SOCIAL MEDIA
YOUTH PARTICIPATION
IN LOCAL DEMOCRACY

A practical guide from the LGiU Action Learning Set
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Acknowledgements

An online companion resource is available at: http://www.practicalparticipation.co.uk/yes/

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About the LGiU The LGiU is the largest, most influential think-tank and representative body operating in the space between Town Hall, Whitehall, Westminster and communities. Now in its 26th year, the LGiU continues to make a significant impact on public policy. In 2008 the LGiU was awarded the Public Affairs News award for think-tank of the year.

About CSN The Children's Services Network (CSN) is part of the LGiU. It is dedicated to improving outcomes for all children, young people and families and provides services of the highest quality to the children's workforce.

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Contents

Foreword

Young people are shaping a new wired and wireless world. They are driving a communication revolution. Social media is rewriting all the rules, from music sales to fashion, friendship and even politics. Facebook groups campaign to stop bankers' bonuses. Twitter supports the democracy movement in Iran. Social media is powerful and growing rapidly.

People used to the old world of old media are struggling to understand the phenomenon, let alone positively interact with it. Retailers make crude attempts at Twitter marketing that backfire, councils stop their employees accessing Facebook and MySpace.

So what does social media mean for local government? Is it a passing fad, something that public service providers and politicians shouldn't even try to engage with? Maybe "it won't catch on". But didn't people say that about the telephone, the television and the internet ? If you want proof, did you know that social media is already used more widely as a form of communication than email?

This guide, produced by my colleagues at the LGiU and our partners, experts in the fields of social media and children's services, aims to help councils to understand and ultimately harness the power of social media to transform services, revitalise democracy and strengthen community.

It is unashamedly practical, to the extent that we might even get some stick for having a paper-based guide to using YouTube. I still keep a mapbook in my car, even though I use my SatNav. Consider this your Web 2.0 mapbook: an old written route into a new online world.

Your feedback is welcome, by snail mail if you want, by Twitter if you can
http://twitter.com/andysawford

Andy Sawford
Chief Executive
**Local Government Information Unit**

Introduction

Fewer than two per cent of councillors are aged under 30, according to the National Census of Local Authority Councillors 2008. There is also a decline in the number of young people active in established formal structures of local and national politics. This, and rising numbers of young people not in education, employment or training (220,000 at the time of writing), present a significant challenge for local democracy.

Yet this does not mean that young people care less — quite the opposite. The Hansard Society audit of political engagement shows 67 per cent of 18-24 year olds are interested in local issues. But there is a disconnection between formal political structures and the informal engagement young people are more likely to be involved in. Much of this, both with peers and with politics, is taking place on line and through social network sites — where they can be spending upwards of two hours a day. These relatively new media represent a huge opportunity to engage young people and have real dialogue, especially with those who have previously been off our radar.

In 2009 the LGiU's Children's Services Network set up a special project in partnership with Practical Participation and other specialists to work with representatives from 30 local authorities. The project has provided useful insights into the mass phenomenon of social networking sites and the opportunity they present for engaging young people in democratic activity.

This practical guide on youth participation and social network sites is based on the work of the project's 'action learning set' over the past year. The set brought together staff from local authorities, young people and experts in social networking sites to explore the potential and practice of using social network sites for youth participation. The content includes important information and techniques suggested by the action set, invited expert speakers and additional research and shared learning developed by course participants in conjunction with their respective local authorities.

This guide does not set out *the way* to use social network sites — or offer a set pattern to copy. The right approach will depend on your context — and will draw upon your creativity and professional practice. However, it does offer some key learning, advice and an overview of different online tools that we hope will help you on your journey to add social network sites and social media to your toolbox of youth participation approaches.
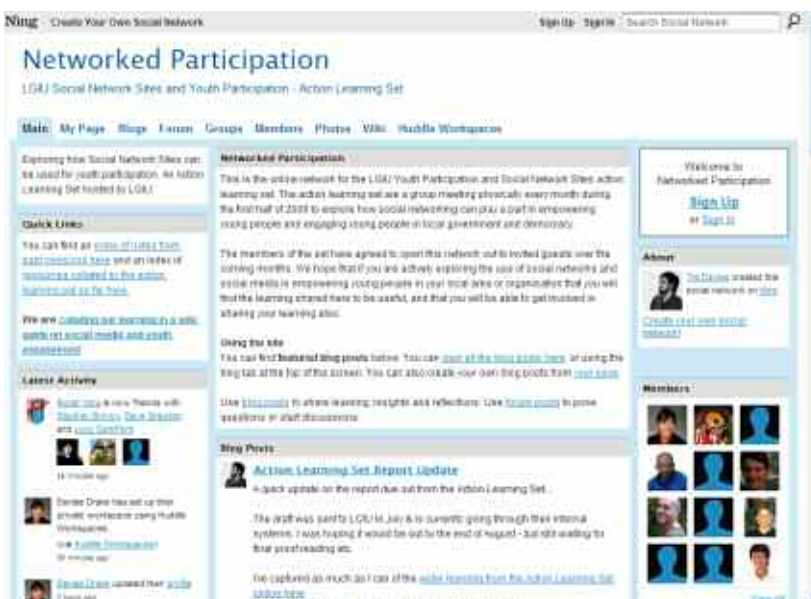
This document sits alongside an online network at http://www.networked participation.co.uk designed to support practitioners to share their learning on using social technology in youth participation. In this network you can find further notes, presentations and downloads which dig deeper into the topics covered in this document.

What's it all about?

Youth participation

Young people have a right to be involved in the decisions that affect them. This is promoted in law, policy and guidance: the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Every Child Matters, the Children Act 2004, Youth Matters, Children's Trusts guidance and guidance on inspections.[1]

There are many different forms of youth participation — ranging from the one-off involvement of young people in giving feedback on services, through to the involvement of young people as commissioners, grant-makers and members of governance structures.

These various forms are on a continuum from one-off and unstructured opportunities for participation, through to more formal participation structures. Hart's 'ladder of participation' shows this as a series of rungs, ranging from the manipulation of young people on the bottom, partnership working between young people and adults at the top.

Meaningful youth participation involves a genuine opportunity for young people to influence decision making and bring about change — a shift of power.

See also Find out more under Practical guides and Toolkits.

Social network sites

Throughout history, people have turned technologies into tools for social communication. Social networks are the latest stage in the transformation of the internet from a tool for publishing information — to becoming a tool for connecting people, hosting conversation and social interaction, and supporting collaboration.
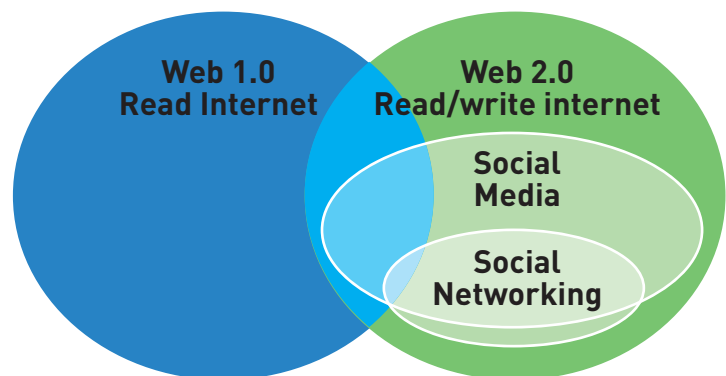
Since the launch of MySpace in 2003, and Bebo and Facebook in 2005 (and many niche social network sites since) online social networking has leapt onto the scene as a key part of young people's lives.

A social network site/service (SNS) allows its users to:

- create a **profile** — writing themselves into being online

- link their profile to others through **friend connections**

- **experience** the site differently depending on the connections they have made (i.e. you mainly see content from people you have added as friends, or joined online groups with).

Most SNS are also rich environments where users can publish media, share content and interact with friends and others with whom they have made a connection on the site.

SNS come in many different forms[2]:

- **profile focused** — and large-scale open social networks such as Facebook, MySpace and Bebo

- **content focused** — social media sites that have introduced social network elements such friends lists and profiles for their members — Flickr (photo sharing) or YouTube (video sharing) are examples

- **white label** — such as Ning or the open source Elgg which allow anyone to create their own social network

- **mobile platforms** —providing mobile phone based social networking — either to well known networks like Bebo or Facebook, or to niche mobile-only social networks

- **micro/presence blogging** — such as Twitter which relies on users sharing short status updates with a list of friends or followers

- **multi-player games** — which may increasingly have friends lists and social network features built in.

Social networks are increasingly available on devices other than internet connected computers—including mobile phones and games consoles. Many social networks are also becoming 'woven into the web' through tools like 'Facebook Connect' and 'Google Friend Connect'. These tools allow their users to log into third-party websites with their social network username and password — and for their activities on third party websites to be shared with their friends on their social network account.

Social media

When talking about social network sites you may also hear the term 'social media'. This refers to a wider range of online platforms for publishing, sharing and interacting with media content. When using social network sites as part of your youth participation work, you will also need to draw upon a range of social media tools — from video and photo sharing, through to blogging and interactive online maps.

Participation and social network sites

Good youth participation will create a wide range of opportunities for young people to engage in decision making and shape decisions that affect them.

In the Action Learning Set we explored the matrix overleaf — created by combining the 'ladder of participation' (columns) and different forms of youth engagement (rows) currently used by local authorities and youth-serving organisations.

Individual examples of youth engagement can be plotted on this matrix — to show what form, and how participative, they were. This helps users to identify gaps in current participation and to think about how social networks could support improvements in meaningful youth participation.

The use of social network sites can be added to almost any existing participation approach — but there are also opportunities to create new and unique participation opportunities through these means. To do that we need to explore how social network sites are used in practice.

Forms of youth engagement → Levels of participation ↓	Individual complaints or feedback	Surveys & consultation	One-off events or annual participation events	Participation projects — often using arts or media	Peer-led activities such as training, research & evaluation	Youth forum, youth grant-making etc.	Young people involved in governance
Participation — Youth initiated— shared decisions with adults							
Youth initiated and directed							
Adult initiated— shared decisions with youth							
Young people are consulted & kept informed							
Young people are assigned tasks & activities							
Non-participation — Tokenism							
Decoration							
Manipulation							

How are young people using social network sites?

Young people use social network sites in many different ways[3], including for:

- **keeping in touch** with friends and acquaintances
- **developing new contacts** often with friends of friends, or people with shared interests
- **sharing content, engaging in self expression and exploring identity**
- **hanging out and consuming content** including commercial and user-generated content— particularly music and video
- **accessing information and informal learning**
- **participating** in informal groups, and formal youth engagement opportunities.

Understanding the diverse ways in which social networks are used is important when you are planning your strategy for using social networks in youth participation.

You've got to experience it

It's hard to understand social networks if you've never joined and explored one. It can take less than an hour to sign up to Bebo or Facebook, create a profile, add a colleague as a friend, share a status update and explore the groups available in the social network.

You can always delete your account after you have explored the network and got a basic understanding of how information and interaction flows between people in a social network.

You might also find it useful to ask some of the young people you work with to give you a tour of their favourite social network sites.

Understanding social network sites

Asking 'What is a social network site for?' is like asking 'What is a city for?' If you were planning to try and engage young people in a particular city in decision making you would think about the appropriate places to find, recruit and meet with young people, and the appropriate places to make participation opportunities available (leaflets at school, a stall at a community festival, visits to youth clubs).

There would be some areas of the city where you wouldn't go to (a local pub perhaps) — either because you could not create a safe space for youth participation here, or because you would be intruding on young people's space. In the same way, you can think about the many different spaces within a social network site where there may be opportunities for engagement. You will find different young people in different spaces within a social network site, and the forms of engagement appropriate in different spaces will vary.

Knowing why you want to engage with young people and why you want to use social network sites as part of your engagement is important. This knowledge will provide you with a nuanced approach to your online participation.

See Bibliography on page 36.

Why use social networks to involve young people?

There are many different reasons you may want to use social network sites as part of your youth participation work.

Reaching young people

Young people in Britain have grown up in a connected world of internet access, mobile phones and interactivity. Their experience has often been of rich multi-platform media and, over recent years, of interactive online social media. From watching videos on YouTube, to spending hours connected to social network sites such as Bebo and Facebook, most young people engage with social networks on a daily basis.

The time young people are spending online is fast overtaking time spent watching TV, and many conventional forms of communication are losing out to online communication.

Using social media for youth engagement can help organisations:

- **Reach young people where they already are** — spending hours a day connected to social networking platforms. Too often engagement opportunities are based on expecting young people to come to us, when we should go to where young people are.

- **Be found** — as many young people turn to search engines to find or confirm information. If you're not online and easy to find, you're probably missing many opportunities for youth engagement.

- **Communicate with young people in familiar settings** — using the same forms of media young people are comfortable interacting with. Social media tools make it easy to create rich

multi-media communication that you can use to make ideas and opportunities accessible to young people.

- **Meet changing expectations** — as older methods of communication and participation lose ground in a social media-rich environment. Young people will expect media they can interact with.

- **Take advantage of networks to spread engagement opportunities** —creating content and opportunities that young people can easily share with their friends through social media and social networking tools.

Flexible and far-reaching communication

There is no one place where you can reach all young people. Any engagement will need to consist of multiple approaches. However, with sensitively chosen social media and social networking tools you can reach out to a far wider range of groups — increasing your impact.

Building blocks of social media such as RSS can be used to automatically spread your content out to a wide range of online spaces.

- **Publish once, use everywhere** — with social media tools you can take your content and engagement opportunities to a whole range of different digital spaces, and still easily generate printed and other off-line materials. It's easier to start with online content and move it offline than it is to work the other way around.

- **Reach the 'long-tail'** —remixing and linking content and engagement opportunities into different niche communities and online spaces used by young people.

- **Empowering young people** —to take your content and engagement opportunities and to remix and share them on their own terms — reaching new groups.

Cost savings and efficiency

Athough getting started with social media can involve an investment of time to learn new tools and ways of working, social media has the potential to offer significant cost and efficiency savings.

Not only can you reach a greater number of young people with fewer resources, by increasing the flow of information between your organisation and young people you can target your work more effectively and efficiently.

- **Cut the cost of travel** — instead of bringing groups together for a few meetings a year you can keep in touch with young people online and can facilitate rich group work across a wide geographic area.

- **Listen and respond** —targeting information and engagement opportunities to where they are needed most at the right times.

- **Network better with your partners** — using social media not just to engage with young people, but to engage with other organisations — increasing your collective impact and avoiding duplication of work.

- **Remix media** —taking advantage of the wealth of public domain and creative common resources online that you are free to use and adapt instead of always creating your own resources and materials from scratch.

NI14 — Reducing avoidable contact — National Indicator 14[4] is a performance measure for local authorities designed to reduce avoidable contact such as phone calls to find out if an activity is still running, or to chase up the response to a request to the local authority. Taking services online and into social media spaces can help authorities meet NI14.

Creating a safe and pro-social internet

The internet is created by the people who participate in it. In the same way your organisation is involved in creating a better world for young people offline, so should organisations working with and for young people be involved in creating a positive online world.

- **Contribute positive content** —to make sure young people have opportunities to engage with positive, developmentally appropriate information, resources and engagement opportunities in their time online.

- **The web is safer when responsible adults are engaged** and involved.

See also Safety on page 14.

Making the case for using social network sites in youth participation

You will often need to make the case to your organisation for why you should explore the use of social network sites. Below are a number of elements and critical questions you may find useful when putting together your case for using SNS. Does your pitch for using social media address these elements?

The Proposition: explaining your plans

- **What you want to do.** Can you explain your plans in a way that is accessible to someone without much experience of social media?
- **The way that you want to do it.** How will you use your existing professional skills and values in your use of social networking?

The Pull: demand from young people

- **Going to where young people are.** What relevant evidence can you show about the online behaviours of the young people you work with, or are trying to reach?
- **Demand from young people.** Do you have evidence from the young people you work with showing how they want to engage with you?

The Push: drivers from above

- **A need to engage.** How can this help you meet your aims, objectives and targets?
- **Efficient and effective.** How could this play a role in making your work more efficient, targeted and effective?
- **Government or organisational policy.** Are there policy drivers from above? For example, the Communities in Control empowerment White Paper, or local social media and communications strategies?

The Potential: taking it further

- **Increased reach.** How could this help you extend your existing work?

- **New opportunities.** How could this help you deliver new services that you've not yet been able to provide?

The Practicalities: all things considered

- **Safe and sound.** Can you show that you have given thought to the policies, guidance, training and resources needed to put your use of social networks on safe and sound foundations?
- **In partnership with young people.** Can you show how you will involve young people as partners in all stages of developing your use of social networks?
- **Evaluation.** How will you evaluate your social network engagement?

Not alone — connecting with our organisations

Making the case for using SNS within an organisation isn't always easy, but there are ways of overcoming barriers – here the youth service is used as an example.

Many members of the Action Learning Set have found that others in their organisation are supportive of the use of social networks and social media and are exploring how it could be used in their work. However, in some cases the advocates of SNS can feel as if they are getting ahead of their organisations, or that they are isolated and lack support from colleagues who are fearful of, or not interested in, social networks as a youth engagement tool.

Who should you talk to?

- Communications/marketing
- Consultation/engagement
- ICT
- Webteam
- Audit
- Senior management
- Councillors
- Your chief executive

One of the big challenges is that social networking sites may be blocked on corporate networks. A line manager or IT staff should be able to help with the process of unblocking, but a specific case may need to be made. As an example, not everyone will be aware of the specific needs of youth services and youth participation staff, so in this case it would be useful to explain:

- **what is the youth service —** times of work; who we work with; where we fit in the organisational structure

- **why youth workers need access to social network sites —**we can only protect young people if we are present in the spaces where they are at risk; SNS can help extend our reach; SNS can help us in saving funds

- **what we're doing to prevent abuse —**we are drafting a policy on safe and effective use of SNS in the youth service; we will carry out a complete risk assessment.

Building on this learning, the 'Interactive Charter' project was launched in July 2009 at http://www.interactivecharter.org.uk, and is designed to help organisations overcome practical barriers to using social media.

Contact Carl Haggerty, Devon County Council: carl.haggerty@devon.gov.uk

Social networking for children in care

One Action Learning Set sub-group considered how social network sites could be used to support the participation of children in care.

The White Paper Care Matters — A Time for Change stressed the importance of children's participation in decisions that affect them. Local authorities are also expected to establish a Children in Care Council (CiCC) to ensure that every child has the opportunity to air their views.

The group considered how social networking sites (SNS) can contribute to work with children in care and benefit both the young people and the staff working with CiCCs. There are already examples (search in Facebook groups for 'in care') which show that young people want to talk to others in similar situations as themselves — but often this is taking place separately from CiCCs and other structures which could help young people to engage collectively, in supported safe space, in improving their situation.

Why use SNS?

- SNS can be a way to reach those young people who can't or won't come along to group sessions.

- SNS can facilitate work with those unable to travel long distances, given that young people in care may be placed some distance from their home area.

- In Care Matters there is an expectation that Children in Care Councils have direct contact with the Director of Children's Services and Lead Member.

- Young people in care have to have internet access in their placement.

- Young people in care may have low self-esteem and be reluctant to join in group activities. SNS is a good way to engage and develop relationships with such young people, encouraging them to share their views.

- SNS enables moderated and recordable social interaction between groups of young people, especially beneficial where they have lower levels of social skills.

- Young people in care have suggested that a SNS could be a place where they could offer or find peer support.

Young people in care frequently ask for better information on activities and what happens when they leave care. SNS could provide a communal area where this information is readily accessible.

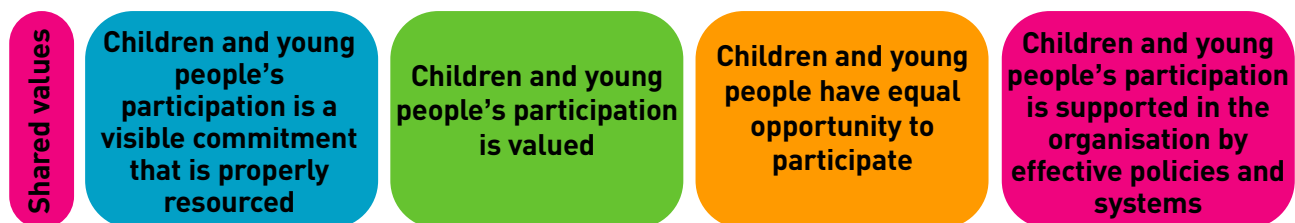**Contact Joy Jenkins, West Berkshire Council: jjenkins@westberks.gov.uk**

The practice

This section is focused on the practicalities of youth participation using social network sites. It covers four areas:

- **Principles and values** —for social network based youth participation
- **Safety** — including guidance for policies and practice
- **Strategy** —exploring different approaches to putting all these tools together
- **Measuring impact** — what difference does using social network sites make?

Principles and values

Youth participation works best when it is based on shared values and principles. The same is true for social network based youth participation. However much you plan and develop strategies for what you do, you will need to be flexible and able to adapt projects on the go. A clear set of values and principles will help guide the way your use of social networks for youth participation develops.

Hear by Right, the standards framework for effective youth participation (NYA, 2009) includes a set of shared values for organisations thinking about youth participation:

| Shared values | Children and young people's participation is a visible commitment that is properly resourced | Children and young people's participation is valued | Children and young people have equal opportunity to participate | Children and young people's participation is supported in the organisation by effective policies and systems |

When it comes to online engagement the following principles may be useful:

- **Engagement is voluntary** — don't force anyone to get involved online. Create a welcoming environment for voluntary participation.

- **Online engagement is real engagement** — and those who input online deserve feedback and recognition of their involvement.

- **Don't try to control the conversation** — if you moderate conversations, only moderate to keep discussions safe and civil. Don't use moderator powers to remove negative feedback or to control the conversation.

- **Make participation meaningful** — and make sure young people's views are fed to decision makers. Think about how you can signpost young people to further information on opportunities and resources to help them create the forms of change they are interested in.

It is important to think carefully about the principles that will guide your use of social networking for youth participation and to articulate these before you get started. Often you will find it useful to generate your online engagement principles in dialogue with young people.

Strategy

There are many different ways of using social network sites for youth participation. Starting off in the right direction is important, even if you find you have to adapt your approach once things get going.

Social networking sites and joint commissioning

Joint commissioning is now a key feature of the approach to the delivery of children's services, but where do social networking sites fit in?

The joint commissioning process used within children's trust arrangements can be illustrated as shown here.

In the same way that a drive towards joint commissioning encourages organisations to work in more 'networked' ways, so a networked model of youth engagement, blending together online and offline approaches, becomes increasingly essential to ensure the active participation of young people in the children's trust commissioning cycle, especially in relation to the following:

Process for joint planning and commissioning

- Look at outcomes for children and young people
- Look at particular groups of children and young people
- Develop needs assessment with user and staff views
- Identify resources and set priorities
- Plan pattern of services and focus on prevention
- Decide how to commission services efficiently
- Commission - including use of pooled resources
- Plan for workforce and market development
- Monitor and review services and process

- looking at particular groups of children and young people, particularly those that find our services hard to reach or are at risk of missing out
- developing a needs assessment in partnership with service users
- setting priorities and identifying opportunities for pooling resources
- monitoring and reviewing services and process
- looking at outcomes for children and young people.

The way in which children and young people use social media presents us with opportunities to give them meaningful access to local authority decision making processes which are often out of their reach, as they may not respond to traditional communication methods. Two possible approaches are actively going out to the social network site spaces used by young people with whom we may not usually engage, and increasing the transparency of the commissioning process to give young people opportunities to stay engaged and comment throughout the cycle.

Contact Jasmine Ali, Head of Children's Services Network, LGiU: jasmine.ali@csn.info

Participation process

The first stage of putting together a strategy is to work out what sort of participation you are working on. You may find it useful to look back at the matrix of participation earlier in this guide. For example, do you want to:

- Allow young people to provide feedback on your service online?

- Become more responsive to young peoples needs on a day-to-day basis?

- Support young people to input into a one-off decision or consultation — such as a local planning process?

- Help young people move from one-off engagement with your organisation to getting more involved in ongoing projects and participation opportunities?

- Involve young people in the design and development of a service — for example, developing new provision, spending a grant, or designing a new building?

- Support a geographically dispersed group of young people to work together on a project, or to be the decision making board for an organisation or project.

In each of these cases you need to think about whether this participation is about:

- long term or short term involvement
- involving young people you already know, or new groups of young people
- gathering insights from young people, or handing over decision making power to young people.

Opportunity, interaction, interface, outcome

There are a number of different elements to most good examples of participation with young people through social network sites. These are:

- the **opportunity** for involvement

- the **interaction, discussion and dialogue** between young people — and between young people and your project/organisation

- the **interface** — between young people's input and decisions getting made, or action taking place

- the **outcome** — in terms of decisions made and change for young people — with details of what has changed or why decisions were made the way they were fed back to young people.

Sometimes these elements will be linear — where you run specific short-term online participation projects and the process looks a bit like this:

Set up Opportunity ▸ **Support the Interaction** ▸ **Manage the Interface** ▸ **Feedback on the Outcome**

For example, you might have a consultation taking place where you:

- identify that the young people you want to engage are mostly on Facebook

- set up a blog (for people not on Facebook to interact with) and a Facebook group which you invite young people to join and to invite their friends to (the **opportunity**)

- actively facilitate discussion in the Facebook group for a month (the **interaction**)

- sum up discussion from the Facebook group and create a presentation which you show to managers and trustees/councillors at a meeting and where you ask them to respond to young people's views (the **interface**)

- record feedback from that meeting and report this, along with details of decisions and changes made, to the members of the Facebook group (the **outcome**).

Sometimes the elements of your participation process will not be linear, but will be part of an ongoing cycle of participation and engagement with young people as shown here.

Listen online and find opportunities for participation

Join in interaction in existing and new online spaces

Encourage young people to take action, and constantly interface young people's views with managers

Create opportunities for participation by becoming more transparent in your day-to-day decision making

Regularly change and adapt on the basis of what you hear - and let young people know about this outcome of their involvement

Different approaches

Choosing the right tools for participation through social network sites is only a small part of planning your strategy. There are many other decisions to make about how you will approach your participation project.

A range of mix-and-match approaches are listed below. Which are appropriate for your project?

- **Co-design with young people** — inviting a small group to work with you to help design your social network presence, plan the project, and promote it when it goes live.

- **Invite decision makers to the discussion** rather than reporting what young people say to decision makers at the end of a process, invite (and support) decision makers to join the conversations directly.

- **Use offline advertising,** including posters and flyers to let young people know about your online engagement opportunities.

- **Practice blended facilitation** and act as a link between online discussions and offline meetings. For example, create a presentation of key points from online discussions, and take photos of flip-charts at face to face meetings and upload these to the web.

- **Offer incentives for participation**, such as prizes or rewards for involvement.

- **Engage young people to create media content** that will help explain the participation opportunity and make it more engaging.

- **Work with a professional media/social media agency** to develop your online engagement plan — perhaps involving young people as commissioners of the agency's work.

- **Train young people as social reporters or online facilitators** and support them to help run your participation project.

- **Create a thematic network or engagement opportunity** and work with a number of different agencies to make sure young people's views are listened to — even if they don't fit within one particular organisation's sphere of responsibility.

- **Target your online engagement on a particular social network.**

- **Create opportunities for engagement** across a wide range of different social networks and online spaces.

- **Train adults in how to engage directly with young people online** so that councillors, directors or other officers get into in-depth conversations with young people.

Safety

The well-being of children and young people should always be a prime concern of organisations exploring youth engagement. Being safe is a key aspect of well-being[5].

- The law recognises that young people require specific protection, and places specific obligations on authorities and institutions working with young people to prioritise the safety and well being of the young person.

- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child expresses the specific rights of young people to be protected, to have special provision made for their developmental needs and to participate in decisions that affect them.

- Many organisations have a statutory duty relating to the safeguarding and protection of young people.

- Most young people experience their teenage years as a period of dynamic biological and social change during which issues of personal identity and peer-group relationships can be of heightened importance and during which many young people are, by adult standards, less risk-averse.

It is also important for organisations to ensure that they adequately support their staff to stay safe in their use of social media.

Aspects of safety

Promoting the safety and well-being of young people online has many aspects. No single approach can suffice on its own. Consider:

- **Creating a safe environment** — through the design of online platforms and interfaces, and through the policies and conduct of adults and young people in those spaces.

- **Promoting information literacy** — so that young people can make their own informed decisions about their online activities and so they can navigate online environments and experiences safely.

- **Promoting young people's resilience** — encountering and navigating risks is part of growing up. Equipping young people with the skills to respond to risks, so that they do not lead to lasting harm, is a key part of promoting safety.

- **Being vigilant and ready to respond to potential harms** —remembering that many online risks have their roots in offline issues. In some cases the right responses will be personal and social developmental interventions — in other cases you may need to contact the specialist agencies listed later in this document.

The EU Kids Online project (Livingstone and Haddon, 2009) emphasises that increased opportunity for young people online leads to increased risk. Conversely, though, strategies to reduce risk often restrict young people's online opportunities, and potentially their capacity to respond to risk in future. The research also found growing indications that the provision of positive online content (which would include youth engagement opportunities online) *"directly benefits [young people's] development and reduces online risks by encouraging valuable and valued activities."*

At the launch of the EU Kids Online I Report (June 2009) Dr Tanya Byron outlined the importance of balance in our response to risk, stating: *"We cannot and must not build an environment for children to develop within, which is built around what we see through the eyes of the most vulnerable child"*.

Our goal should not be to remove all possible risk from online engagement — but to ensure that all young people do not come to harm as a result of online risks — and to work to ensure all young people have the best possible chance of having positive online experiences. We should devote particular attention to the needs of the most vulnerable young people.

Identifying risks

The EU Kids Go Online project (2008) provides a matrix model for thinking about risks to young people online (also adopted in the Byron Review[6]). While far from comprehensive, it can provide a useful framework for considering young people's exposure to risks online.

Motivation → / Child's role ↓	Commercial	Aggressive	Sexual	Values
Content (child as recipient)	Advertising, Exploitation of personal information	Violent web content	Problematic sexual web content	Biased information, racism, blasphemy, health 'advice'
Conduct (child as participant)	More sophisticated exploitation, children being tracked by advertising	Being harassed, stalked, bullied	Being groomed, arranging for offline contacts	Being supplied with misinformation
Conduct (child as actor)	Illegal downloads, sending offensive messages to peers	Cyber bullying someone else	Publishing porn	Providing misinformation

The Interim Report of the Youth Work and Social Networking project (NYA, 2008)[7] explores in depth the literature on risks specifically related to online social networking.

The opportunities and risks of social media go hand in hand. It is important then to identify the risks and take steps to ensure they are mitigated, and that young people are able to navigate the risks safely. Risks linked to social network sites include the following:

- Social media sites can make it easier for anyone to publish content, including offensive, hateful or bullying material. This content can spread quickly and be tricky to remove.

- People may use the publishing potential of social media sites to share personal and private information, or to publish content which could impact upon their future education, career or relationship prospects.

- Social media and social network sites can act as 'amplifiers' of off-line activities. While this can have significant positive effects it can also increase the harm caused by bullying, and exacerbate other personal and social development challenges young people are facing.

- Social media spaces can provide predatory adults with information and communication channels that can be used in sexual grooming.

- Social media platforms often work on a 'trade data for service' model and there is a risk that third parties will abuse user supplied data.

Organisations also need to consider how they comply with laws, guidelines and terms and conditions that relate to their planned social media engagement with young people, for example:

- data protection legislation and policies
- laws on moderation and content publishing
- Criminal Records Bureau/Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) checks for moderators of online services for young people
- age restriction on the use of certain social media services
- guidelines on consent for photos, videos and participation of young people
- guidance on official civil servant or elected politicians participation in social media spaces.

Being aware of the risks to young people online, and of the legal and policy contexts of online engagement, allows organisations to take a proactive approach to safe online participation — running positive projects which are based on safe and sound foundations.

Engaging children in care safely

The sub-group of the Action Learning Set focusing on using social network sites for participation work with children and young people in care identified a number of common concerns raised by managers of services about the risks, and identified appropriate responses.

Special attention should be paid to online safety when exploring engagement with vulnerable young people. Young people in care, for example, may look to form meaningful relationships with other people on the internet, often without considering the dangers involved.

The following table addresses concerns raised by managers within social services about creating social network site based engagement for young people in care, although the principles can be applies to other vulnerable groups and, indeed, young people in general.

Risk/concern	Possible responses	Implications
People not involved with Children in Care Councils (CiCCs) could access the site, view information about young people involved and find out about meeting times/places.	Young people could be invited to join a SNS as they arrive in care/reach the appropriate age/join CiCC. There could be a front page open to the public with further access only given on application, which would need to be verified by the designated staff team. Passwords need to be kept secure.	Requires a member of staff with time to administrate.
Other young people/adults may be present as 'valid' members on the site, therefore able to view info/photos of young people in care who would prefer to remain anonymous.	Terms and conditions need to be agreed by young people and staff as they apply to use the site. A visible group contract (in accessible language) should be shown on the site, with reminders placed around the site, particularly if photos are available.	All members of the network should be encouraged to take responsibility for keeping the space safe.
Even if the network is a closed site for young people in care, allowing their photos to be shared may still be considered a risk.	Encourage young people to create avatars (e.g. cartoon character images) in place of using photos — see for example http://tinyurl.com/cavatar.	Allows the benefits of visual communication while avoiding photos.
Wall posts — are young people able to write anything they want or is moderation/filtering necessary?	Before a post appears a member of staff should moderate it. The terms and conditions can set out ground rules and moderation policy. Make sure young people can report inappropriate pictures/language/posts. Work with a post-moderation and warning system — anything inappropriate is taken off by staff and a warning given to the poster.	Encourages young people to take responsibility but may still require a member of staff with time to monitor.
The internet may be viewed as an inherently unsafe environment.	Use the site as a place to educate young people on safe internet use, and to publicise CEOP campaigns on internet safety. Creating a safe online space increases young people's overall online safety.	
If you open up an SNS to young people aged 11-19, how do you ensure material on the site is appropriate for all?	Consider having two separate age groups, e.g. years 7-9 and 10-13. Changeover needs to happen in years 10/11 when young people become the responsibility of the leaving care team. The older age group could be monitors/participants of a younger group.	

A 'white label' social network site such as Ning (*see page 29*) gives the site administrators more control than is available in a general social network site like Facebook or Bebo.

Contact Joy Jenkins, West Berkshire Council: jjenkins@westberks.gov.uk

Responding to concerns

There are a number of key agencies you should be aware of and which exist to deal with serious concerns about the safety of young people online.

Emergency call
If you suspect a young person is in immediate danger or you need an immediate response you should phone 999.

Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP)
CEOP is a police agency with powers to investigate concerns about grooming or sexual abuse of young people online. Professionals and young people can report concerns to CEOP via the 'Report Abuse' button on their website. http://www.ceop.gov.uk

Internet Watch Foundation (IWF)
You can report obscene and illegal internet content to the IWF and they will work with Internet Service Providers to ensure it is removed or access to it is blocked. http://www.iwf.org.uk

Service providers
Responsible website providers will have clear processes for dealing with reports of abuse including inappropriate content or bullying. For concerns which do not involve illegal content or conduct, look for the 'report abuse' feature on the website in question. Most social network sites only check content when alerted to it by users.

Record it, talk to your manager and know your policies
You should raise any other concerns with your senior manager or the appropriate child protection/e-safety co-ordinator within your organisation.

Whatever actions you take you should make a record of them and discuss them with your manager.

Make sure you are aware of the general child protection and reporting guidelines for your organisation. These will apply to online work with young people as well as face-to-face work. Your organisation may also have a specific e-safety policy which you should make sure you are familiar with.

Policy and risk assessment

Safe social networking may have a place in a variety of policies. It is advisable to apply the same kind of risk assessment process to online engagement as you would to offline engagement.

Two approaches to policy
It is relevant to consider whether online engagement with young people should have a policy of its own, should be an element in other policies.

A specific 'online engagement' policy can be useful to raise awareness of the specific issues with staff — but in the long run, you may want to ensure there is an online element across all your policies.

Policies which may have an impact upon your online youth engagement include:

- child protection policy
- staff ICT guidance / policy
- ICT acceptable use policy
- photos/image consent policy
- recognition and rewards for participation policies.

The document *Safe and Effective Engagement with social network sites for Youth Professionals* (Davies, 2009) offers guidance for staff on engagement with social network sites — *see Bibliography*.

Safety: things to think about

The steps you will need to take to promote safety will vary depending on how you are using social networks. Below is a non-exhaustive list of elements you may want to consider.

In all situations:

Are all staff and volunteers aware of what they should do if they have concerns about young people's online safety?

Is your choice of social networking tools age-appropriate? (e.g. don't encourage under-13s to use Bebo, as the terms of service don't allow this).

If you are working face-to-face with a group of young people and using social networks to extend your work or share it online:

Have you negotiated and agreed ground rules with the group for what they can and can't share online?

Are group members aware of the support available to them if they come across things which concern or worry them online?

Are you actively monitoring online discussions about your work or project to be able to identify and respond to any issues that might arise?

If you are creating content that involves young people:

Do you have informed consent from young people for their images, videos or other content to be used online?

Do you need, and have, consent from parents or guardians for the same?

Have you talked to young people about how posting content which involves them could reveal information about them online?

Have you checked that if this content is linked to young people's profiles that it won't reveal information they don't want revealed and that young people know how to use their privacy settings?

If you are planning to interact with young people online:

Do you have a clear policy that sets out which staff members can and can't interact directly with young people online, and who they can and can't interact with?

Do you have ways for young people to verify the identity of the profiles they will be interacting with on social network sites (check you are 'official')?

Does your identity (profile / page) in the social network clearly state who you are?

Have you thought about how you connect with young people? Using 'friend requests'? Groups? Or pages? Does this allow you to see young people's profile information? If so — is this appropriate and do you have informed consent for this from young people?

Are you actively monitoring online discussions to be able to address any issues that arise? If so, are moderators CRB checked?

If you are using a third party social media platform:

Have you checked out the safety features of the platform?

Are you inviting young people to join the platform to interact with you? Or only interacting with young people already using the platform?

If you are building your own social media platform or application:

Have you looked for relevant guidance and codes? For example, the Home Office Taskforce on Child Internet Safety has published good practice guidance for moderators of online services and developers of social network sites (see 'Resources').

Measuring impact

Whatever you do to use social network sites for youth participation, you should always be asking the question: "What's changed as a result for children and young people?"

Measuring the impact of participation through social network sites is important for three main reasons:

- to identify where participation has led to change for young people
- to identify opportunities to improve and develop future projects
- to make the case for future investment in participation through social network sites.

Change for young people

Good youth participation should be able to create real change in the lives of young people. It is important to regularly check young people's perception of change that has been brought about through their engagement — and to offer regular feedback on how young people have been listened to and what has been done as a result.

"If the people who are supposed to be the beneficiaries of change do not know that it is happening – then it probably is not happening." [8]

The *Hear by Right* 'What's Changed?' tool available from http://hbr.nya.org.uk/whatschanged provides a mechanism for reflecting upon and gathering evidence of listening, action and change from organisations, individuals and communities.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning

There are many ways to evaluate online participation, including:

- web metrics — such as visitor statistics, and details of how people found your online participation opportunities

- content analysis — looking at how many comments have been posted for example, and how many different people have got involved

- online surveys and polls — either ongoing during a project, or at set points in the project

- focus groups and peer-interviews — including with people who did not take part in the online participation to find out why they didn't engage.

Think about the way you will evaluate your project when you are planning it, rather than leaving evaluation until the end. You should consider whether you will use internal evaluation, or an external evaluator.

Evaluating Discover Young Hackney

Discover Young Hackney, now in its third year, is a month-long youth arts and culture festival promoting participation and training in the local cultural and creative industries. Its strategy has been to listen to young people and involve them in shaping the programme, its brand and marketing from the outset.

The festival's strong brand and creative publicity has always raised awareness and interest, but one of the key ways of engaging young people has been through the internet. In 2009 Discover Young Hackney launched a blog on blogspot where young people and parents/guardians could follow and interact with the festival. It's a way to find out what's on, watch short video trailers for some of the events, and share clips, as an alternative to traditional council web pages which did not particularly attract young people.

The Cultural Development Team examined the blog site visitor data, how users came to the site and where the blog consequently led them to. This helped them understand how effective the blog was in providing a web presence for Discover Young Hackney and as a marketing tool for associated organisations.

The blog was successful in promoting cultural activities to young people and attracting local youth to the Council's cultural offer, with more than 3,000 hits by the end of the festival, the majority from those who had not taken part in the programme before.

The project was less successful in engaging young people in 'blogging' — giving feedback or making comments on the individual events and blogs. The site should give young people more ownership through youth-led moderation, provide more attractive incentives to encourage blogging and set a platform for a youth-orientated cultural debate, but this will require thorough planning and more allocation of resources.

For next year, Discover Young Hackney will create its own Facebook and Bebo pages and link those to the blog in order to spread the word to the social networks of young people and the providers. The Cultural Development Team will also implement a festival documentation project training young people to report on and photograph the activities. This could naturally lead to the production of a new site or added tools such as Flickr, where other young people could add their own photographs and leave comments.

Contact: Petra Roberts, Discover Young Hackney Project Manager: petra.roberts@hackney.gov.uk   www.dyh09.blogspot.com

Resources

There are literally hundreds of social networking and social media tools which you can pick up and use for free, or at very low cost. There are tools for publishing media, hosting conversation and connecting groups.

> *"Free is not worthless. Using low cost online tools allows us to try different approaches and be flexible – without needing to spend £500 or £1000 on building websites or online destinations."*
> **Action Learning Set participant, final meeting**

Many social network based participation projects will involve using a variety of different tools which you connect together, or use for different parts of your project. Think about how young people can help you to choose and identify different tools to use.

> *"Young people are the greatest resource you've got."*
> **Action Learning Set participant, final meeting**

In this section we detail a number of online tools that are available, and share tips from the LGiU Action Learning Set members in their use.

The list in this guide is by no means exhaustive, and you will find many more tools documented in the online companion to this document at http://www.practicalparticipation.co.uk/yes/

Three key concepts

There is a social media tool for just about any task you can think of: video sharing, photo sharing, creating interactive timelines, visualising data, online mapping, mind mapping, document sharing, spreadsheets, publishing articles, audio-streaming and more.

Hearing about all these different tools can be pretty daunting. However, once you get your head around a few key concepts of the social web, you will start to see how you can mix-and-match different tools and connect them together to realise almost unlimited possibilities — allowing you to think first about the participation process you want to design, and then to fit the tools around it.

Below are outlined three key concepts that it's worth taking time to explore and understand:

Really Simple Syndication (RSS)

RSS is a way for websites and online services to exchange information seamlessly. An RSS feed provides a standard way for one website to allow another website or online service to read its content, filter it and display it in different ways.

For example, you can take the headlines from a Blog and feed them into a Facebook page. Or you can set up a search using Google News for mentions of a particular local area and take an RSS feed of the latest news items into your own personal dashboard.

When you set up a connection between two online tools using an RSS feed, then the one receiving the feed regularly checks for new content and is kept automatically up to date.

Tagging

How do you bring content, media and conversations together from the many different social media tools you are using as part of your youth engagement? You could ask everyone to put their content and hold their conversations in one space online. Or you can make use of 'tags' to locate and aggrgate information from wherever it is on the web.

A tag is an informally agreed keyword which anyone can include in blog posts and twitter messages, or in the tag field when uploading photos and videos. Using a combination of RSS feeds and web search you can bring together and track all the content which includes your unique tag.

Tagging is a convention. There is no formal way of 'reserving' a tag. You just pick something likely to be unique to your context (but short enough to fit in twitter messages and so that it isn't cumbersome). For example, at a recent conference called 'Connected Generation' all the participants were invited to use the tag 'cgen09' (**C**onnected **GEN**eration 20**09**) and the content that was tagged has been aggregated at http://www.connectedgeneration.info.

Embedding

Have you ever seen a video from YouTube displayed on a website other than YouTube? Wondered how it got there? It's been embedded. The video still comes from the YouTube servers, but is displayed in the context of the website where it has been embedded.

Embedding is a powerful way of adding rich interactive and multimedia content to a blog or social network site page, without that blog or social network site page needing to have features for video or audio sharing, or other forms of interactivity, built into it. Embedding is another way for content to be published in one place, and then displayed in many others.

Look out for 'Embed This' links on videos, slide shows and other content online.

Listening dashboards

Listening dashboards are a really user friendly tool that will allow you to pull together in one place information from across the web that you are interested in. Set up in the right way, a dashboard can give you an at-a-glance view of recent online content and conversation on issues that matter in your work.

Why use it?

A dashboard can help you gain a feel for dialogue that is taking place on a particular issue in your area, better understand public and community views about issues, and identify communities and communities of interest that are chatting online. It's also a really good way of capturing qualitative information; you can use it as a basis for acting or intervening to resolve any issues or problems, and to monitor feedback on something that you might have done.

> *"A listening dashboard is your radar to the intelligence and issues within a particular area or community"*
>
> Action Learning Set participant

Getting started

Before you start it's important to be clear about what you are trying to achieve. There is a whole wealth of information and conversation taking place out there — if you set your dashboard to search

for "youth issues", for example, be prepared for a lot of content coming back. But don't worry; dashboards have been designed to allow you to refine your approach in an iterative and organic process. Don't expect to get your dashboard settings right the first time, be prepared to chop and change until you are happy with the results.

Once you're clear about what you're looking for, think about choosing the right tools for the job — some applications are better suited to certain types of activity and are more user friendly and easier to set up than others.

- Addictomatic.com creates an instant dashboard based on the key words you supply, but you can't save and customise it.

- iGoogle (www.google.com/ig) integrates with any existing Google accounts you might have, and makes it easy to add Google Gadgets to your dashboard.

- NetVibes (www.netvibes.com) and PageFlakes (www.pageflakes.com) make it easy to add RSS feeds from different websites to your dashboard.

When setting up your dashboard, remember it's not just about knowing what you're looking for — have a think about where you want to look. There's a lot of information out there and populating your dashboard with the best information will save you some time. Do you want images? If so include flickr.com on your dashboard. Do you want to find out what people are Twittering about with regards to your particular issue? If so include Twitter on your dashboard.

For more detailed instructions on setting up your dashboard visit:
http://www.practicalparticipation.co.uk/yes/toolbox/listening_dashboard

Keeping it going

Using a dashboard can be resource intensive or fairly light touch — it goes back to what you're trying to achieve. If you want to use a dashboard to occasionally keep an eye on what's happening with regard to an issue or within a particular community then dipping in and dipping out occasionally is fine.

This is unlikely to be too resource intensive. But if you want to use it to engage with communities or resolve particular issues, or indeed improve the services you provide, it is likely that you will need to dedicate more time and effort to making it work. Keeping it going all links back to the points we covered in 'Getting started'.

Measuring impact

Again, the effectiveness of your dashboard will depend on what you are trying to achieve. If you are trying to gather better intelligence about a particular issue or a community you should be able to measure the value of that information in both a quantitative and qualitative way. If you are using that information and intelligence to establish better links with communities or communities of interest through pro-active engagement, once again this should be relatively straightforward to measure in terms of impact.

A real tangible measure will be the way in which you might use the information and intelligence you gather to improve service delivery and the quality of decisions. There should be an audit trail that allows you to measure the impact you have made. A potential benefit of utilising dashboards is that councils and services can turn re-active engagement into pro-active engagement. This can be used as a basis for developing different relationships between councils and their communities. But a cautionary note — the more you engage, the more you create expectations particularly in terms of your speed of response. Managing and measuring these impacts will be a fine balancing act.

Facebook

Facebook is one of the most popular mainstream social network sites and it offers many different opportunities for engaging with young people.

- You can offer young people a way of connecting with your organisation (profiles, groups and pages) and then keep young people up to date with information and news about opportunities to get involved.

- You can provide space for young people to comment on your updates and on the services you provide.

- You can host in-depth discussions on important issues in Facebook groups and on discussion pages.

- You can use the in-built features or add-on applications to manage collaboration and conversation between groups of young people from across a wide geographical area.

Creating the connection

There are three main ways of connecting with young people through Facebook: profiles, groups and pages.

- **Profiles have 'friends'.** The friend connection is a close connection. Using the friends feature is good for one-to-one communication — and makes it easy to message young people on Facebook. You will always need to create a professional work profile to manage any engagement on Facebook, but you do not necessarily have to accept friend requests from young people.

- **Groups have 'members'** and provide a discussion and media sharing space. Groups can be public, private or invite only. As the creator of a group you can moderate members. Groups work well when there is a clear shared interest or sense of community between group members. Sometimes groups are used as a form of petition — where individuals join a group to display their support for an idea or issue. You can message all the members of a group direct to their Facebook inbox.

- **Pages have 'fans'.** A page is similar to a profile, but pages are for organisations and projects rather than for people. They are a good tool for sharing information and getting feedback by allowing comments on the content you share. You can add Facebook applications and add-on features to your pages to make them more interactive.

The most effective and most appropriate method of connection for you to use will depend on your existing relationship to the young people you are engaging with — and the sort of participation opportunity you are creating.

Often the most appropriate route will be to use a page. Pages also offer greater opportunities for integration with other online tools.

Creating a page

To create a page you will first need to have an account on Facebook. Consider setting up a work profile. Explain clearly on that profile who you are and who you work for, as this profile will be displayed as the creator of your page.

The first time you use pages you will need to visit http://www.facebook.com/pages/manage/ when logged in to your Facebook account to gain access to pages.

You will find the links to create a page in the bar along the bottom of the screen when you are logged into Facebook.

Look for the 'Pages' link and then the 'Create Page' button:

Work through the prompts on screen to set up your page. You now need to encourage young people to become a fan of your page.

Once your page is set-up you can configure it by looking for the 'Edit Page' link when you are viewing it.

Make sure you add images and clear descriptions to your page to make it engaging.

Explore how you can use your page to encourage dialogue by posting content and looking at the different ways in which people can comment on it. Think about how you will keep track of comments and feedback.
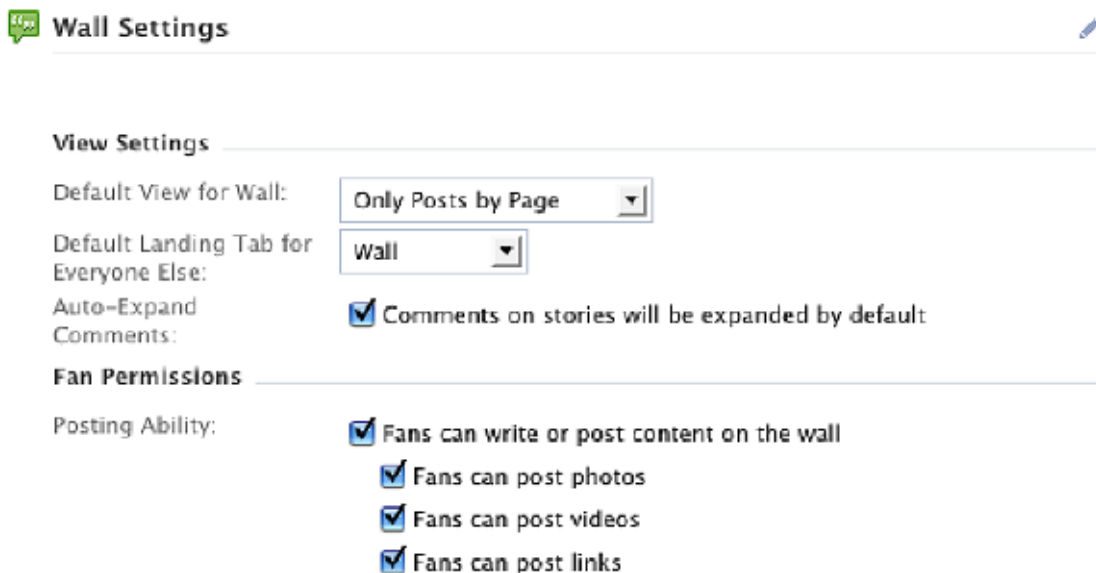
The 'Wall Settings' feature allows you to determine the level of interactivity on your page.

Using the 'More Applications' option at the bottom of your page settings interface allows you to add other features to your page from Facebook's library of third-party applications.
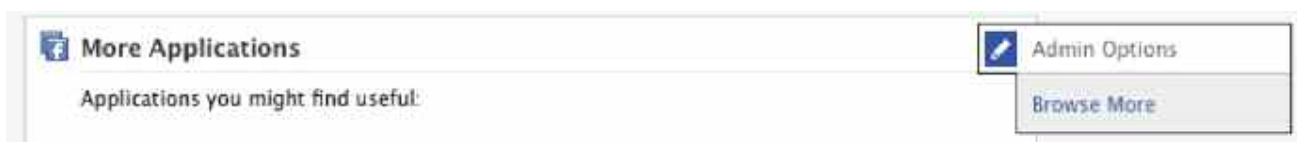
You can use the 'Get a Fan Box for your Website' option to embed the latest updates from your Facebook page, and a list of your fans, into your main website.

Using the 'Send Update to Fans' option you can message all the young people who have become a fan of your page. You can also target these updates by age, gender or location. Updates to fans appear as notifications rather than in their Facebook inboxes.

Tip: When you are viewing your own page you can select 'View All' next to the list of your page fans. You can then promote fans to be page owners (useful for colleagues) or you can remove fans if for any reason there are people you do not wish to be displayed as your fans or to receive your updates sent out to fans.

Find the right approach for you

We can't describe all the possible ways to use Facebook in this document. Explore the different options to find which might be right for your participation strategy.

Norfolk's Virtual Detached Youth Work pilot

In Norfolk, Facebook has been used as an outreach tool for detached youth work.

A Youth Participation Worker, working as a 'virtual detached youth worker' invited young people to become a friend of his official work profile, and to join participation groups within Facebook where they could discuss and input into decisions on local issues. Young people were made aware of the implications of adding a youth worker as a friend, so they could give informed consent to the connection.

The young people were keen to engage and many participated in lengthy discussions regarding services for young people. These discussions were then summarised and shared with relevant staff within the local authority and its partners.

As the relationships developed a signposting service was provided responding to young people's requests for information on services they wished to access.

This method of engagement can be more time consuming than using Facebook's group or page function. It is best suited to use by small experienced teams of youth work practitioners with the confidence and ability to commit to managing the online relationships. They need to feel comfortable in using online media as tools for informal education, and record their interactions.

The initial findings from the pilot are now informing future opportunities for workforce development offered within Norfolk County Council. It is also hoped that further virtual detached projects will be commissioned in the future.

Contact Tom Gaskin, Norfolk County Council: tom.gaskin@norfolk.gov.uk

Bebo

Bebo is particularly popular among younger age groups — and you are likely to find some communities of young people for whom Bebo is their main online network, rather than Facebook.

Engagement on Bebo primarily takes place through profiles, and features added to profile pages such as discussion boards, draw-boards and polls.

A number of high-profile engagement campaigns have taken place on Bebo, including the It Does Not Have to Happen anti knife-crime campaign funded by the Home Office.

It Does Not Have To Happen

The Home Office funded It Does Not Have to Happen project has a Bebo profile page at http://www.bebo.com/itdoesnthavetohappen which they use both to communicate with young people and to engage and get young people's input into their future campaigning.

> "Bebo is widely used by our target audience...which means we can bring young people to the forefront of the campaign either by asking them to co-create materials or using young editors to update the site."

The profile also makes extensive use of multimedia — often created by young people — in order to be engaging.

> "To keep our audience engaged we need to be useful by offering them incentives and relevant editorial content. We also have to provide an experience through new content such as a video, photos and audio tracks."[9]

Top tips for using Bebo

- Bebo profiles often work best when visual and media-rich.

- You can have a visual time-line at the top of your Bebo profile — and this can provide a really effective way of explaining a consultation or engagement process to young people.

- The main way of connecting with young people on Bebo is through friend requests, so think carefully about how you will manage these.

- You can set message boards in Bebo to be pre-moderated so that you approve all posts before they appear, although this can slow down discussion and dialogue.

Applications for engagement

Social network site applications are third-party tools which add features to the social network site. They might add a game to the site, or a new way of viewing and interacting with content. Applications can take advantage of the information the social network site holds about an individual's friends list to help messages and engagement opportunities spread.

For example, Boredometer is a social network site application developed by Neon Tribe (www.neontribe.co.uk) for the Plings project (www.plings.net) which is seeking to raise awareness of positive activities available to young people and to explore ways of gathering young people's feedback on positive activities.

Young people can add Boredometer to their Bebo profiles, where it displays as a profile 'badge' showing a measure of boredom. This design was based on face-to-face consultation with young people where it emerged that 'being bored' was a major issue young people talked about.

However, the Boredometer application doesn't stop there — it invites young people's friends viewing their profile to help them with their boredom — and gets young people to search for activities for their friends to do and share them with their friends on Bebo.

You can read more at http://blogs.plings.net/?p=607.

Ning

Ning provides a platform on which anyone can build a defined online community of people to address any issue or interest. On a Ning-based social network you manage the memberships and you control the community features. You can also control the appearance and branding of the site. A number of discussion forums can be maintained independently, allowing different issues to be discussed separately.

Getting started

- Be clear about what you want a site for — Ning networks work best with a clear purpose and a clear target group.

- Think about whether your network will need to be approved by your organisation (content and branding)?

- You can setup your own social network easily using Ning's 'wizard' at www.ning.com. Simply choose a name, a style and the features you want your network to have (for example groups, forums and blogs).

- You can do some extra work and design your own header and set up member profile questions.

- Security can be set to make your network either public or private.

- Invite your members.

Using your Ning network

- Create any groups you want. You can upload pictures to clearly identify them.
- You could start a forum for people to introduce themselves.
- Initially people may need a lot of encouragement to start using the site.
- You will need to facilitate the site by getting involved, but be careful not to take over or crowd out young people's voices.
- You can make certain members administrators to help you manage the site.

Evaluation

There are a number of ways you might evaluate the impact your site is having:

- number of members
- number of groups and forums
- frequency of activity
- number of files uploaded by members
- number of face-to-face meetings being held by members (is the network saving time and money) — remember that face-to-face meetings are still important.

Blogging

Blogs are not strictly social networks. But they provide a very useful platform for publishing content and inviting feedback which can be made available in public online spaces and then linked into social networks.

Why set up a blog?

- Share/disseminate information through ideas, stories, video, polling, images, links and documents.
- Market and promote events, activities or news stories.
- Provide updates and transparency on the council's services, e.g. youth funds.
- Provide a platform for comments and feedback.
- Signpost to other services, sources of information and websites, e.g. LA and/or other providers.
- Create a web presence for one-off projects, e.g. events, or consultation.

Getting started

There are many different free and low cost blogging tools available. One of the most popular and flexible is Wordpress, available as a free hosted service at http://www.wordpress.com, or as a download which you can run on your own servers.

> *"Using Wordpress.com was very simple and it's free! We could customise the design and get our blog up and running in under an hour."*

Wordpress includes:

- easy moderation functions ('allow' or 'disallow' comments via the admin screen)
- lots of choice with design and layout, lots of templates to choose from and it's also easy to upload new images for banners
- space for you to include additional pages of information and the ability to import RSS feeds from other sources (e.g. displaying updates from another blog in a side-bar).

You can also set up a blog using Google's Blogger. Blogger offers, in theory, greater flexibility than Wordpress.com in terms of customising your blog layout and embedding media from other websites, but it can be slightly more complicated to use these advanced features. Blogger has the advantage of a good events calendar feature and polling functionality — although the comments function is not very visible, and so can reduce the amount of feedback.

Top tips: Keeping your blog going

You can get a blog set up very quickly, although it's important to think about how you will keep it updated. Top tips from the action learning set include:

- careful planning of time and resources — involve managers from the start to allocate staff and time/budgets

- remember that a blog requires regular input of new material — decide on the frequency of posts and ensure it is manageable

- plan resources for moderation and make criteria for inclusion clear. For example do not allow hateful, vulgar, illegal, or violent comments but do allow opinion and debate

- recruit staff wisely as they may be volunteers or youth workers (e.g. ensure they are CRB checked if communicating with young people) and promote good practice in line with safeguarding policy.

Integrating your blog with Facebook

You can link together your blog with a Facebook page — allowing you to publish content on the public internet, but feed it into a social network space where you are actively engaging with young people.

1) In Facebook select the 'Ads and Pages' icon in the grey toolbar at the bottom of the page.
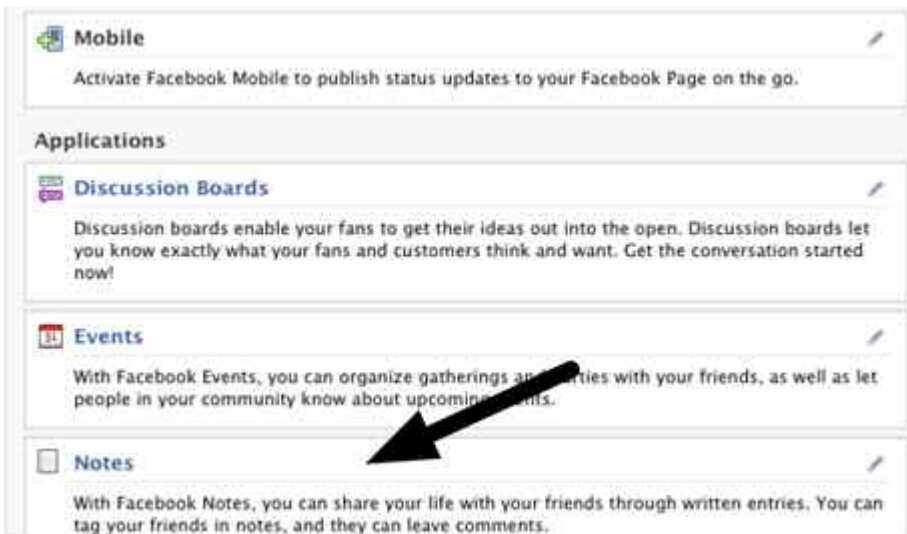

2) Select the 'pages tab' within the application.

3) Select the page you want to add the feed to. (See the Facebook section above for details on setting up a page)
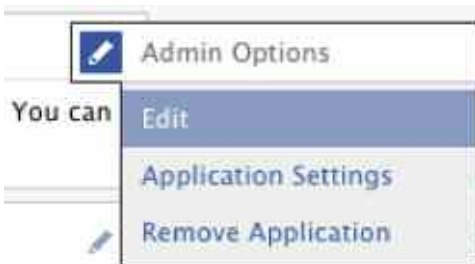
4) Select 'edit page' from the left-hand column.

5) Half way down the page you will see a 'notebook' type icon called 'Notes'.

6) Click on the 'admin option' and choose 'edit'.

7) You will now see a 'notes settings' box in the page which says 'import a blog'. Click on this link to open a dialogue box with a space to add the URL of the blog RSS.

8) You then need to go to your blog and get the address for your RSS feed and copy it (in Wordpress this is found at the bottom of the blog page) and then go back to Facebook and paste the URL into the space provided.

Facebook automatically updates the page when you post a new blog.

Blog and Facebook: Communicating with young people in Hampshire

Officers from Hampshire County Council have made use of a Facebook page to provide information to young people – a first step into social networking before looking at ways to add interactivity and feedback mechanisms

Hampshire Children's Services' communications team set up a blog using Wordpress, with its content generated from existing communication activity such as press releases. The team also set up a Facebook account, and a Facebook page which can read the blog output via an RSS feed, with no extra work required from the officers.

The flow of information here is one-way. Young people with Facebook accounts can become 'fans' of our 'Services for Young People' page and receive updates on our service activity — an opportunity to pick up on news of interest to them, which they may otherwise normally miss. They can also send us a message or an email directly, but there is no forum or message board that requires constant monitoring.

Over time this set up will be developed to allow discussion and feedback, so young people can participate in a way which is comfortable and familiar to them, for example a page specific to a consultation on a new school development.

Contact John Addicott, Hampshire County Council: john.addicott@hants.gov.uk

Video sharing and YouTube

Video is a powerful medium for online engagement. You can use video clips to explain a participation opportunity, to provide a stimulus for discussion or to feedback on what has changed as a result of young people's participation.

With video sharing websites like YouTube you can upload video clips from your computer, and have them converted into easy-to-view online videos. You can then embed them in other websites or within social networks.

How to use YouTube

You don't need to register an account to view clips but will need one if you plan to upload your own content.

1 Make sure that the video is saved as a file where it can easily be found and close all programs that may be using the video.

2 Open up your web browser (Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox).

3 In the search bar, type in www.youtube.com. This will take you to the 'YouTube' homepage.

4 In order to upload a video, you will need to register.

5 To do this, you will need to click on 'Sign Up' which is located at the top right corner of the web page.

6 Once you have clicked this, a new page will be uploaded. In the top box called 'Username', in the text box next to this, type in a user name of your choice. After you have done this, click 'Check Availability' which is located just underneath where you have written. This will either say 'Username Available' or give you other available related names.

7 After you have found a suitable username, fill in the various other boxes and then click 'I Accept' at the bottom. This will link you to another page where it will ask you to fill in your email, select a password and then fill in a word verification.

8 Then click on 'Create New Account and Finish'. YouTube will then automatically send you a verification link to your email.

9 Once you have verified that it is the correct email by clicking the link, you will need to return back to the YouTube home page.

10 Now you are ready to start uploading videos. Just to clarify, do not upload copyright material such as music videos (or the soundtrack), commercials, TV shows or movies without permission as these will be removed by YouTube and your account banned.

11 To upload a video, make sure you are signed in and look in the top right hand corner next to the search bar. There is a yellow button labelled 'Upload'. Hover your mouse over this and select 'Upload Video File' which will pop up in a drop down menu. Click on this and you will be directed to a new screen.

12 Roughly in the centre of the screen is a button labelled 'Upload' and is coloured grey. Select this and your 'My Computer' will open up. Look up the video file you wish to upload and either double left-click it or click it once and press 'Open'. (If any prompts appear asking permission, select 'Allow').

13 Your video should start uploading. While it is uploading, you may wish to edit tags, the name and the description. Make sure you click 'Save' after you have made these changes. This button is found by scrolling to the bottom of the page.

14 Your video may take a while before it is viewable by the public. Once your video is uploaded, look for the 'Embed' link to get the embed code which will allow you to include your video within another website.

Find out more

Social network sites are changing rapidly, as are the opportunities for youth participation through social networking. In this document we have provided a snapshot of some of the issues and ideas covered in an Action Learning Set at the start of 2009.

Online communities

Networked Participation — http://www.networkedparticipation.co.uk

The online community set up to support the action learning set which this document is based upon, and now open to all practitioners exploring the use of social network sites for youth engagement.

Join the network to access resources, ask questions and share learning with other practitioners.

Social Media Community of Practice — http://communities.idea.gov.uk

(Search for the 'Social Media' community once you have created an account)

An online community of staff from local authorities and public bodies, and of supportive freelancers, exploring all aspects of the use of social media in local and national government.

Youth Work Online — http://network.youthworkonline.org.uk

This includes practitioners, researchers and volunteers exploring how youth work and associated professions can take advantage of new technologies and can support young people to navigate a digital world.

Practical guides

Social by Social — http://www.socialbysocial.com

A practical guide to using new technologies to create social impact. It includes a wide range of case studies and practical tips for using social media in small and large organisations.

Participation Works How To Guides — http://tinyurl.com/participation-howto

These short guides provide an overview of a wide range of participation topics — including involving children and young people with disabilities; involving young people from diverse backgrounds; thinking about remuneration and rewards for involvement; involving young people in governance; involving young people in infrastructure organisations; and safeguarding young people.

Listen and Change — http://www.participationworks.org.uk/resources/listen-and-change-a-guide-to-children-and-young-peoples-participation-rights

A guide to children and young people's participation rights putting participation in its current policy context, and providing the historical context.

Toolkits

Hear by Right — http://hbr.nya.org.uk

A tried and tested standards framework for Youth Participation. Available for download along with a range of resources, including the 'Involving Children and Young People, An Introduction' briefing.

YES — Youth Engagement and Social Media — http://www.practicalparticipation.co.uk/yes/

An evolving online resource building on this document and including a practical How To toolkit for those exploring all forms of youth engagement through social media.

Home Office Taskforce guidance — http://tinyurl.com/ho-taskforce

Home Office Taskforce on Child Internet Safety has published good practice guidance for moderators of online services and developers of social network sites.

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Endnotes

1 *Involving Children and Young People, An Introduction,* NYA, 2009

2 Source: Josie Fraser on Safe and Sound Foundations, presenting to the January 2009 meeting of the LGIU Youth Participation and Social Network Sites Action Learning Set: http://fraser.typepad.com/

3 Based on Youth Work and Social Networking Final Report, NYA, 2008 — *see Bibliography*

4 Avoidable contact: the average number of customer contacts per received customer request

5 Source: *Safe and Effective Social Network Site Applications*, Davies 2008

6 *See Bibliography*

7 *See Bibliography*

8 Lord Herman Ouseley, former Chair of the Commission for Racial Equality

9 Source: Handout from 2009 Bebo 'Social Networks for Social Change' symposium

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