you test? Compare your current plan with one lower-cost option and explain which better fits the evidence and your capacity.
Vague caution	This may not work.	The plan depends on volunteers arriving at the same time. Test availability with the intended group and create a smaller version that can run with fewer people.
Taking over	Send me the file and I will fix it.	Show me the part that is not working. I can model one example, then your team can choose and apply the approach.



Mentor without becoming the manager

Mentoring is most valuable when it expands students' capability and judgment. A mentor may model or connect, but the team remains responsible for learning and action.

MENTOR MOVE	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE
Ask	Use questions that reveal reasoning, evidence, assumptions, authority and the next decision.
Observe	Notice the team's process and strengths before offering a solution.
Clarify	Explain real-world conditions, language, policy, costs, constraints or professional practice.
Model briefly	Demonstrate a skill or example, then return the work to students.
Connect carefully	Offer an introduction only when it is relevant, consented and clear about purpose.
Challenge with care	Name a risk, missing perspective or unsupported claim and explain why it matters.
Return the decision	Ask students what they will do next and why.
Follow through	Complete agreed actions or communicate promptly when circumstances change.



END EACH MEETING WITH STUDENT LANGUAGE

Ask: What did you decide? What will you do next? Who owns the action? What evidence will you bring back?

Support without taking over

Experienced adults can often complete a task faster. The educational value lies in helping students develop the capacity to understand and do the work responsibly.

WHEN THIS HAPPENS	RETURN THE WORK THIS WAY
Students ask what you would do	Share one relevant consideration, then ask what options they see and what evidence they need.
The work is slower than you expect	Clarify the milestone and offer a planning question; do not become the team's manager.
A product needs technical improvement	Model a small example or teach the skill, then return the product for student revision.
A student's idea seems unrealistic	Help test the riskiest assumption and let evidence inform the decision.
You have a useful contact	Ask whether an introduction serves the project and prepare both sides before connecting them.
An adult decision is required	Name the authority and complete only that decision; return all remaining choices to students.

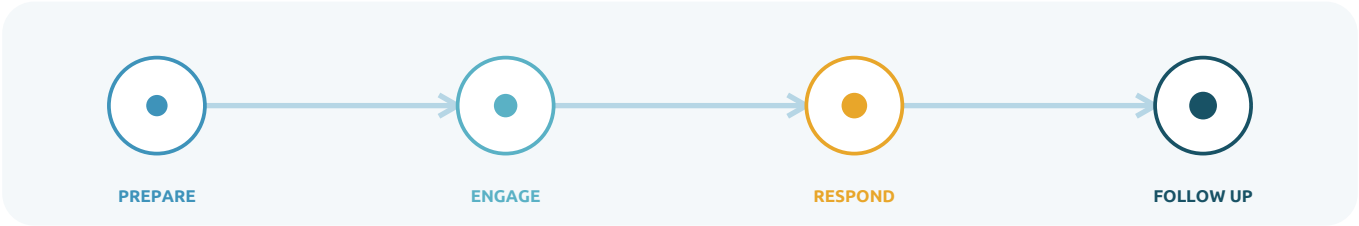
COMPLETE ONLY THE ADULT RESPONSIBILITY



If a signature, safeguarding decision, contract or organizational approval must be held by an adult, hold that responsibility clearly - then return every remaining decision to the students.

Partnership playbooks

Use the next five pages as quick preparation for common roles in the research journey.



Community Listening Conversation

PURPOSE



Help students understand experience, local knowledge, assets, tensions and questions without turning the conversation into a request for solutions.

BEFORE

- Confirm the purpose, format, time and how notes or quotations may be used.
- Share access or protocol needs with the coordinator.
- Decide what you are comfortable discussing and what should remain private.
- Know who will follow up after the conversation.

DURING

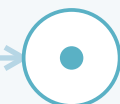
- Speak from your experience and role; name the limits of your perspective.
- Allow students to ask, listen and follow up rather than delivering a long presentation.
- Correct misunderstandings and decline any question you do not wish to answer.
- Suggest other perspectives or sources without sharing another person's contact information without permission.

AFTER

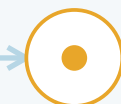
- Review or clarify information if agreed.
- Expect a thank-you and later update about what students learned or decided.
- Contact the staff coordinator if you are concerned about privacy, representation or follow-through.



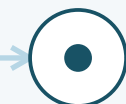
PREPARE



ENGAGE



CHECK



FOLLOW UP

Mentor or Advisory Meeting



PURPOSE

Strengthen students' reasoning and capability while keeping responsibility and decision-making with the team.

BEFORE

- Receive a short update, current question and materials in advance where possible.
- Clarify what advice, modelling, connection or decision is being requested.
- Identify what is inside and outside your expertise or authority.

DURING

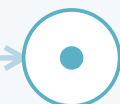
- Begin by asking what has changed since the last meeting.
- Ask for evidence and reasoning before offering your view.
- Focus on one or two high-leverage issues.
- Model briefly when a skill is needed, then return the task.
- End with student-named decisions, owners and next actions.

AFTER

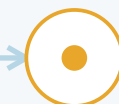
- Complete only the actions you accepted.
- Keep the teacher or coordinator included in significant changes or concerns.
- At the final meeting, clarify whether the relationship is concluding or moving into an approved next phase.



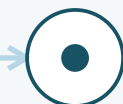
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FOLLOW UP

Pitch and Feasibility Feedback



PURPOSE

Help teams test value, assumptions, feasibility and responsible next steps - not choose a winner.

BEFORE

- Know the criteria and decisions the event can influence.
- Understand whether you are advising, authorizing, offering support or only asking questions.
- Prepare to give specific, actionable feedback rather than rankings.

DURING

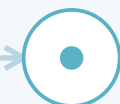
- Ask what evidence supports the idea and which assumption is riskiest.
- Distinguish a question, caution, connection and offer.
- Name real-world conditions without presenting your preference as the only solution.
- Do not promise support or access outside your authority.

AFTER

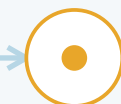
- Allow teams time to interpret feedback before responding.
- Complete any agreed introduction or information request.
- Expect students to explain what they changed, retained, paused or stopped and why.



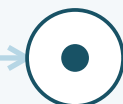
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FOLLOW UP

Evidence Interpretation Review



PURPOSE

Help students check whether findings are accurate, proportionate, respectful and useful before public reporting.

BEFORE

- Clarify whether you are checking facts, context, interpretation, representation or a decision.
- Confirm that information shared with you is appropriate and de-identified where needed.

DURING

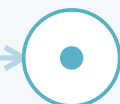
- Ask who is represented and who is not.
- Distinguish what the evidence shows from what students think it means.
- Look for alternative explanations, outliers and missing context.
- Identify claims that are larger than the evidence can support.
- Correct factual or contextual errors without requiring students to adopt your preferred conclusion.

AFTER

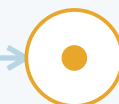
- Confirm any correction or permission in writing.
- Ask students to document how the review influenced the finding or communication.



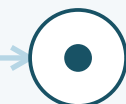
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FOLLOW UP

Community Showcase and Decision Forum

PURPOSE



Learn from students' findings and action, offer response, celebrate contribution and support responsible continuation or closure decisions.

BEFORE

- Know whether the event is for learning, celebration, decision-making, recruitment or several purposes.
- Review access information and the role of guests.
- Avoid expecting every student to participate through formal presentation.

DURING

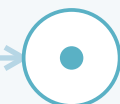
- Engage with displays, demonstrations and conversations as well as presentations.
- Ask about evidence, learning, limitations and relationship quality.
- Offer feedback or support through the designated process.
- Do not photograph, post or identify students without permission.

AFTER

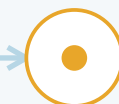
- Follow through on offers and introductions.
- Provide feedback on both project value and the quality of partnership.
- Respect a decision to redesign, pause or conclude; continuation is not the only sign of success.



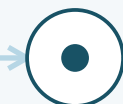
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FOLLOW UP

Respond to requests and commitments

Authentic projects may involve money, space, data, public communication or ongoing operation. A clear boundary is more respectful than a vague yes.

REQUEST	RESPONSIBLE RESPONSE
Money, materials or space	State what you can approve, what needs review and what conditions apply. Route formal commitments through the responsible adults.
Access to people or data	Protect privacy and organizational obligations. Offer introductions or information only when authorized and relevant.
Endorsement or logo use	Clarify who can authorize representation, brand use or public claims of partnership.
Media or public communication	Involve the school or organizational contact before interviews, releases, public posts or statements.
Ongoing operation	Do not assume students, teachers or partners can continue after the current cycle. Discuss authority, capacity, funding and handover.
A request you cannot meet	Decline clearly and respectfully. When appropriate, explain the boundary or suggest a safer next question without creating a new promise.

THREE USEFUL ANSWERS



I can approve this. • I need to check with _____. • I cannot offer this, and here is the boundary. Be precise about which answer you are giving.

Raise concerns early

Partnership does not require silence or agreement. Concerns should be specific, communicated through the responsible channel and addressed before they grow into harm or broken commitments.

CONCERN	WHAT TO DO
A young person shares a safety concern	Listen calmly, do not investigate or promise secrecy, and contact the responsible staff member immediately according to local safeguarding procedures.
Information seems private or identifying	Stop recording or sharing, protect the information and ask the coordinator what should be retained or removed.
The project may cause harm or exceed authority	Pause the activity, name the concern and involve the adult responsible for safety, policy or approval.
Conflict or exclusion is affecting participation	Do not force a public resolution. Notify the coordinator and support a process that protects dignity and access.
You disagree with the project direction	Share evidence, questions and implications. Students may make a different decision if it remains ethical and within their authority.
You can no longer participate	Communicate promptly, complete or transfer open commitments where possible and agree on a clear ending.

SAFETY COMES BEFORE MOMENTUM



A deadline, event or public commitment is never a reason to continue an activity that may be unsafe, unethical or outside authority.

Make partnership reciprocal

Reciprocity does not require an equal exchange of identical things. It requires clarity about value, responsibility, follow-up and whose needs the relationship serves.

PARTICIPANT	WHAT RECIPROCITY REQUIRES
Partners can expect	A clear invitation; prepared students; informed participation; respect for time and knowledge; permission checks; thanks; follow-up; accurate representation; responsible closure.
Students need	Respectful challenge; honest boundaries; real-world knowledge; specific feedback; room to think and decide; no pressure to disclose, agree, impress or accept every suggestion.
Teachers coordinate	Safety, permissions, schedules, preparation, assessment, access, concerns and commitments that require school or adult authority.

RECIPROCITY QUESTIONS

- What value could this work create for students, partners and community - and who defines that value?
- How will participants learn what students heard, decided or produced?
- Whose time, knowledge, relationships, space or emotional labour is being used?
- What acknowledgement, compensation, correction or follow-up is appropriate?
- How will the relationship end without leaving unclear expectations?

When a project changes or ends

Evidence, capacity and conditions may lead a team to continue, transfer, redesign, pause or conclude. Continuation is not the only successful outcome.

DISPOSITION	PARTNER CONSIDERATION
Continue	The work still has value, authority, relationships and realistic capacity. Clarify responsibility and evidence for the next cycle.
Transfer	Another group or organization can carry the work. Provide context, relationships, permissions, cautions and unanswered questions.
Redesign	Evidence shows the current form is not workable or responsible. Identify what must change before action resumes.
Pause	A decision, resource, safety condition or relationship needs time. Communicate what the pause means and when it will be reviewed.
Conclude	The purpose is complete, capacity is unavailable or closure is most responsible. Resolve commitments and preserve useful learning.

CLOSURE IS A RESPONSIBILITY

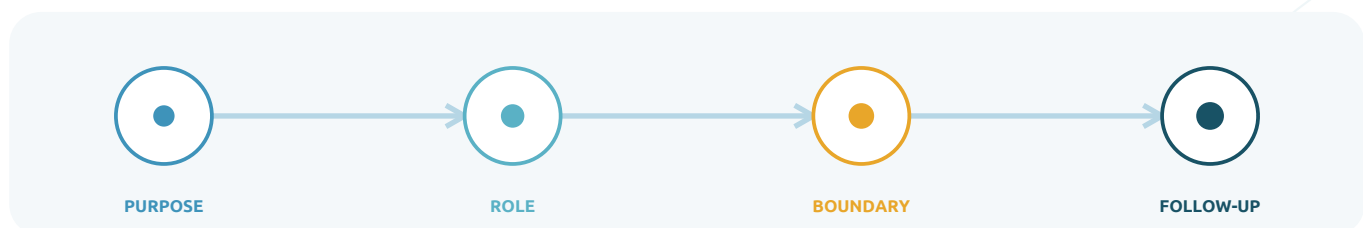


Confirm remaining commitments, communicate the decision, manage records, complete thanks and identify who - if anyone - holds the next step.

Plan the partnership conversation

Use these questions before contact begins or whenever the role, scope or project conditions change.

- 1 What is the purpose of this partnership, and what learning or decision should it support?
- 2 What may students genuinely influence? Which decisions are shared or held by adults?
- 3 What knowledge, experience, authority or resources is the partner being invited to contribute?
- 4 What should the partner not be asked to hold or do?
- 5 What consent, privacy, safety, protocol or public-representation requirements apply?
- 6 What preparation do students and partners need before contact?
- 7 What communication channel, response time and point of contact will be used?
- 8 How will access, expenses, honoraria or participation barriers be addressed?
- 9 How will feedback be captured and used while revision is possible?
- 10 How will learning, thanks, commitments, records and the end of the relationship be communicated?



Quick reference

A three-part check for any partner interaction.

WHEN	PARTNER CHECK
Before	Know the purpose, role, boundaries, participants, access needs, consent, information use and point of contact.
During	Listen first, ask for evidence, share from your experience, name limits, give actionable feedback and return decisions to students.
After	Complete commitments, clarify records or permissions, respond through agreed channels, receive an update and close or renew the relationship explicitly.

USEFUL LANGUAGE

SITUATION	WHAT YOU MIGHT SAY
Return the decision	I can share what I would consider. What options do you see, and what evidence will help your team decide?
Name a boundary	I can advise on this, but I cannot approve it. The person who holds that decision is ____.
Offer actionable feedback	Your evidence supports _____. I am still uncertain about _____. Before the next step, test or clarify _____.
Decline a request	I am not able to offer _____. I can explain the constraint and help you identify the next question to ask.

More useful language

SITUATION	WHAT YOU MIGHT SAY
Pause for safety or privacy	Let's stop here and check with the staff coordinator before we record, share or continue.
Check representation	That is one part of my experience. Please do not present it as the view of the whole community or organization.
Close a commitment	To make sure we agree: I will ___ by ___. Your team will ___. We will communicate through ___.
End the relationship	My role in this cycle is complete. Before we close, let's confirm remaining commitments, records and how I will hear what happened next.



A FINAL INVITATION

The strongest community partnerships do not remove uncertainty or do the work for young people. They make meaningful learning, honest challenge and responsible action possible.

Thank you for partnering

Young people learn what community partnership means by experiencing it. Your preparation, honesty, challenge, care and follow-through help make the work more rigorous and more human.

BEFORE YOU LEAVE THE CYCLE

- Complete or communicate every action you accepted.
- Confirm how names, quotations, images, records and organizational references may be used.
- Offer feedback on both the project and the quality of the partnership.
- Receive or request an update about what students learned and decided.
- Clarify whether the relationship is complete or continuing through an approved next phase.

PARTNERSHIP LEAVES EVIDENCE

The strongest evidence is not only a product. It is young people who can explain how community knowledge, honest feedback and shared responsibility changed their decisions.

LISTEN BEFORE SOLVING CHALLENGE WITH CARE RETURN THE DECISION

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ELK WILLOW CONSULTING

Innovative Ideas for an Inspired Future