Cookbook for Cross-Sectorial Cooperation

Recipes for building partnerships for young people

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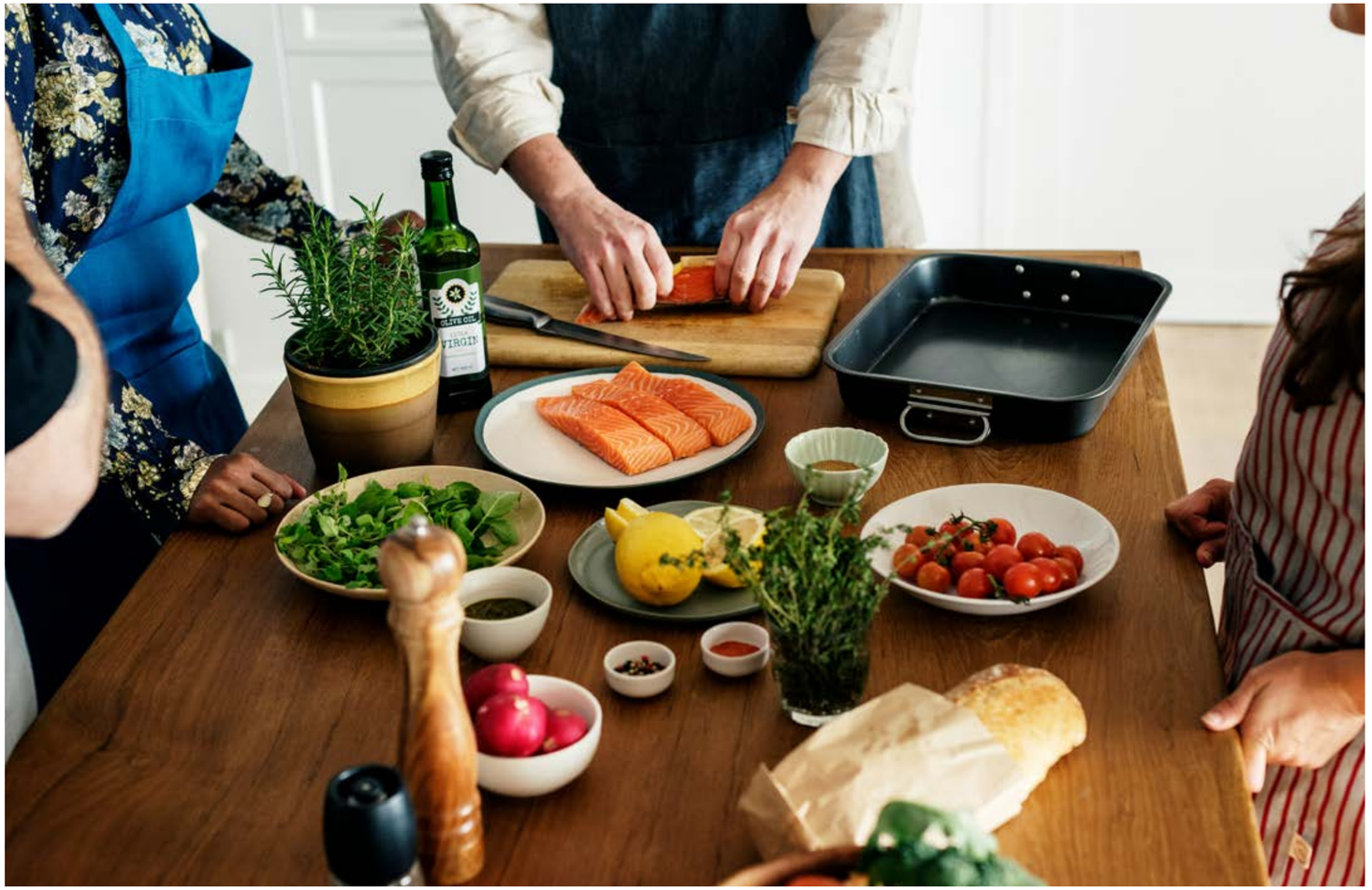
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1. Welcome to the Kitchen of Cross-Sectoral Cooperation!

Dear readers,

Welcome to the publication **“Cookbook for Cross-Sectoral Cooperation”**. The aim of this publication is to inspire you and provide examples of good practice related to cross-sectoral cooperation.

The youth work field is not an island - it operates in the wider spectrum of society, and cross-sectoral cooperation is an important part of our work. This is especially so if we want to provide the best support for young people and ensure that the youth work offer stays on a quality level.

What do we mean by cross-sectoral cooperation? In literature, it refers specifically to collaboration between organisations from different sectors, which can include government-business, business-nonprofit or government-nonprofit partnerships (Bryson Crosby and Stone 2015).



The findings presented in this publication were collected at the Conference ***Youth Work Talks: Space for (Youth) Growth. Building cross-sectoral alliances in the changing political climate.*** The conference took place from 6 - 9 October 2025 in Rotterdam, Netherlands. The conference brought together 80 participants from across Europe, including: youth work practitioners and organisations, local government representatives, researchers and academics, and representatives from a number of different sectors: education, health, sports and social services.

The intentions of the conference were the following:

- Explore the changing political, social and economic climate and effects that it has on young people and their development;
- Understand ways in which youth work, cooperating with other sectors, can support young people's personal and civic growth (through approaches, interventions, spaces, etc.);
- Capitalise on the success stories of cross-sectoral cooperation, their impact and factors that contributes to the success;
- Strengthen links between the different sectors and exploring possible pathways forward in supporting young people in the changing times;
- Support different stakeholders in checking the potential for cross-sectoral cooperation in their contexts and environments.

The Conference "Space for (Youth) Growth" was an event format of the Youth Work Talks series. This series comes under the ***Growing Youth Work*** SNAC, a Strategic National Agency Cooperation project consisting of 16 National Agencies for the EU Youth programmes and SALTO Resource Centres. Through a series of discussions, Youth Work Talks aims to bring focus to the European professional debate on enhancing and strengthening youth work. Each Youth Work Talks event centres around a key thematic issue, aligned with the ***European Youth Work Agenda*** and its eight priority areas.

This conference explored cross-sectoral cooperation through three interconnected dimensions:

- **Personal growth:** How cross-sectoral cooperation supports young people in dealing with current challenges - mitigating negative effects of political, social, and economic changes, including mental health struggles, multiple insecurities, and social fragmentation.
- **Civic growth:** How cross-sectoral cooperation empowers young people toward civic engagement, political participation, and active citizenship.
- **Link between personal and civic growth**: How these dimensions are interconnected and how youth work can act as a bridge between personal development and civic engagement, connecting all relevant sectors.

Like every good cookbook, this one does not offer one perfect recipe. It brings together ingredients, methods, warnings, tasting notes and examples that can help youth workers and partners from other sectors prepare cooperation that is meaningful, sustainable and adapted to their needs.

And what can you find in this publication?

We start by exploring the context of cross-sectoral cooperation, especially in relation to the challenges young people are facing and how the youth work sector is responding to them. Then, we move to explore the topic more deeply and provide a checklist for successful cross-sectoral cooperation. In Chapter 3 we share different cross-sectoral dilemmas along with some challenging issues and different perspectives raised by the 80 plus participants of the Conference. Next, there is a flow-chart which can assist you in creating successful cross-sectoral cooperation. Lastly, we share some examples of good cross-sectoral practice from Rotterdam.

We hope this publication will inspire you, bring you some new tools to use and that you will use our cookbook regularly to create successful cooperation! Enjoy the reading!



2. Knowing the Ingredients: Understanding the Context of Cross-Sectoral Cooperation

“Everything is loud. Everybody has something to say but no one in power is listening.”
(Dermot O’Brien, Space for (Youth) Growth)

Cross-sectoral cooperation is not an easy task. Before cooking the perfect recipe, we need to know and understand the ingredients. In cross-sectoral cooperation, this means understanding the realities that young people are growing up in.

In today’s environment youth work constantly responds to the threats and the crises - something like providing a quick snack when someone is really hungry. However, a quick snack is temporary, the impact is in the moment, and it is not sustainable. A full nutritional meal on the other hand, while also not keeping hunger away forever, does provide sustenance and satisfaction. In a youth

work context, it means making space and opportunity for the management of the situation. Working with other sectors to create the nutritional meal would mean youth work being rooted in the responses that make a difference when there is a threat - and in this moment in time the young people are saying there are a lot of threats.

What are the threats or challenges that young people are facing today?

Dermot O'Brien is a youth work practitioner from Ireland, but also has a decade of experiences in multiple sectors. In his key-note presentation at the conference he shared that young people are faced with five challenges, especially in this era. These challenges should not be seen as stand-alone issues but are interconnected and set the stage for the cross-sectoral cooperation.



Challenge no. 1: Noise and numbness

Challenge:

Young people report that "everything is loud: everybody has something to say but no one in power is listening". This creates a paradox: maximum opportunities to speak, yet minimal experience of being heard by those with power to make decisions

Youth work response:

Create calm and quiet youth work environments that offer space for pause and reflection, that push back on the numbness that is used as a protective mechanism. Create spaces where young people can process all the overwhelming information.

Challenge no. 2: Fragile futures

Challenge:

Young people are told to "plan for the future" and "set your sights on the horizon," yet they experience housing out of reach, insecure jobs, unstable peace and the questionable survival of the planet.

Youth work response:

Hold spaces where young people can acknowledge fragile futures while still building hope and agency; support realistic planning without dismissing legitimate concerns.

3: Inherited burdens

Challenge:

Young people report that “everything is loud: everybody has something to say but no one in power is listening”. This creates a paradox: maximum opportunities to speak, yet minimal experience of being heard by those with power to make decisions

Youth work response:

Empower young people in the present, not just the future; give them real agency and decision-making power; acknowledge their contributions.

Challenge no. 4: Belonging

Challenge:

In a fractured, polarised world, young people struggle to know where they truly fit. Many face two dangerous paths: hyper-individualisation: “I’ll just focus on me because that’s what I can control”. The other is gaining a sense of belonging through hate from various forces that offer belonging based on division and hate.

Youth work response:

Create spaces where belonging means being seen, heard, valued, trusted, and respected. Offer genuine community as a counterforce to divisive belonging.

Challenge no. 5: Civic silence

Challenge:

Young people have marched for climate, cried for mental health, pleaded for fair working conditions, mobilised for justice, and still experience silence from those in power. Therefore, they wonder: “Is our contribution real? Does it matter?”

Youth work response:

Show the young people that their actions matter, show them the impact of their contributions at the community level and connect their local actions to broader changes in the world.



The role of youth work and cross-sectoral cooperation in turbulent times

Dermot mentioned that underlying these five challenges is a deeper crisis - fractures in the rules-based international order. Young people observe that the institutions are not doing their job. For many of the big institutions, respecting peace and treaties seem to be optional, those with power don't follow the same rules as everyone else. Young people see local crimes being prosecuted, while global crimes are unpunished. This sends a clear message to young people: why should they follow the rules if the people who have the power do not have to?

The youth work community of practice needs to be bringing its **values, experiences, knowledge and beliefs in what is possible**, as a way to help young people navigate the world.

Cross-sectoral cooperation is an important factor for supporting young people in this fractured world. If our collaborations mirror the same chaos and hypocrisy young people see outside, we prove nothing; but if we can show that health, sport, youth work, education, and other sectors are pulling in the same direction, even imperfectly, we build imagination and hope grounded in reality.

When we collaborate, our work becomes rooted in responses that make a real difference when there is a threat. Therefore, youth work should be making more full meals as this brings more value to young people.

Try this short exercise: are we cooking quick fix snacks or nutritional meals?

The idea of this short exercise is to help you to identify the sustained, structural responses to the challenges young people face - and spot the gaps where cross-sectoral cooperation is needed most.

Time needed: 30- 45 minutes

Description of the activity:

Print the five challenges for young people: Noise & Numbness, Fragile Futures, Inherited Burdens, Belonging, and Civic Silence – stick them to a wall in a row. Give each member of your youth work team five sticky notes: one per challenge. On each sticky note, each person writes down one thing your organisation currently does that responds to that challenge. Place each sticky note under the relevant challenge on the wall. As a group, review what has been written on the sticky notes.

For each response, discuss:

- **Is this a quick snack or a nutritional meal?** Is it a short-term reaction or a structured, sustained response?
- **Who does it serve?** Does it genuinely give young people agency, voice, and decision-making power, or is it performative?
- **Does it connect to other things we do?** Or is it standing alone?

Choose **one challenge** where your response feels most like a snack. Then discuss with your team: What would it take to make a full meal here? What would we need to start, stop, or do differently? By doing so, you will have a strategy within your organisation to detect how to support young people the best.

You can also do this exercise with a partner from another sector, this would make it even more visible where support is needed for young people.



3 Preparing the Recipe: How to Kick-Off Cross-Sectoral Cooperation?

> " As the world becomes more complex, it's never been more critical for organisations to work across sectors to achieve shared goals."
> *(Resonance Global n.d.)*

From switching on the oven to shared meal: the phases of cross-sectoral cooperation

In the previous chapter, it was stated that different sectors that serve young people can achieve greater impact if they coordinate their efforts together. This means using the unique strengths of each sector, while maintaining a shared commitment for the wellbeing and development of young people (Lerner et al. 2015). Cross-sectoral cooperation has several phases; initial contact; implementation; and the maintaining of relationships. Each of these phases are important as they can help organisations to develop quality cooperation. Below, you will find the different phases explained in more detail.

Phase 1 - Switching on the oven: initial contact and sparking the conversation

Each cooperation starts with the smallest action, like switching on the oven: which means creating space for dialogue and establishing the conditions for trust. Initial contact between sectors can start due to different reasons: maybe there is a community need that all stakeholders want to fulfill or there is a policy initiative that requires action. Sometimes, it can just be a passionate individual who sees the value in mutual collaboration. At this stage, the formal agreements and planning are not yet happening, it is the different organisations focusing more on creating informal opportunities, so that they can meet, share perspectives and understand each other's contexts better (Ansell and Gash 2008). From the youth work perspective, this is the moment to listen to other views, to ask questions, and to prepare the pots, pans and utensils for the next phases.

Phase 2 - Checking the recipe together: assessing the common goals

After making the initial contact, the next phase is to make a short assessment. Organisations need to ask themselves if the sectors becoming involved share common goals and values for young people. This question is probably simple to answer, but it informs your organisation if you should continue to cooperate or not. Many cooperation initiatives fail because they operate from different understandings of what they want to achieve for young people (Bronfenbrenner 1979). In this phase, organisations should have an open exchange aboutn their goals and values, and the priorities they want to achieve.

Some questions that could be asked in this phase include:

- Do the partners prioritise young people's holistic development or do they prioritise the narrow outcomes connected with their institutional goals?
- What are the values of the involved organisations?
- Are there any conflicting values or approaches that would influence the cooperation?
- Is there any historical tension between the sectors that needs to be addressed?

If any of the answers are in the negative and you cannot find common ground, then it's good to return to the first phase of initial contact and work more on building a better understanding.



Phase 3 - Preparing the kitchen: establishing trust

After the shared values and goals are confirmed, the next phase focuses on building human relationships and organisational trust. This will help if any challenges arise in the future. This phase needs to include informal meetings, sector-specific learning, and identification of mutual benefits of cooperation (Vangen and Huxham 2003). Within this phase, youth workers and colleagues from other sectors usually:

- Visit each other's workplaces to understand day-to-day realities;
- Share specific knowledge and approaches towards working with young people;
- Identify what each sector needs from the cooperation and what the contribution is of each involved sector.

It is important that the organisations from the different sectors recognise and celebrate the unique value each one brings to young people's lives.

Trust becomes stronger if the people involved see repeated positive interactions, cooperation is transparent, and all included sides see commitment to the shared values and goals. During this phase, personal relationships are also quite important, as they are the ones pushing the cooperation in the early stages, while formal structures are still being developed.



Phase 4 - Measuring the ingredients: plan and design the cooperation approach

This phase involves planning. This needs to include defining shared goals, identifying the needs of the young people, and thinking about the resources available. In this phase, a written agreement should be made, this would normally include the roles and responsibilities of each involved party, the responsibilities of each organisation, and how decision-making will be conducted.

When planning, the focus should be put on the following items:

- **Goals:** these should be measurable and specific, and not too general (e.g. improving the lives of young people in social care), as they need to be action oriented and need to be easily evaluated.
- **Needs assessment:** a detailed needs assessment should be conducted on different levels: both on the level of the actual needs of young people and in identifying the gaps in existing service implementation.
- **Resource planning:** all the organisations need to be realistic concerning the resources that they can offer - staff time, money, facilities, or something else.
- **Governance:** the decision-making processes also need to be agreed upon as well as other practicalities such as meeting schedules and communication methods.

Phase 5 - Cooking a small test portion: piloting phase through small-scale projects

Creating new partnerships can be challenging on different levels. Often cross-sectoral partnerships fail due to the desire to see the cooperation being implemented fully from the start. However, the better approach would be completely the opposite. It is necessary to test the quality of the partnership, this can be done by launching a small-scale initiative. This initiative, according to Yin (2009), should have clear objectives, defined timelines, and a built-in monitoring and feedback mechanism. The reason for doing this is to allow the partners to test their cooperation approaches in a low-risk situation and to identify any challenges that could arise before they become a part of a bigger problem. These pilot initiatives also show impact and evidence, something that could be motivating for future cooperation.

In the piloting phase, youth workers and the partners from the other sectors should:

- Identify initiatives that have clear success factors;
- Monitor progress regularly and collect feedback from different stakeholders, including young people, youth workers, staff, researchers, and policy makers;
- Document what is working well and what needs to be changed or improved;
- Create a space for learning and reflection.

The piloting phase is designed to be adaptive, meaning



that partners need to be open and prepared to make changes in their practice and approach in this partnership. A pilot is like cooking a small test portion before preparing a meal for a large group. It allows partners to check the taste, texture and timing of cooperation before scaling it further.

Phase 6 - Tasting and adjusting: evaluating the pilot project

In phase 2, one important question that was tackled was regarding the common goals and values. Continuing this reflection, in phase 6 partners need to ask themselves several questions about the piloting initiative. Evaluation is the tasting moment of your cooking, where you ask: Did the pilot reach its objectives, what were the benefits for young people and what were any consequences we didn't expect? What was the learning that can be taken from this pilot project?

This evaluation phase is about learning.

- If the pilot project did not work at all, learning is still happening and everyone can draw from the lessons learnt during the cooperation.
- If the pilot project did not fully reach its objectives, the organisations involved should ask themselves how to adjust their approach.
- If the pilot project was successful and cooperation was good, there can still be a question of how things can be even better in the main project.

This iterative approach reflects a contemporary understanding of organisational change and innovation. Rarely do complex initiatives work perfectly on the first attempt: what matters is the willingness to learn, adapt, and try again (Edmondson 2012).

Phase 7 - Cooking the banquet: upscale and expand the practice

After successful implementation of the pilot initiative, the next phase focuses on scaling: this means that the practice is expanded to reach more young people, to engage new partners, and secure long-term funding. Often it is assumed that scaling is just about replication: however, it requires adaptation to the different contexts, while keeping the main elements that made the cooperation successful.

During the scaling phase, partners:

- Upscale the successful practices in new local areas or with new target groups;
- Involve other organisations and/or sectors;
- Secure additional funding and sustainable resources;
- Build capacity with new partners to implement the cooperation effectively.

Phase 8 - Keeping the kitchen open: sustaining the cooperation

Sustainability happens when cooperation becomes visible in the policies, procedures, and culture of the organisations. To keep the mindset of cross-sectoral cooperation, organisations should:

- Include specific tasks in the job descriptions of positions that are involved in the cross-sectoral cooperation;
- Integrate cross-sectoral cooperation into organisational policies, strategies and procedures;
- Plan and allocate funding up-front, so that the cooperation can be implemented efficiently and successfully;
- Develop transfer approaches and methods so if staff turnover happens, the knowledge can be easily passed on and the cooperation can continue.

Phase 9 - Sharing the meal: impact and celebration

During the cooperation journey, but especially as the cooperation becomes longer, partners should both measure and celebrate the impact on young people. This involves:

- Documenting concrete outcomes in young people's lives (e.g. educational changes, employment, well-being...);
- Collect and share good stories that show the impact that happened because of the cooperation;
- Celebrate achievements with the young people, staff, and the wider community through events or other methods.



Phase 10 - Exchanging recipes: further cooperation

Cooperation does not end after one meal. Good partnerships exchange recipes and prepare for the future.

The final phase of the cooperation journey is making the acknowledgment that it is never truly finished. The needs of young people, changes of people in the sectors and new challenges often happen. Thus, it is logical that cooperation also evolves. It is always a good idea to return to the assessment phase and check if the needs of the young people are still being fulfilled and to see if the partners still share the common goals.

And then you do it all over again!

What do these phases mean for the youth work sector?

For youth workers, the phases can offer some important insights. Firstly, cooperation requires patience. Moving from initial contact to sustainable partnership typically takes quite some time - we are talking about years of hard work. Understanding the phases can help youth workers have realistic expectations and recognise the progress as it happens, especially when the cooperation feels slow.

Secondly, cooperation is founded in relationships and trust. Usually, cooperation succeeds or fails based on the quality of the relationships between people from different sectors as well as their commitment to the shared goals and well-being of the young people in the local community.

Thirdly, setting up cross-sectoral cooperation requires courage to make difficult decisions, especially if the values and goals do not align at all. It's important to then acknowledge the situation and openly have a conversation about why the cooperation would not be possible.

In the end, cooperation requires commitment to learning and adaptation. Youth workers should expect that the pilot phase will not work perfectly: adjustments will certainly be needed. If this can be done, it means that the partnership is healthy and learning focused.
Down below, we bring a handy pathway that you can use as a short reminder for setting up your future cross-sectoral cooperations.

Framework

Cross-Sectoral Cooperation flow

A structured pathway trom initial contact to sustalned, impactful partnership tor young people



START

Initial Contact
Between sectors - spark the conversation

Do we share common goals for young people?

NO
Return & find common ground

YES
Proceed to Build

YES

Establish Relationships & Trust
Lay the human foundation

- Informal meetings
- Share sector understanding
- Identify mutual benefits

Design Cooperation Approach
Align on goals, needs & resources

- Define shared goals
- Identify young peoples needs
- Allocate resources

Launch Small-Scale Pilot
Test, leam and adapt

- Implement with clear objectives
- Monitor & collect feedback
- Adjust based on learning

Evaluate: Did the pilot work?

NO
Return to Plan. adjust approach

YES
Proceed to Scale

YES

Expand Successful Practices
Broaden reach and deepen impact

- Replicate to other contexts
- Engage new partners
- Secure long-term funding

Institutionalize Cooperation
Embed into culture and policy

- Embed in policies & procedures
- Build organizational culture
- Continuous improvement

Measure & Celebrate Results
Document, share and ho nor the work

- Document impact on young people
- Share stories & learning
- Celebrate successes

Ongoing Cooperation & Evolution
The work is never finished - keep growing

Return to Assess regularty to ensure continued alignment with young people's needs

Key ingredients for cross-sectoral cooperation

The key appliances and utensils needed for cross-sectoral cooperation



In the previous chapters we have shared some of the factors that can support cross-sectoral cooperation. From the concrete evidence and experience of the youth work community of practice, there are a number of factors that should be taken into consideration when developing cross-sectoral cooperation. Every cooperation recipe needs several appliances and utensils. The following utensils were identified by participants at the Youth Work Talks Conference in Rotterdam as essential for cooperation that can actually nourish young people and communities:

- **The slow cooker: Time and patience matters.** Building trust between different sectors takes time and here there is no shortcut. Therefore, patience is important.
- **The mixing bowl: Establish a common language.** It would be good to allocate some time to define what is meant when we say, “youth work”. Often people are talking about the same thing but using different words, so common language is a good starting point.
- **Cooking knives: Have a win-win mindset.** Coming to the table with other sectors can be challenging. However, it’s good not to come to the table asking for things, but with something that youth work can offer. So, it’s always good to understand what the other sectors need and what you can provide to fulfill these needs.
- **Measuring spoons: Show that you are an expert, but be humble.** Be aware of your value and listen more than you talk.
- **The sieve: Start informal.** Begin with simple conversations and try to be informal at the beginning. It’s good not to overcomplicate things at first.
- **The blender: Amplify and share stories.** Share stories that matter and be the mouthpiece of the young people if they cannot be there themselves. Use research data to back your stories.
- **The saucepan: Start with young people’s needs**. Let’s always remember that the young people must be in the centre. We always start with their needs. It’s not about creating perfect systems but making sure young people feel seen and heard.
- **The serving dish: See the magic.** Don’t just talk about youth work - let other people experience it! For example, you can invite school leaders to spend time in a youth centre or attend a workshop you are organising. Let them see what actually happens and see the magic of youth work!

Tensions in the kitchen: dilemmas in cross-sectoral cooperation

When starting cross-sectoral cooperation, as already mentioned, sectors and organisations must check if they share common goals and values. Even with having the same values and goals, it is normal that different tensions and challenges will arise. During the Youth Work Talks Conference, participants shared their opinions about some of the common dilemmas that organisations can have.

Dilemma 1: Balancing objectivity and advocacy

- **Tension:** How do we support young people to be politically active and participate in civic life while maintaining objectivity?
- **Youth work response:** Youth work has always been about supporting young people to develop their own voice and perspective. So, we cannot impose our views: we can create space for young people to think critically and engage civically. The key is transparency about our values while respecting young people's autonomy.

Dilemma 2: Maintaining youth work's non-formal approach in formal settings

- **Tension:** How do we maintain youth work's non-formal, relationship-based approach when working in schools and other formal institutions?
- **Youth work response:** Schools have a different pedagogical approach than is commonly used in youth work. The key is to create a hybrid space where both approaches can exist. This means that both youth work and school need to think about the assumptions each side has about the other and what they can offer to each other to make successful cooperation.

Dilemma 3: Funding and sustainability

- **Tension:** How do we secure sustainable funding for cross-sectoral cooperation when youth work is chronically underfunded?
- **Youth work** response: Financial stability is really important, without it, youth work struggles to be an equal partner. This requires advocacy at policy level and demonstrating the value of youth work through research and stories, including the impact of cross-sectoral cooperation initiatives. Allies from other sectors can support the arguments of youth work for secured funding.

Dilemma 4: Scaling without losing quality

- **Tension:** How do we scale successful cross-sectoral initiatives without losing the relationship-based quality that makes them work?
- **Youth work response:** Scaling requires building capacity and infrastructure and is not just about replicating existing programmes. There is a clear need to invest in training, support systems, and ongoing relationship building. Quality comes from people and relationships, not systems.

Dilemma 5: Young people's voice vs. adult decision-making

- **Tension:** How do we genuinely include young people's voices in decision-making while adults maintain responsibility?
- **Youth work response:** The role of youth work is to create a real partnership, where young people have influence on decisions that affect them. However, this means that adults from all sectors need to be willing to be influenced and to share power.

And now, what can you do with all these dilemmas? One suggestion is to discuss them with your team so that you have some pre-set solutions to potential problems before the cooperation with the other sectors starts. Also, when looking at the phases of cross-sectoral cooperation, these dilemmas could be handy as talking points with the different organisations and partners from the other sectors.



Try a short exercise:

Dealing with tensions in the kitchen

Time needed:
40-50 minutes

Description of the activity:

This exercise is designed to help teams anticipate the tensions that will surface in cross-sectoral cooperation and prepare you for having consistent positions before entering the kitchen with your partners.

Print and cut out the five dilemmas above (or display them on the screen). Each dilemma should be visible as a separate card.

For each dilemma, each member of the team places a sticky note on the dilemma according to a colour coded scale:

- green: we feel confident we handle this well;
- yellow: we are aware of this tension but struggle with it;
- red: this is a challenge we don't have a resolution for.

After placing all the sticky notes, the group votes on which two dilemmas are most urgent or most likely to arise in their context. For those two, the whole team needs to discuss:

- What is our current response? Do we have a clear stance, or do we improvise?
- What would we need, in practice, to handle this better? (Think about resources, conversations, decisions, or advocacy).
- What would we be willing to compromise on, and what is non-negotiable?

Within your team, agree on one concrete next step per dilemma. It should be something the team can prepare before the cross-sectoral conversations begin, e.g. statistics, comprehensive overview of the situation, etc.



Before serving – a checklist for successful cross-sectoral cooperation

Based on everything that has been shared in this chapter, below you can find a useful checklist for successful cooperation.

You can use the checklist in several ways: as an assessment tool to check where you are currently with the quality of cooperation or as a tool to discuss and plan with your team what needs to be improved.

Have a look at the checklist:

1. Foundation and readiness



☐ **Shared understanding**
☐ All partners have a common understanding of what “youth work” means
☐ Partners understand the concept of non-formal learning
☐ Partners agree on shared goals for young people
☐ Partners have discussed and aligned on definitions and terminology

☐ **Commitment and leadership**
☐ Leadership from all sectors is committed to cooperation
☐ There is political will and support at municipal/national level
☐ Resources, both human and financial, are allocated for cooperation
☐ Clear roles and responsibilities are defined

☐ **Trust and relationships**
☐ Initial relationships between sectors have been established
☐ There is mutual respect and recognition of each sector’s value
☐ Communication channels are open and regular
☐ There is willingness to learn from each other

2. Planning and design



☐ **Needs assessment**
☐ Young people’s needs have been identified and documented
☐ Challenges facing young people are understood by all partners
☐ Existing gaps in services have been mapped
☐ Opportunities for collaboration have been identified

☐ **Win-win analysis**
☐ Each sector has identified what it needs from cooperation
☐ Each sector has identified what it can contribute
☐ Mutual benefits have been articulated
☐ Potential conflicts or tensions have been acknowledged

☐ **Governance and structure**
☐ Decision-making processes are clear
☐ Coordination mechanisms are established
☐ Meeting schedules and formats are agreed
☐ Communication protocols are defined

☐ **Resource planning**
☐ Budget for cooperation has been allocated
☐ Human resources are assigned
☐ Time for cooperation is built into job descriptions
☐ Funding sources are identified and secured



3. Implementation and action

☐ **Pilot projects**
☐ Small-scale pilot projects have been launched
☐ Clear objectives and success indicators are defined
☐ Roles and responsibilities are clear
☐ Regular monitoring and feedback mechanisms are in place

☐ **Communication and coordination**
☐ Regular meetings are held, minimum quarterly
☐ Information is shared transparently
☐ Decisions are documented
☐ Progress is tracked and reported

☐ **Young people's involvement**
☐ Young people are involved in planning and design
☐ Young people's voices are heard in decision-making
☐ Feedback from young people is regularly collected
☐ Young people see the impact of their input

☐ **Staff development**
☐ Staff from all sectors understand each other's approaches
☐ Joint training has been provided
☐ Capacity building is ongoing
☐ Learning is shared across sectors



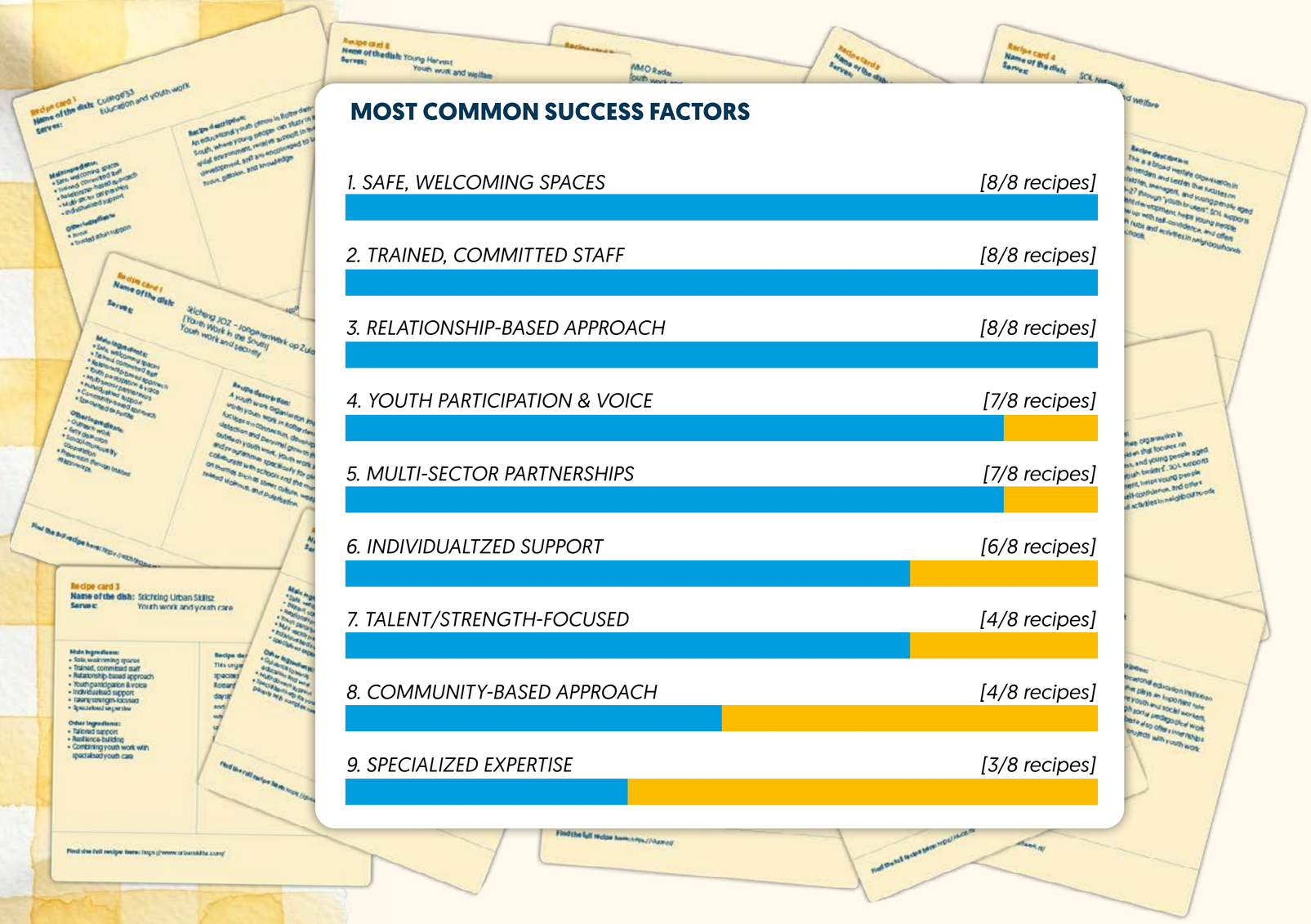
4. Sustainability and growth

☐ **Evidence and impact**
☐ Impact on young people is being measured
☐ Success stories are documented
☐ Data is collected and analysed
☐ Results are shared with stakeholders

☐ **Scaling and expansion**
☐ Lessons learned from pilots are applied to larger initiatives
☐ Successful practices are replicated
☐ New partners are engaged
☐ Scope of cooperation is expanded

☐ **Institutionalisation**
☐ Cooperation is embedded in policies and procedures
☐ Funding is secured long-term
☐ Cooperation is part of organisational culture
☐ Succession planning is in place

☐ **Continuous improvement**
☐ Regular evaluation is conducted
☐ Feedback is used to improve practices
☐ Challenges are addressed proactively
☐ Learning is documented and shared



4 Recipes from the Rotterdam Kitchen: Cross-Sectoral Cooperation in Action

"Cross-sector collaboration is the only way we can solve the world's toughest issues."
(Williams 2024)

In this section, you will find eight recipe card examples of good practice that were presented at the Youth Work Talks Conference in Rotterdam. Each example brings a number of interesting ingredients that make for successful cross-sectoral cooperation. We have identified ten main ingredients that are the success factors that we feel are important for cross-sectoral cooperation. You can see them in the infographic below.

Recipe card 1

Name of the dish: College'53
Serves: Education and youth work

Main ingredients:
- Safe, welcoming spaces
- Trained, committed staff
- Relationship-based approach
- Multi-sector partnerships
- Individualised support

Other ingredients:
- Focus
- Trusted adult support

Recipe description:
An educational youth centre in Rotterdam-South, where young people can study in a quiet environment, receive support in their development, and are encouraged to build focus, passion, and knowledge.

Find the full recipe here: https://deverrebergen.nl/programma/college-53/

Recipe card 2

Name of the dish: Stichting JOZ – Jongerenwerk op Zuid (Youth Work in the South)
Serves: Youth work and security

Main ingredients:
- Safe, welcoming spaces
- Trained, committed staff
- Relationship-based approach
- Youth participation & voice
- Multi-sector partnerships
- Individualised support
- Community-based approach
- Specialised expertise

Other ingredients:
- Outreach work
- Early detection
- School-municipality cooperation
- Prevention through trusted relationships.

Recipe description:
A youth work organisation implementing urban youth work in Rotterdam-South. JOZ focuses on connection, development, early detection and personal growth through outreach youth work, youth work in schools, and programmes specifically for girls. They collaborate with schools and the municipality on themes such as street culture, weapon-related violence, and polarisation.

Find the full recipe here: https://stichtingjoz.nl/

Recipe card 3

Name of the dish: Stichting Urban Skillsz
Serves: Youth work and youth care

Main ingredients:
- Safe, welcoming spaces
- Trained, committed staff
- Relationship-based approach
- Youth participation & voice
- Individualised support
- Talent/strength-focused
- Specialised expertise

Other ingredients:
- Tailored support
- Resilience-building
- Combining youth work with specialised youth care

Recipe description:
This organisation provides streetwise specialised youth care and youth work in Rotterdam-Rijnmond. Urban Skillsz offers daytime activities, guidance, work trajectories, and two youth centres, “Skillszhouse”, where young people can participate in tailored activities and talent development programmes, including resilience training.

Find the full recipe here: https://www.urbanskillsz.com/

Recipe card 4

Name of the dish: SOL Netwerk
Serves: Youth work and welfare

Main ingredients:
- Safe, welcoming spaces
- Trained, committed staff
- Relationship-based approach
- Youth participation & voice
- Multi-sector partnerships
- Individualised support
- Talent/strength-focused
- Community-based approach

Other ingredients:
- Neighbourhood-based support
- Youth hubs
- The role of youth brokers in connecting young people with opportunities

Recipe description:
This is a broad welfare organisation in Rotterdam and Leiden that focuses on children, teenagers, and young people aged 15–27 through “youth brokers”. SOL supports talent development, helps young people grow up with self-confidence, and offers youth hubs and activities in neighbourhoods and schools.

Find the full recipe here: https://www.solnetwerk.nl/



Recipe card 5

Name of the dish: YETS Foundation

Serves: Youth work, sports and security

Main ingredients:
- Safe, welcoming spaces
- Trained, committed staff
- Relationship-based approach
- Youth participation & voice
- Multi-sector partnerships
- Community-based approach

Other ingredients:
- Sport as a tool for prevention
- Role-model coaching
- Positive group culture
- Social-emotional development

Recipe description:

This is an organisation that uses role-model coaches and sports, mainly basketball, to guide vulnerable young people preventively. YETS is active in schools and neighbourhoods, with a strong focus on social-emotional development, behavioural guidance, and positive group formation.

Find the full recipe here:
https://www.yetsfoundation.nl/over-yets/

Recipe card 6

Name of the dish: Albeda
Serves: Education and youth work

Main ingredients:
- Safe, welcoming spaces
- Trained, committed staff
- Relationship-based approach
- Youth participation & voice
- Multi-sector partnerships
- Talent/strength-focused

Other ingredients:
- Training future professionals
- Connecting education with practice Internships
- Cooperation between vocational education and youth work

Recipe description:
Albeda is a vocational education institution in Rotterdam that plays an important role in training future youth and social workers, including through social pedagogical work programmes. Albeda also offers internships and collaborative projects with youth work.

Find the full recipe here: https://www.albeda.nl/

Recipe card 7

Name of the dish: WMO Radar
Serves: Youth work and welfare

Main ingredients:
- Safe, welcoming spaces
- Trained, committed staff
- Relationship-based approach
- Youth participation & voice
- Multi-sector partnerships
- Individualised support
- Talent/strength-focused
- Community-based approach

Other ingredients:
- Workshop-based support,
- Creating places where young people can feel at home

Recipe description:
Youth work and welfare
What is the recipe all about: This is a welfare organisation committed to youth talent development in Rotterdam through children's, teens' and youth work. WMO Radar provides safe spaces, such as the youth hub La Casa Blanca in Lombardijen, where young people can be themselves, follow workshops, and receive support from youth workers.

Find the full recipe here:
https://www.incluziorotterdam.nl/district/jongerenhub-la-casa-blanca/



Recipe card 8

Name of the dish: Young Harvest
Serves: Youth work and welfare

Main ingredients:
- Safe, welcoming spaces
- Trained, committed staff
- Relationship-based approach
- Youth participation & voice
- Multi-sector partnerships
- Individualised support
- Specialised expertise

Other ingredients:
- Guidance towards education and work
- Multi-domain support
- Specialised help for young people with complex needs

Recipe description:
They provide specialised youth care to vulnerable children and young people aged 10–23 with complex psychological and social issues across multiple life domains. Young Harvest guides children and young people towards education or work through tailored programmes based on their specific needs.

Find the full recipe here: https://duce.nl/



5 Serving Suggestions for Different Sectors

“Cross-sectoral cooperation works when young people stay at the centre.”
(Participant, Space for (Youth) Growth)

The recommendations in this chapter build on the experiences and reflections shared throughout this cookbook. They highlight that meaningful cross-sectoral cooperation starts with young people’s needs, grows through trust and shared responsibility, and becomes sustainable when all sectors recognise their role in creating better conditions for young people’s personal and civic growth.

The recommendations are divided into two categories: one for the youth work sector, and the other for the connected sectors with whom youth work will cooperate with.

Recommendations for the youth work sector

Start from young people's needs and voices

Cooperation should be grounded in what young people need and want. Youth workers should regularly check back with young people, include them in decisions and make sure their perspectives shape both planning and implementation.

Build relationships before structures

Youth workers should invest time in getting to know partners from other sectors. The first step is always to start getting to know each other informally, as this builds trust and mutual respect. Later, more formal cooperation can be developed when the relationships are strong.

Communicate the value of youth work

Youth workers should document and share the impact of youth work through evidence, examples, and stories. Young people should tell their own stories and help other sectors understand the value of non-formal learning and relationship-based work.

Contribute proactively while protecting youth work values

Youth workers should enter cooperation as an equal partner by showing what youth work can bring to the table. However, being adaptable is an important skill to have because of the different contexts that partners have. At the same time, it is also important to keep the principles and values of youth work at the core of the work.

Strengthen capacity and use evidence

Youth workers should focus on professional development, cross-sectoral cooperation skills, and evaluation capacity. They should use research and practical evidence to improve their work and help make the learning accessible within the sector. It is important to collect and use the evidence on the outcomes for young people, share good practices, and ensure that young people are meaningfully involved in shaping services and policies, once collaboration has started.

Recommendations for the education, health, culture, sports, and social service sectors

Recognise youth work as an essential partner

Youth work should be treated as an important part of the support system around young people. The contribution of youth work should be recognised and it should be given a legitimate place in cross-sectoral planning and decision-making.

Create sustainable conditions for cooperation

It is important to move beyond short-term and project-based thinking. If possible, other sectors should support youth work in advocating for stable funding, long-term support, and the coordination of structures that make cooperation possible and sustainable.

Invest in capacity building and shared learning

All the sectors involved should ensure support for training, staff development, peer learning, and other opportunities for professionals, from each other's sectors. This will support learning from one another. Strong cooperation depends on people having the time, skills, and support to build it.
Cross-sectoral cooperation can bring value to young people, youth work and the wider community: it helps

us move beyond short-term responses and create spaces, relationships and opportunities that support both the personal and civic growth of the young people.

Like every good recipe, cooperation takes time, care, trust and the right ingredients. But when different sectors come together and build on young people's needs, result can be outstanding and long lasting.

So, we invite you to keep your kitchens open: partner with other sectors, build trust, share responsibility, and create the conditions in which young people can grow, belong to and shape the world around them!





6 Pantry Notes and Sources: References

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