



POWERING OUR FUTURE WITH HISTORY

Guidelines for Working with Gen Z Guidance

We're excited that you are seeking guidance from young adults as you build products or programs designed for their use. Organizations like yours have so much to offer today's young people, and we strive to forge a closer relationship between institutions and Gen Z, by centering Gen Z in our work.

With that, here are a few tips to make the most of your experience seeking input.

Ground Rules (suggest agreeing upon this at the start)

1. **What is said here stays here, what is learned here leaves here.** We respect the confidentiality of all participants in order to cultivate a safe and open productive dialogue.
2. **Time is valued.** While we encourage making connections and sustaining relationships with our young advisors after our engagement ends, please respect peoples' time and expertise and do not request free advice or favors from our Gen Z advisors outside of the scope of work.
3. **Abide by your community's Code of Conduct, or [borrow this one](#) from Made By Us.**

Setting Expectations

No group of young adults can speak for an entire generation, and while we strive to offer the most relevant lived experience for the target audience for your work, please understand you are getting feedback from a select group of people at a particular moment in time. Gen Z's world is fast-paced and highly reactive to outside events and trends; consider developing processes, alongside tangible feedback and decisions, that can help you stay responsive (we can help!)

We **do** provide our youth advisors with broader Gen Z data and trends so they are equipped to speak reliably beyond their immediate experience and perspective.

We **do** recruit advisors who can speak to a broad diversity of experiences and perspectives, and seek balance in representation (across gender, race, sex, geography and other identity factors)

We **do not** tell our Gen Z advisors what to say or what advice to give.

We **do** share with them strategies and approaches that have been successful from other projects, for their ongoing learning.

We **do** provide Gen Z advisors with a similar prep document for best practices in participation and conduct periodic training and practice sessions.

Tips

Bring an open mind

These advisors are here to bring an insightful look at how to enhance or better your program, which requires a critical eye. Please be open and receptive to the feedback and recommendations being given.

Listen first, plot later

Your role is to empathize with the users, ingest their feedback, ask questions to better understand key insights, and ultimately, later with your team, filter through what is operational and effective for your project. During our limited time together, give participants the space to express their thoughts fully, and avoid interrupting.

They are hired experts on their own lives.

Gen Z often operates in a different reality from most institutions, simply by virtue of the issues, media, platforms and language that separate generations. We're at work, but we're often asking them to respond to a project designed for leisure, entertainment or education. Respect their lived experience and life circumstances.

Give grace

Try to interpret feedback as new data that helps construct and drive forward, rather than as a critique that tears down. On the road to an improved product, you can absolutely expect to encounter criticism of institutional aspects and of the work that's already been done or imagined. You may feel emotionally challenged or uncomfortable. Anticipate this and strive to take it in stride.

Embrace the differences

Keep in mind that these advisors are meant to bring a new and different perspective that you could not get internally. If you find some feedback troubling, unclear or inconsistent with your experience, by all means ask questions to understand, but consider that you may not ever align with the perspective shared because we are not our audience. Finally, recognize that it takes courage to share a point of view, especially a critical one, and especially for younger people with less "institution-land" experience.

Learning together

If you find yourself wanting to push back against the feedback given or explain previous decisions, we ask that you save that for internal discussions later and focus on using the limited time with youth advisors to listen and explore ideas together. Model graceful acceptance of feedback, showing that leaders can learn and adapt.

Consider where else you can get ongoing youth input.

Like the refrain, "nothing about us without us," now that you've gleaned some initial guidance, where else can you bring in youth input, leadership, design or creation roles? What are the ways that you can compensate time and expertise (paid work, credits or titles, platform, other assets?)