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Engaging Youth in Corporate *Climate Leadership*

*Recommendations for working
with youth panels*

The Danish Youth Climate Council
and The Danish Association of
Managers and Executives

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Foreword

We need to talk more with young people, *not about them*

What we do in the coming years when it comes to the climate and natural crises will determine the conditions on Earth for hundreds of years to come¹. And it is future generations who will have to live with the consequences of the decisions made today. Many young people are therefore worried and frustrated by what they perceive as a lack of action.

Having more influence and getting their voices heard where decisions are made can help young people act on their concerns - both when it comes to climate and other issues².

Closer collaboration between generations can also help to ensure a common discussion about the big challenges of our time and can help to counteract polarisation. It can also create value for companies and their management in terms of understanding the perspective of younger generations. That's why the Danish Youth Climate Council and the Danish Association of Managers and Executives have developed a set of recommendations on how to involve young people in management and board decision-making through youth panels.

There are already several examples of youth panels out there. However, it is a relatively new phenomenon, and the following recommendations are based on the knowledge that is available and on experiences from some of the examples that already exist. These cases will also be described in greater detail.

We hope that these recommendations can create value for business leaders and society, and engage the many young people who have ideas, visions and a desire to be heard so that together we can tackle the major crises we face.

Nadia Gullestrup Christensen,
former chairperson, The Danish Youth Climate Council,
Co-founder of Gaia

Bodil Nordestgaard Ismiris,
CEO, The Danish Association of Managers and
Executives

¹ See, for example, the Cost of Climate Inaction <https://www.climatepolicyinitiative.org/the-cost-of-inaction/>

² www.eib.org/en/press/all/2023-112-76-of-young-europeans-say-the-climate-impact-of-prospective-employers-is-an-important-factor-when-job-hunting



Youth panels can create great value for everyone

Themes such as climate, biodiversity and planetary boundaries have, in just a few years, moved firmly onto the radar in management teams and boardrooms. Climate footprint reporting is required, legislation is tightening in the EU and elsewhere, and we see companies being deselected by customers and investors if they do not meet specific climate requirements.

At the same time, the climate expectations of leaders and companies are increasing. This also very much applies to the expectations of young people in society. Whether they are future young employees or young people as consumers, they have expectations for companies when it comes to responsibility, climate action and sustainability.

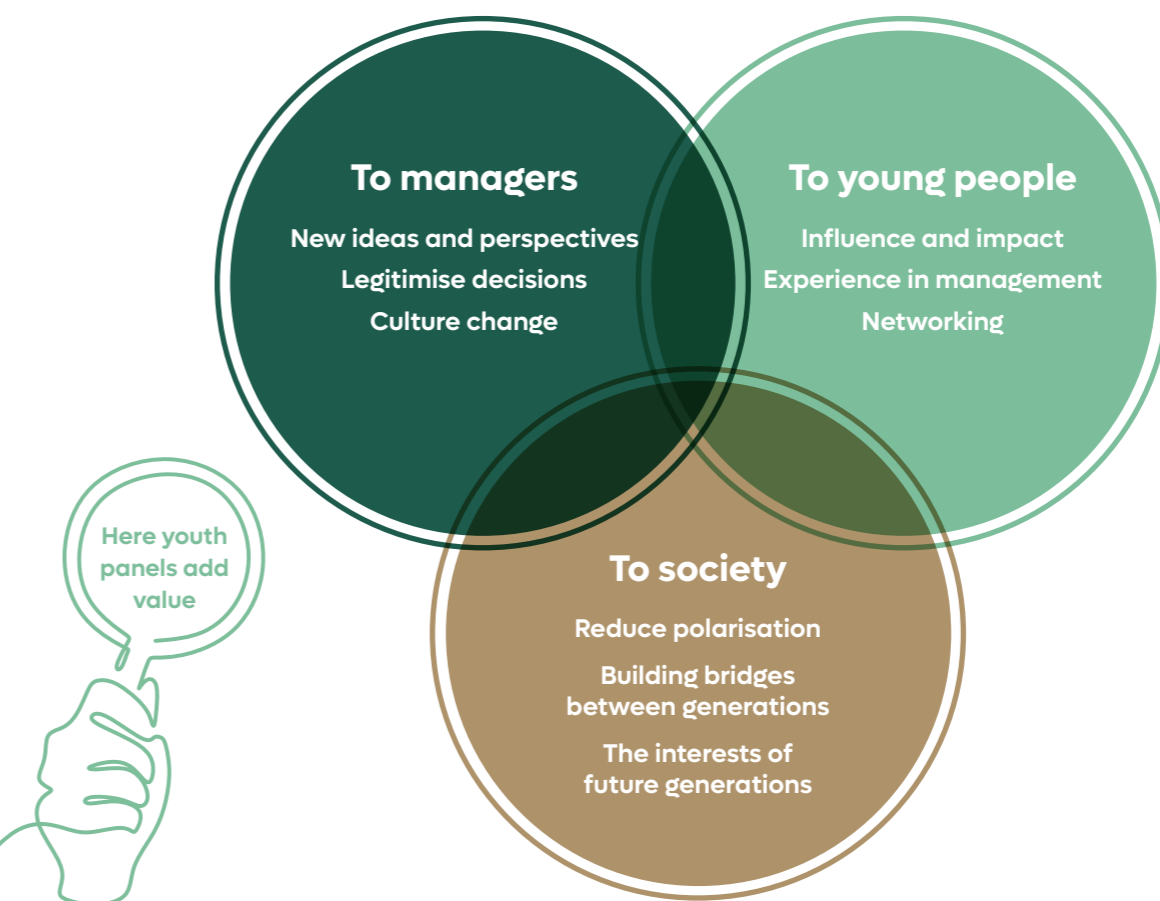
This is highlighted by the fact that 55% of global Generation Z and 54% of global millennials research what a company does for the climate and nature before accepting a job. 25% of Generation Z and 23% of millennials also say they would consider leaving their workplace if not enough is being done for the climate³. Ignoring the demands of young people is a critical mistake for companies that need young talent.

Value for leaders

In other words, leaders can benefit greatly from including and understanding young people's perspectives.

Inspired by large multinational companies, we are increasingly seeing examples of companies' management teams or boards of directors choosing to establish a youth panel that can contribute valuable ideas on how management can work with climate, nature and sustainability in the company. These ideas range from production, the company's (sustainability) strategy, good behavioural change initiatives in the workplace or communication. Having young people contribute their constructive and critical perspectives can help strengthen the legitimacy of decisions and make them better.

Stakeholder engagement - including young people - has also become a reporting requirement in the EU CSRD reporting directive. See box



But in addition to all this, a youth panel can also help enrich the collective intelligence of the organisation, for example if the panel consists of young people who are already employees but who otherwise do not have a say in major strategic decisions. This means that as many perspectives as possible are brought to the table and thus have the potential to sharpen the company's strategy. The company's young people are often not in leadership positions and therefore not mandated to make decisions, and as a result their views are not always heard.

Diversity - also in age - among decision-makers provides the best foundation for making better decisions. This applies to green decisions, but also more broadly⁴.

Youth panels can therefore also help create cultural change, where management teams in general are trained to listen to stakeholders and enhance their curiosity towards other perspectives. This also explains why there are more examples of 'reverse mentoring' now, where a young person mentors an older manager so that he/she understands the young person's view of the world and potentially gains a better understanding of what is expected of the company in the long term.

Overall, involving young people can help paint a picture of a more attractive workplace, generate new ideas, develop strategy and drive the company's sustainable transformation.

Reporting requirements for community stakeholder engagement - including young people

The EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) requires large companies to describe their process for engaging with the public.

Among other things, it states that: "The undertaking shall disclose a summarised description of: (a) its stakeholder engagement, including: i. the undertaking's key stakeholders; ii. whether engagement with them occurs and for which categories of stakeholders; iii. how it is organised; iv. its purpose; and v. how its outcome is taken into account by the undertaking;"

Next: "how the undertaking has amended or expects to amend its strategy and/or business model to address the interests and views of its stakeholders;" "and further: "how the administrative, management and supervisory bodies are informed about the views and interests of affected stakeholders with regard to the undertaking's sustainability-related impacts."

Read more in CSRD ESRS 2 SBM-2

³ <https://action.deloitte.com/insight/3378/gen-zs-and-millennials-doing-demanding-more-around-climate-change>

⁴ <https://www.lederne.dk/ledelse-i-dag/ny-viden/2018/ledelse-i-dag-juli-2018/brug-diversitet-til-at-traeffe-bedre-beslutninger>

Value for young people

A youth panel gives young people the opportunity to learn from managers who typically have many years of experience. It can give young people a unique opportunity to gain insight into the work of management teams and boards. It can also give young people a better understanding of the dilemmas and considerations that are behind decision-making when it comes to climate and sustainability. Furthermore, it can increase interest in young people wanting to become managers themselves.

In addition, young people can influence decisions in the workplace, leading companies in a more sustainable direction, in a way that aligns with young people's demands and expectations. Young people's opinions meet management's responsibility and decision power.

Youth panels also offer a network for young people. Both with the other young people on the panel, but also through networking in companies, which is also valuable when you are new to the labour market.

Value for society

If leaders and concerned young people listen to each other more, we can reduce polarisation and tensions in society because the workplace can become a space for building bridges between different views of the crises we face - not least when it comes to expectations of what companies can and should do.

With youth panels, the 'next generation' perspective can take place in a concrete and practical context.

There are many social issues that concern young people today that are important for leaders to gain insights and perspectives on. For example, topics such as diversity, gender equality and the future of work are all issues that young people have opinions on and want to help shape. Therefore, youth panels can also deal with topics beyond climate and nature.



Youth panels can be called many things

There are many names that cover the same function - having a group of young people associated with management teams or the board. Besides youth panel, some companies call it "Young Advisory Board", "Youth Council", or "Shadow Board" and there are also examples of it being called "Youth collective".

There are no rules for what you choose to call the panel, and it can also be called something that specifically includes the company's own name.



"It has been extremely rewarding to have new and exciting proposals brought to the table. The proposals help ensure that the CIP Foundation's projects contribute to creating the world that the next generation wants to live in.

I would like to thank the entire Youth Advisory Board for their commitment and great contribution, which we will also bring into the future work of the CIP Foundation."

Torben Møger Pedersen, Chairperson CIP Foundation Board of Directors

"I find that the board has a lot of confidence that what we contribute as a member of the Young Advisory Board is relevant and that they actively show that they take it seriously.

For example, they listened to us when we gave feedback on the Danish Association of Construction Clients' sustainability policy and when we formulated our own strategy. This has opened up better opportunities to include those who will be in the industry for the next 30-40 years."

Amanda Slynborg, member of the Danish Association of Construction Clients' Young Advisory Board

"It was very rewarding for me on the Youth Panel when we had a session of two hours to present our three ideas to the CEO of Ørsted Mads Nipper.

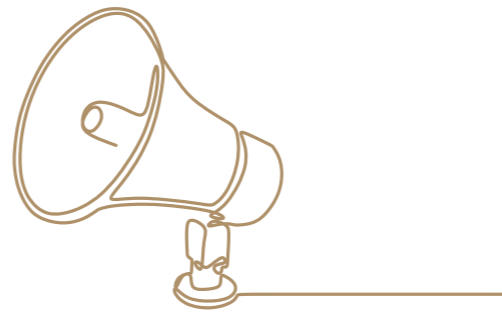
He listened carefully and took many notes but also asked critical questions."

Cecilia Zade Iseni, member of the Ørsted Youth Panel



8 recommendations

from *The Danish Youth Climate Council* and *The Danish Association of Managers and Executives*



How to get started with youth panels

1.

Set goals for what you want from the youth panel

There can be several reasons that a management or board decides to set up a youth panel.

Is it about understanding young people's business-critical perspectives of your organisation by challenging you? Getting ideas for the company's sustainability strategy? Developing specific products or enhance company communication? Is it about empowering young people and reducing polarisation in the workplace and in society? Or is it about receiving visions and new ideas that are worth working on? Or is it about complying with legislation on stakeholder engagement such as CSRD?

If your company doesn't have an internal alignment of expectations about what you want from the youth panel, it will create confusion for both the youth panel's members and the rest of the organisation.

2.

Avoid youthwashing

It's crucial to talk *with* young people and not *about* them. Young people are involved because they want to be included and they expect to be listened to.

That's why it's important to set expectations from the beginning about the role and mandate of the panel members. This avoids 'youthwashing', a situation where it appears that young people are only there to enhance the company's image. See box

Listen, engage and be honest throughout about the role of your members and their expectations of influence.

What is 'youthwashing'?

'Youthwashing' means that companies use young people to signal that they are listening to and involving young people, but without them actually being heard. There are examples of young people being invited to give their input but not feeling heard. This can lead to accusations that the company is not acting as promised - like 'greenwashing', where companies try to make themselves look greener than they are.

3.

Make sure management is committed

Setting up a youth panel is a commitment in terms of resources and prioritisation.

It is important that there is general agreement on the importance of the youth panel among the majority of the management team and/or board. However, it may make sense to leave room for smaller parts of the management team or board to be convinced of the relevance and importance of a youth panel only when they experience it in practice. However, just as with corporate sustainability initiatives in general, the youth panel rarely adds value if there isn't wide support for it.

Therefore, it is important that the management team or board remember that the panel exists and that they see it as a living part of the organisation. If the youth panel does not report directly to senior management or the board, it is important that the managers with whom it collaborates still have the decision-making power to move forward with the panel's ideas and input.

4.

Ensure diversity in the panel

The greater the diversity, the more likely it is that all perspectives will be brought to the table. Therefore, a panel that is broad in terms of gender, age, regional background, educational background, ethnicity, etc. is recommended.

Keep this in mind during the recruitment process. Some companies choose to advertise that they are looking for members for a youth panel. If you do this, remember to communicate in a way that ensures diversity among the applicants. Other companies select the members themselves and approach them directly, and in this case it's also important to think about diversity. Of course, this also applies if you choose to bring in members from within the organisation.

At the same time, it can be a good idea to have members who represent several young people. For example, you could include young people who have already been elected to various youth organisations. Also consider diversity in terms of knowledge and skills. Should all members have the same level of knowledge when it comes to climate and sustainability, or should there be a difference in their prior knowledge so that both experts and novices participate?

5.

Find the right structure

Consider the pros and cons of different ways to organise the panel.

Should there be a chairperson or not? How often should the panel meet? What will be the age range? Should the panel be linked to management or the board? Or should the youth panel be written into the articles of association, for example? How can mechanisms and processes be put in place to ensure that the youth panel's input is properly assessed in a meaningful way?

The number of members is also relevant to consider. Typically, there are around 10 members in a panel.

The framework must be clear from the start, otherwise bottlenecks, unclear roles or other issues will arise that can result in time not being used optimally for both parties. It's also important to have a clear timeline for how long the members are elected for and to consider whether you want to have rolling mandates so that, for example, half of the panel stops every other time to ensure a handover of experience.

It is also crucial to have a clear framework for the work before selecting members. This way, members can assess from the start whether they can see themselves in the concrete structure of the youth panel.

6.

Equip the youth panel to provide input

Consider how meetings or workshops can be organised so that the youth panel can structure their work and deliver their input in a way that creates the most value for the management team or board.

Who should facilitate workshops? And should a member of management or the board attend meetings or workshops?

Involve the youth panel members in the company's strategy from the beginning. This applies to the company's overall strategy as well as its sustainability and climate strategy.

Also, consider how much capacity-building the members should have access to on an ongoing basis.

7.

Consider whether youth panel members should be paid or compensated

Some youth panels are paid in order to recognise the value that the panel creates. Other companies are concerned that compensation may create the wrong incentives, with youth panelists feeling obligated to say what they think the company wants to hear. Therefore, youth panel members are compensated in the form of networking opportunities, skills building, field trips or similar.

Another solution is not to pay them, but to compensate them for lost earnings in cases where, for example, they have to take time off from regular work to attend longer meetings of the youth panel. Compensation for lost earnings can also break down a barrier for less resourceful young people or for young people with certain types of jobs, so they don't risk experiencing being on the panel as an expense if they have to take unpaid time off work to attend meetings.

It's important to communicate from the start whether or not you will be paid and compensated. As a minimum, expenses for transport, catering or accommodation should be covered.

8.

Communicate in a balanced way about the youth panel

As a company, it's important to find a balance when communicating externally about your panel. You need to be careful about communicating about the panel before you've even got started. As with greenwashing, it's a balancing act to not oversell your message, but on the other hand also to report on the results you've actually achieved.

Some companies choose not to communicate about the panel to the outside world at all but use it for internal decision-making. Others see communication to the outside world as part of the motivation for establishing a youth panel because it can make the company appeal more to potential employees. If you choose to communicate externally, it's important that the youth panel members can really see themselves in this communication.



Experiences with youth panels

Case 1. The CIP Foundation's "Youth Advisory Board"

The CIP Foundation is a Danish foundation that calls itself an 'action tank' as opposed to 'think tank'. The foundation devises and implements long-term projects that will lead Denmark in a greener direction. The foundation was established as an independent, non-profit organisation by the partners behind CIP (Copenhagen Infrastructure Partners). In 2022, the CIP Foundation established a Youth Advisory Board to give young people the opportunity to contribute their ideas to the Foundation's projects and provide their perspectives from the outside. The Youth Advisory Board's primary purpose is to ensure a next-generation perspective in all of the CIP Foundation's long-term projects, as it is the youth who will take over the world that the CIP Foundation is working to influence in a more sustainable direction.

The panel consists of 11 selected members under the age of 30 with different backgrounds, but with the common denominator being that they study or work with the green transition and therefore have extensive knowledge of the area. The panel has a designated chairperson to facilitate the dialogue between the panel and the board. An employee of the CIP Foundation coordinates and spends an average of 2-4 hours a week on the project. Panel members commit for one year and can choose to continue or resign from the panel at the end of this period.

The panel held its first meeting in May 2023 and in its first year it organised a series of workshops to generate ideas. The CIP Foundation has involved a board member in some of the workshops to qualify the ideas and maximise their value before they are presented to the board. The CIP Foundation believes that their youth panel has contributed great value to the foundation's projects.

The future work of the youth panel will bring more of the same but will also contribute to a general rethinking of the foundation's identity and work.

The members are not paid, but in addition to their tasks on the panel, they also have the opportunity to participate in various networking meetings, gain experience and, not least, have the opportunity to shape the future of green Denmark through their input.

"Working with the the board of the CIP Foundation has given me a lot. Working together across generations creates some great dynamics.

It provides a broader understanding and opens up new perspectives. This is exactly what we need in the green transition."

Niels Skovgaard, Chair of the CIP Foundation Youth Advisory Board

"Luckily, the youth panel doesn't feel bound by the present or existing frameworks. They are able to dream, think big and think outside the box.

It's incredibly important for the CIP Foundation to get a next-generation perspective on our projects, as we work with large-scale societal projects that reach far into the future and commit the next generation!"

Anne Arhning, board member of the CIP Foundation

Om CIP Fondens Youth Advisory Board

Number of members:	11
Age:	Under 30 years old
Period selected for:	1 year (with possibility to continue)
Nationalities:	Denmark
Created:	2023
Recruited externally/internally:	Externally

Case 2. The Danish Association of Construction Clients' 'Young Advisory Board'

The Danish Association of Construction Clients is the trade association for professional Danish construction clients. The association's board is committed to understanding the industry and regularly engages with members to understand current trends and needs. To sharpen this process, a panel of young people from the construction industry was established in 2023. They will challenge and provide input to the work of the board and the development of the association. This includes work on sustainability, the development of construction client identity, and input on what the industry can do to be up-to-date and attractive to young people.

The Young Advisory Board was initially established as a two-year initiative. The young people consist of practitioners who have already had their first taste of the labour market. Half of the participants in the panel are selected from the association's members, while the other half consists of representatives from the construction industry's other companies to ensure interdisciplinary dialogue. In addition, a researcher and a member of the Danish Ministry of Climate's Youth Climate Council have also been selected as participants.

The panel organises workshops a couple of times a year, with the director of the association's secretariat also participating. In early 2024, the youth panel presented visions focusing on themes they deemed relevant, such as sustainability, collaborative cultures, digitalisation and AI, and construction client identity.

The members of the panel are busy practitioners themselves, but participating in the panel gives them the opportunity to learn and gain exposure to the association's board and members. They also participate in the association's events and committees as speakers, panellists and the like, and they receive good exposure through interviews in newsletters.

One challenge from the start has been to ensure that the young members are prepared well enough for the meeting with the board, so work has been done to create a completely confidential space and clarify both the purpose and ambitions of the Young Advisory Board's work. Another realisation was that the Young Advisory Board and the board did not have to agree on everything and that the Young Advisory Board could therefore communicate more ambitiously than the association as a whole in areas such as climate change. From the secretariat, three people are involved in coordination and project management, spending around 5-6 hours per meeting.

"The Young Advisory Board enables us to have more direct conversations about, for example, collaboration in the industry and how important it is for younger employees.

But it has also given us the opportunity to share experiences at different levels across different players in the construction industry."

Amanda Slyngborg, member of the Danish Association of Construction Clients' Young Advisory Board

"It was an eye-opener when the Young Advisory Board recommended that we should take industry culture and forms of collaboration more seriously. We need to articulate this more, and young people are good at pointing out things that we perhaps forget or overlook a little too quickly."

Peter Fangel Poulsen, Chairman of the Board in the Danish Association of Construction Clients

About the Danish Association of Construction Clients' Young Advisory Board

Number of members:	11
Age:	Under 35 years old
Period selected for:	2 years
Nationalities:	Denmark
Created:	2023
Recruited externally/internally:	External

Case 3. Ørsted's 'Youth Panel'

Ørsted is a Danish green energy company with the vision of "a world that runs entirely on green energy". As part of achieving this vision, Ørsted has chosen to create a youth panel to "connect today's decision-makers with tomorrow's climate leaders".

Before the creation of the Youth Panel, Ørsted had for a long time been interested in getting an external perspective, and therefore it was a logical next step to create a Youth Panel.

The Youth Panel members were recruited through an open application process and the aim was to recruit members from all over the world, with a special focus on the markets where Ørsted is most active. Based on a call for applications, applicants submitted a CV and essay. In their essay, they were asked to explain how Ørsted should work to ensure that the green transition is fair and just. Virtual interviews were then conducted with a colleague from Ørsted's Diversity & Inclusion team to ensure a neutral selection process with a focus on diversity. This resulted in panel members from seven nationalities.

The age criterion was set to 18-24 years because it aligns with the UN definition of youth, and the term of office for members was set to 1 ½ years. Ørsted decided that a chairperson should not be elected, as all members should function on an equal footing.

The Youth Panel met for the first time for a full week. The time was spent familiarising the members with Ørsted and the company's sustainability strategy, and the panel worked with consultancy The Footprint Firm to formulate three topics that the panel would discuss with Ørsted CEO Mads Nipper. The topics were 'advocacy', 'impact on the local communities Ørsted operates in', and 'expansion in the Global South'. The week culminated with the meeting with Mads Nipper.

Despite the fact that the youth panel hasn't been running for long, it has already brought a better understanding of the long-term perspective to management.

The members get access to skills building, knowledge, learning opportunities, meeting employees and generally being close to a large company operating in a turbulent world and in a rapidly evolving sector.

So far, the experience with the Youth Panel has also kickstarted conversations within Ørsted about general stakeholder engagement and how the panel can be used to understand Ørsted's local communities even better.

"Personally, it has given me an exciting insight into how a company works holistically with sustainability across departments. But the biggest gain for me is being able to influence a company that can make a difference to the climate and biodiversity. It's one thing when I vote in the general election, it's another when I have a more direct influence on a company that can do almost as much for the climate as Denmark as a whole."

Cecilia Zade Iseni,
member of the Ørsted Youth Panel

"External perspectives - especially from the next generation of young people who will drive the green transition - allow us to step back and qualify our worldview."

Ingrid Reumert,
SVP, Global Stakeholder Relations at Ørsted

About Ørsted Youth Panel

Number of members:	8
Age:	Between 18 and 24 years old
Period selected for:	1 ½ years
Nationalities:	Denmark, France, USA, India, Sri Lanka, Colombia, Taiwan
Created:	2023
Recruited externally/internally:	Externally

Case 4. AFRY's "Youth Panel"

Swedish engineering company AFRY has 19,000 employees and decided in conjunction with the UN Climate Conference COP26 to establish a Youth Panel in September 2021. The Youth Panel consists of employees under the age of 30 employed by AFRY and the purpose of the panel is to give younger employees more of a voice on issues such as sustainability and the work environment, thereby providing a space for the youth to hold top management accountable for their actions.

The panel is organised so that there is a project team with a coordinating role and then the actual youth panel consisting of young employees. The project team consists of 10 internal employees who have the responsibility to lead, host, and plan events for the Youth Panel throughout the year. The project team is self-governing when it comes to activities and themes for the youth panel, without influence from AFRY's management.

Currently, more than 500 employees under the age of 30 are part of the AFRY Youth Panel. The panel has a Microsoft Teams group where ideas and experiences are exchanged and a SharePoint section where news and interviews with members are shared. AFRY operates as a company on four continents, so there can be logistical challenges in ensuring a direct dialogue between young employees across continents.

Once or twice a year, the project team organises a physical meeting in Sweden for those youth panel members who are able to attend. Here they meet with AFRY's CEO, selected board members and managers from the sustainability departments to participate in an open dialogue. To guide this dialogue, the main topic of discussion has been the results of a particular employer engagement survey, specifically, the survey for the Youth Panel. The results of the survey provide current opinions on the development of the company's climate goals, working conditions, employee relations and overall company direction. The aim is to hold top management accountable for their decisions.

The youth panel has also helped develop AFRY's 1.5°C roadmap, which is a vision for how the company can fulfil the Paris Agreement's target of keeping global temperatures below a 1.5°C rise.



About AFRY's Youth Panel

Number of members:	approx. 500
Age:	Under 30 years old
Nationalities:	International
Created:	2021
Recruited externally/internally:	Internally

Youth panels *cover a wide range of topics*

There are several other examples of youth panels that have both climate and sustainability on their agenda, but there are also many other areas where companies and organisations are working to incorporate young people's views and ideas.

In January 2020, the consultancy and auditing firm Deloitte established a youth panel consisting of 42 young people aged between 20 and 28. The youth panel was part of Deloitte and the think tank Kraka's long-standing project Small Great Nation, which examines Denmark's strengths and potentials. In September 2020, the youth panel delivered their overall vision for Denmark in 2040, focusing on education, labour market, climate change and health.

Danish consumer-owned retail group Coop has appointed a 'youth minister' who works to create an optimal framework for working life at Coop. Coop

has also set up a youth council consisting of younger employees from the company to help define how Coop can create the best possible workplace.

There are also youth panels organised by states and municipalities. For example, the Danish Ministry of Taxation has set up a youth panel of young people under the age of 20 to advise the Minister of Taxation on gaming and gambling. There are also youth climate councils in several Danish municipalities where they help develop local ideas and advise local politicians.

Finally, there are also many examples of youth panels that have a purely commercial purpose. Here, young people typically participate with their input to test and launch initiatives that are important to younger customers and employees.





Ledernes Hovedorganisation

Vermlandsgade 65
2300 Copenhagen S
Phone +45 32 83 32 83
lederne.dk

Contact:

Nadia Gullestrup Christensen,
gullestrup@gmail.com

Anders Nolting Magelund,
anm@lho.dk

Thanks to:

CIP Fonden,
AFRY,
Ørsted,
Bygherreforeningen