



HOW TO INCLUDE YOUTH VOICE IN YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS

S4YE “How-To” Notes

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This Note is part of S4YE's new "How To Series" that provides a quick step-by-step guidance for practitioners and policymakers working to design new youth employment programs. This series covers a range of youth employment related topics identified in collaboration with S4YE partners and World Bank Group teams.

This Note highlights how the **Mexico Youth Labor Market Inclusion (MYLMI) project** used four strategies to incorporate youth voice in the design of their program.¹ The project focuses on generating evidence on interventions that promote the labor inclusion of low-income youth into formal quality jobs in strategic productive sectors. The project is being implemented by the World Bank and the Government of Mexico in the state of San Luis Potosi.

OVERVIEW OF PROJECT

Early work experiences are crucial in shaping future employment status and earnings. Youth often face constraints in finding meaningful employment due to a lack of market-relevant skills and work experience. The lack of appropriate skills training can deter firms from hiring them and or offering better wages. Achieving better job outcomes for youth requires improving the interaction of the labor market's supply and demand side.

The [MYLMI](#) project² was developed by the World Bank to support the efforts of the Government of Mexico to promote the labor market inclusion of low-income youth in the state of San Luis Potosi between the age of 17 to 21 years into formal employment. The project seeks to address the main labor market challenges faced by youth in their transition from school to work while paying attention to the labor market constraints faced by firms seeking to increase their productivity and expand. The project focuses on the:

- (i) the design of an integrated supply- and demand-side labor inclusion approach, and
- (ii) an impact evaluation of a jobs pilot aimed at helping the insertion of youth into quality formal jobs in strategic productive sectors.

The project engages targeted youth before they enter the labor market and offers them a package of interventions to guide their study and work decisions, strengthen their job search skills, and connect them with quality employment opportunities. Targeted youth are low-income youth who are graduating from upper secondary school, including former beneficiaries of conditional cash transfer programs.

¹ World Bank, "Mexico Youth Labor Market Inclusion" <https://www.jobsanddevelopment.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Mexico-Pilot-CN.pdf>

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WHAT WAS THE PROBLEM THE TEAM WAS TRYING TO SOLVE?

Engaging youth early on in the design of a project can contribute to the project's objectives. An effective communication strategy has allowed the MYLMI project to engage youth in project activities throughout their transition from upper secondary school to the labor market.

The MYLMI team used a review assessment and regular interactions with youth to include youth voice and gauge how their intervention could be tweaked and improved continuously. Communicating with the younger generation has become a challenge due to media bombardment, short attention span, and low reading comprehension in developing countries. Engaging youth to participate in project activities, or to respond to surveys, requires a context-appropriate communication strategy. An ineffective communication strategy can prevent targeted youth from actively engaging in project activities, limiting the potential of employment programs.

FOUR STRATEGIES ADOPTED BY THE MYLMI PROJECT TO INCLUDE YOUTH VOICE IN THEIR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

Step 1: Establish credibility and trust

This starting point will help to align subsequent steps, clarify the intended audience, and identify activities. **Youth trust information from institutions they can recognize as reliable sources. For many youth, it is important to know which kind of local institutions or formal organizations are behind a specific message, as this can impact engagement with participants.** When organizations are developing their communication strategy, they must first establish their credibility and obtain the trust of youth. When information is provided by institutions familiar to youth, they are more likely to consider the information shared as reliable and accurate, and more likely to take it seriously and engage or respond (if it is a survey, for example).



Figure 1. Students in the MYLMI project participating in a literacy workshop.

The MYLMI project team decided that schools would be a trusted place to start to reach students. The team coordinated with school directors to deliver an in-person labor market literacy workshop to provide information about the public employment services, provide access to a wage subsidy, and conduct an activity to engage youth in an SMS-based data collection strategy. Developing trust and familiarizing youth face to face with the project was essential since there was some element of insecurity and mistrust in the local context.

Step 2: Be transparent and honest about how their feedback will be used

Youth are interested in learning how their participation in any activity can benefit them and/or society as many are passionate about how they can make a difference. Therefore, positive reinforcement can impact engagement with youth. A communication strategy should be clear about how their participation

is valuable and, specifically, how their feedback will help the overall development objectives of the project in the local community and beyond.

The MYLMI project team observed that youth felt confident to share their insights when they understood the bigger picture and broader strategic goals of the project. The MYLMI project surveys included sentences like: *“Thank you for your important collaboration in this project. The information you share will help us better understand the reality of young people’s lives and design better solutions to the problems they may be encountering”*.

Step 3: Personalize messaging

Youth prefer personalized attention rather than receiving automated messages. Regular and personalized outreach conveys to the youth the importance that the organization places in engaging and communicating with them. Young people like knowing there is a person, or a team, behind a phone call, a WhatsApp message, or a text message, which are not general automated messages and chatbots providing impersonal responses. Practitioners could consider utilizing tools that are appealing with catchy names, culturally relevant logos, colors, and images to grab youth attention.



Figure 2. Youth from the MYLMI project engaging with the team’s SMS platform.

Once the team followed steps 1 and 2 by engaging with students to establish their credibility and explained how their feedback would be used, the MYLMI project consistently personalized its communication with youth by incorporating individual characteristics in their messages. For example, the MYLMI project used an SMS platform to send reminders, provide updated status of activities, and follow-up on school to work trajectories. The team ensured that the SMS platform included the youth participants’ first names in the SMS messages, individual characteristics such as the name of their school, and included information provided from their previous responses (i.e., their activities). The personalized messages also included elements such as sharing stories the local youth could relate to or incorporated components like SMS surveys and random personal checks through WhatsApp. This personalized engagement by the team ensured that youth felt the messages were directly addressed and encouraged their engagement.

Step 4: Use multiplatform channels

Using multiple platform channels can also help increase outreach and commitment. Communicating one message in different ways, through various channels such as SMS, phone calls, WhatsApp or Facebook, will engage diverse groups of youth, and increase the likelihood of getting their attention and receiving a response.

The team's initial qualitative study revealed how the use of communication channels, digital technologies, and communication platforms varied amongst different categories of youth. E.g., a local teacher confirmed it was necessary to repeat the same message through different media to get youth attention. Once personalized messaging was developed, the MYLMI project regularly maintained engagement using different platform channels in addition to the text messages to reiterate the same message and to answer

any additional questions that the youth may have. The team provided timely information to youth about project interventions through SMS, WhatsApp, Facebook, phone calls, and email. The MYLMI team ensured that the messaging was not excessive either by using reminders on these multiplatform channels. For example, the team's strategy was to remind participants via text message about claiming a wage subsidy for which they were eligible. The team's operation of utilizing multiple platforms resulted in increased participation by youth, and the MYLMI team was able to reach a wide range of local students. Organizations, therefore, should adopt this strategy to include youth voice in their youth employment programs.

CONCLUSION

Opportunities for meaningful youth voice input can increase youth engagement in employment programs. The adoption of these four communication strategies has been essential to the MYLMI project to create a culture of youth participation and partnership. Constant and regular interaction with youth has increased the participation rates among the students across all project activities. For example, during the initial stage of the project, 270 young people responded at least once to the SMS messages sent. During phase 2 of the project, when the team incorporated these four communication strategies, over 1182 youth responded to the text messages they received. However, organizations should be conscious not to be too invasive or excessively repetitive at all stages of a communication strategy, as this can also lead to disengagement.

REFERENCE

World Bank, *Mexico Youth Labor Market Inclusion*, <https://www.jobsanddevelopment.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Mexico-Pilot-CN.pdf>

This S4YE “How To Series” Issue No.1 was prepared by Kavell Joseph (Technical Youth Employment Specialist, S4YE, Jobs Group), Ana Lucia Cardenas (Senior Field Coordinator, MYMI, Jobs Group), and Alejandra Rogel Alba (Impact Evaluation Coordinator, MYMI, Jobs Group), under the direction of Namita Datta (S4YE Program Manager). The team is grateful for support by Eliana Carranza, Senior Economist, Jobs Group).

S4YE is a multi-stakeholder coalition that aims to provide leadership and resources for catalytic action to increase the number of young people engaged in productive work. S4YE’s partners include the World Bank Group, Accenture, The Rockefeller Foundation, Mastercard Foundation, Microsoft, Plan International, International Youth Foundation (IYF), Youth Business International (YBI), RAND Corporation, the International Labour Organization (ILO), the Governments of Norway and Germany, and the UN Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth. The S4YE Secretariat is housed in the Jobs Group within the Social Protection and Jobs Global Practice at the World Bank Group.

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