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A Practical Guide to Youth Capacity Building for Countering Hate and Extremism

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Introduction

Young people are acutely affected by extremism, hate and polarisation, but they have proven time and again that they are not merely a vulnerable group that must be protected. Countless young people are playing a pivotal role in preserving peace, security and human rights in their communities around the world. They are passionate, committed and in-tune with local grievances and conflict dynamics, showing that when given the necessary support, young people can offer fresh perspectives on local challenges and act as authentic, credible messengers. Moreover, meaningful youth inclusion in policymaking can help enhance communication and trust among a critical and increasingly disengaged demographic. It is, therefore, necessary both to include young people and build their capacities to act effectively and independently, not only as partners but as leaders. It is for these reasons that the Strong Cities Network (SCN) has made young people a priority in its mission to enhance locally led efforts to counter extremism, hate and polarisation globally.

SCN is an independent global network of 160+ cities dedicated to supporting local authority-led efforts to safeguard local democracy and human rights and prevent extremism, hate and polarisation. SCN supports cities to share good practices and collaborate nationally, regionally, and globally through exchanges and summits. It also builds municipal capacity and supports multi-actor prevention structures through targeted programmes that deploy resources, empowering cities to pursue solutions that increase social cohesion and community resilience. As part of this effort, SCN is working to advance the role of young people in preventing and responding to extremism, hate and polarisation both locally and on a global scale through its Young Cities programme.

Through Young Cities, SCN enhances the role of young people in three pivotal ways: 1) by building their capacity as peacebuilders and leaders; 2) by promoting meaningful youth engagement with and youth-focused policies from municipal officials; and 3) by facilitating opportunities for cooperation between young people and their local government. With these goals in mind, Young Cities mobilises youth-led efforts to build community cohesion and fosters mutual trust and understanding between youth and city stakeholders. This has enabled communities in a geographically diverse set of countries, including Belgium, Jordan, Lebanon, Kenya, Senegal, Australia, North Macedonia and Pakistan, to develop shared solutions to extremism, hate and polarisation that are sensitive to the needs and priorities of youth. Capacity building is at the core of this effort.

SCN's approach to capacity building prioritises learning-by-doing, contextualising theory through practical application so that participants are not merely introduced to critical capacities but can also apply them in ways that benefit their community directly and create a solid foundation from which they can advance their role as peacebuilders in the future. Critically, the Young Cities programme addresses a full range of capacities that young people need to succeed, going beyond knowledge, skills and understanding and providing a range of resources, entry points, networks, and opportunities to build credibility and experiences they need to meaningfully pursue their goals and establish themselves as peacebuilders. This combination of holistic capacity building and hands-on learning has led SCN to develop a series of models that it has deployed successfully in eight countries, training, supporting and empowering more than 400 young peacebuilders and enabling the delivery of 75 youth-led initiatives that have directly engaged 22,000 young people and over 14 million more.

In this report, SCN outlines four of these models, offering good practice and inspiration and providing recommendations for any actor – whether in government, civil society or the private sector – who is committed to empowering young people as leaders, enhancing local governance and helping pave the way for more effective and sustainable P/CVE now and in the future. These models were developed iteratively, based on consistent evaluation and in response to the evidence-based needs of 16 cities and their youth. They were also shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic and the constraints it placed on practitioners globally in 2020 and 2021. As a result, these models offer a range of options to suit online and in-person delivery, and a combination of the two.

Young Cities:
A Holistic Approach to Capacity Building

Extremism, hate and polarisation are whole-of-society challenges that respect neither jurisdictions nor borders, and therefore require coordinated efforts from diverse local, national and international actors, including policy makers, civil society, independent activists, intergovernmental organizations, and the private sector. Crucial to this coordinated effort is ensuring that each actor has the capacity to leverage their unique contribution and play their part effectively. This puts capacity building at the centre of P/CVE globally.

Capacity building[1] – or capacity development – is the process of cultivating and strengthening an actor's ability to produce or perform work, or otherwise pursue specific aims. It can be done on an individual, institutional, or systemic level and can address both personal and environmental barriers to action. Often, the term capacity building is used interchangeably with training, referencing workshops or resources focused on specific knowledge and skills. While skills and knowledge are key capacities, they are only a small part of the puzzle and can seldom be pursued in a vacuum. Instead of isolated training activities, effective capacity building should be holistic, considering all the factors – both internal and external – that an individual or group needs to work more effectively and how these can be imparted sustainably. This can include tangible things like funding or materials as well as intangible factors such as structures and strategy or trust and credibility. No matter the focus, capacity building takes time, typically requires multiple touchpoints and some form of practical application and should be done in a targeted and collaborative manner building upon existing competencies.

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[1] While there has been very little written about capacity building within P/CVE specifically, there are a number of publications about capacity-building within development more broadly, including: 'Understanding Capacity-building / Capacity Development.' European Parliamentary Research Service (2017); 'Human and Institutional Capacity Development Handbook.' USAID (2010); 'Capacity development: A UNDP Primer.' United Nations Development Programme (2009).

Capacity building programmes are especially important for supporting local actors who are crucial to community-based efforts to address extremism, hate and polarisation, but who often do not have access to the same resources or networks as their national or regional counterparts. Building local capacities to develop and lead interventions reduces dependence on international actors, which is crucial to ensure that P/CVE efforts are relevant, sustainable, and cost-effective. However, these kinds of long-term results require personalised and dedicated approaches that are carefully tailored to enhance existing structures and strengthen the ecosystem overall, rather than imparting wholly new ways of working that cannot be sustained outside the parameters of the programme. This requires flexibility and consistency that can be delivered in unique environments at scale, considerations that SCN takes in designing its Young Cities capacity building models.

Each Young Cities programme is designed to fill the gaps and maximise the opportunities present in a city's approach to youth engagement in preventing and countering extremism, hate and polarisation. Following an initial scoping period of research and consultations, SCN builds and tailors a programme that works within existing structures to help cities, including local government and young people in the communities, achieve their goals by focusing on a broad set of capacities that each actor needs to work, both independently and collaboratively. Each element of the programme is designed to impart necessary knowledge, skills and good practice, enhance understanding and cooperation between actors, and enable the development of new interventions to both safeguard young people and promote their leadership and inclusion in addressing the key drivers of extremism, hate and polarisation in their city. The programme's various elements are designed to work in tandem, building these capacities sustainably over time and embedding them in existing strategies and processes.

As a capacity building programme, Young Cities is built around the principle of **active learning** that encourages critical engagement with lessons to develop skills, as opposed to the passive transmission of knowledge that is common in lecture-style training. While active learning can cover a wide range of approaches, it generally includes activities that push participants to 'engage higher-order thinking' and explore themes through the prism of their own experiences, attitudes and values in order to actively 'construct knowledge and understanding.'[2] Through Young Cities, SCN has taken this pedagogical approach out of the classroom and into cities, combining learning and doing through a series of activities (detailed below) that build the capacities of young peacebuilders, city officials and civil society organisations (CSOs) to promote social cohesion and democratic values collaboratively. While each of our workshops is built on the principle of active learning, the most important opportunities for capacity development come from the other activities that push participants to incorporate the new knowledge, processes, resources, and opportunities SCN provides into their existing work.

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[2] Brame, Cynthia. "Active Learning." Vanderbilt University Centre for Teaching (2016). https://www.oaa.osu.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/nfo/2019/Active-Learning-article.pdf

Guiding Principles
Young Cities is...

1.

Youth-Led

Young Cities is an opportunity for young people to take charge. They advance their priorities, choose their methods and make every important decision in developing and delivering their projects. In this way, SCN ensures that young people retain full ownership over their initiatives and have the space to explore, create and sustain their work. This allows young people to learn from their successes and mistakes, gain first-hand experience and build their confidence along with their knowledge, skills and credibility. To catalyse and sustain this youth-led work, SCN works with city representatives to help them create more space for youth leadership within local structures and policy making.

2.

Tangible

Capacity building efforts are always tied to tangible outputs – projects, activities, content, or policy – that can be actioned to directly benefit a community. Young Cities' focus on implementation not only enhances the impact of the programme, but it also focuses training efforts, keeping them relevant and significant for each group of participants and their goals.

3.

Local

SCN works to ensure every Young Cities programme is directly connected with the city in its approach, focus and delivery. Paramount to this effort is a strong delivery partner – a locally based CSO with extensive experience in youth and social change work in the participating city. It serves as a bridge, providing consistent contact and support for participants, while also ensuring recruitment and delivery are inclusive, context-sensitive and effective.

4.

Inclusive & Representative

SCN wants youth activism and efforts to address extremism, hate and polarisation to be inclusive, representative and accessible for all young people, especially those who have not had many opportunities to be heard. With each Young Cities programme, SCN seeks to engage a wide range of young people who are representative of a city's demographics and who can act as credible messengers for the most vulnerable youth. We also seek out innovative and creative approaches, frequently working with artists, musicians, athletes, actors and influencers to incorporate engaging cultural outputs into social change projects and encouraging creators to use their art to promote peace.

5.

Focused

While SCN delivers Young Cities at scale, it works with its youth groups in cycles to ensure that delivery teams can offer each group dedicated and individualised attention. Each Young Cities cycle will welcome four to six new youth groups into the programme, typically involving up to 30 young people in each stage. This allows SCN to stagger delivery cycles so that youth groups who are further along in the programme (Young Cities Ambassadors) can help mentor those who are just beginning their Young Cities journey.

6.

Sustainable

Young Cities is designed to enhance existing efforts, working within established structures and coordinating with key stakeholders, to build a range of capacities, establish good practice and promote sustained change over time. As a result, SCN has helped hundreds of passionate, but often inexperienced young people on their journey to become dedicated, professionalised peacebuilders. Many have gone on to register organisations, receive additional funding, or secure relevant jobs, continuing what they began with us. Through Young Cities, SCN has also driven local and national policy change and helped get more young people engaged in local governance.

7.

Sustained

In each delivery model, capacity development takes place over an extended period of time. They all begin with a set training activity – a four-day workshop or multi-week online course – but the entire programme lasts between one and three years and incorporates a wide range of opportunities and experiences. This gives the SCN team and its local partner, the time and space to develop capacities sustainably, see how participants contextualise and use their skills and resources and fill additional gaps as needed.

Core Components

1.

Training

Through Young Cities, SCN provides bespoke training through multi-day workshops, single-day topical deep dives and a range of online webinars and materials. Offered to city officials, CSOs and young people, this training imparts key knowledge and builds critical skills that each actor needs to address the multitude of drivers that contribute to extremism, hate and polarisation in their city. Training covers a range of topics based on local needs, including universal skills required for project management, localised threats, targeted research and specific policy gaps. Training is interactive, delivered to small groups in safe spaces and tied to tangible outputs.

2.

Project development

SCN supports the development of strategic projects that work within the existing ecosystem to address the local drivers of extremism, hate and polarisation. The programme guides young people and city stakeholders through a process to develop new initiatives and helps them identify opportunities to work together, creating chances for young people and city officials to build trust and identify sustainable means of cooperating that magnify their unique strengths. The projects are evidence-based and creative, incorporating thematic and audience research as well as a range of outputs, including cultural products that appeal to young audiences who may not respond to more formal or traditional activities and content.

3.

Small grants and ongoing support

SCN translates young people's ideas into impact. Participating youth groups can apply for a small grant to fund their proposed project. Small grant schemes are a critical part of building youth leadership in addressing extremism, hate and polarisation, as the lack of funding is the largest barrier that youth-run organisations face.[3] This is especially true early on as they struggle to gain the needed experience, exposure and networks and show proof of concept. SCN fills this gap by offering funding and continued training and support to ensure youth groups have the greatest chance of success and achieving sustainability. Small grants are also a critical opportunity for additional capacity development as young people have the chance to learn through their own successes and mistakes. Most Young Cities projects include multiple rounds of funding to scale up successful projects and help youth-led organisations establish themselves in their communities. Young Cities also includes resources for city-led initiatives, supporting projects that benefit young people directly and incorporate more youth into city-led efforts to address extremism, hate and polarisation and promote policies that are informed by the perspectives of and respond to the needs of young people.

4.

Showcase events

SCN organises public events where both cities and youth can showcase their projects and engage with other important stakeholders, including civil society, multilateral organisations, the international donor community, media and members of the community. Showcase events are an open space for dialogue, exchange, networking and inspiration and have been an important platform for our youth to gain support from the community and donors.

5.

Joint policy workshops

As a safe space for constructive conversation between young people and city and national policy makers, these workshops offer an opportunity to explore the policy areas that matter most for young people. While many cities have a mechanism for engaging with youth, such as youth councils, these are often restricted to those who are already engaged in politics or policy and do not always represent the diversity of experiences of young people in a given city. SCN seeks to extend this effort to include a wider range of youth voices, representing different demographics across the population to help more young people make sense of policy making and the role they can play.

6.

City exchanges

While each city faces its own unique challenges, they also share many things in common and can benefit from greater knowledge-sharing. City exchanges are a core part of SCN's strategy, and they have been incorporated as an effective approach in the Young Cities programme, which has connected city stakeholders and youth from different cities – both within a single country and between countries – to discuss key issues and explore solutions and opportunities to cooperate.

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[3] Simpson, Graeme. 'The missing Peace: Independent Progress Study on Youth Peace and security.' UN Peacebuilding Support Office (2018). https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3846611?ln=en

Online
and Offline

Like most of the world, the COVID-19 pandemic moved SCN to rethink the way it worked as travel and in-person meetings were disrupted for nearly two years. Adapting capacity-building to online platforms was not merely a simple change from in-person presentations to webinars. SCN had to find new ways to incorporate active learning and ensure that online workshops could sustain the same long-term engagement and produce the same tangible outcomes as in-person activities. But what began as a short-term solution led to innovations that made us rethink our approach and helped us incorporate new models into all our capacity building programmes.

SCN developed two new Young Cities models during the pandemic, one for young people in Pakistan and another for students in Australia. Both operated digitally and helped SCN reach similar objectives. However, these distinct models allowed the delivery team to operate successfully in two disparate environments across vastly different time zones. Both models pushed SCN to develop new materials and identify good practices that it incorporated into all its capacity-building programmes, including the development of a new hybrid model which will be piloted in Pakistan in 2023.

Young Cities
Delivery Methods

SCN has now developed four distinct capacity building models utilised in its Young Cities programme. This section describes these models along with their strengths and weaknesses. Each model serves as a starting point for designing tailored programmes for a given city, audience, or goal. This way, delivery is bespoke, but uses many of the same materials and structures, reducing the time it takes to launch a new project. This includes content development and the onboarding of staff and partners. It is also measurable over time. Each iteration of the programme may be tailored, but it can be evaluated against a standard set of indicators and compared to other iterations and models. This allows SCN to iteratively improve and advance each model and the programme as a whole.

While each model is distinct, they draw from the same core components and follow the same guiding principles (detailed in the previous section.

Model 1: In-Person Delivery - Youth Innovation Labs

The Youth Innovation Lab is the core of Young Cities' in-person delivery model. SCN has been implementing versions of the Youth Innovation Lab since 2015 when it established its first capacity building programme for young peacebuilders, the Youth Civil Activism Network (YouthCAN). Initially delivered as one-day workshops, the Labs have evolved over the last seven years into comprehensive, multi-day workshops where participants leave with tangible project plans and are given the opportunity and support to implement them.

A Youth Innovation Lab is a project development workshop where youth participants (aged between 18 and 29) learn a process for planning and managing social change projects by planning one of their own. Labs are delivered in person, typically over a four-day period with four to six groups of youth (up to 30 participants total), each working on their own project. Organised as retreats outside of the city, Labs immerse participants into a process of learning and project incubation, offering numerous opportunities for teambuilding and networking, helping participants connect with other young peacebuilders who share their goals, but often bring a different set of skills and perspectives.

A Lab consists of a set of modules that build participants' understanding, step by step, as they plan their projects. Each module employs a range of educational materials and activities – including presentations, facilitated discussions, exercises, games, worksheets, digital tools, youth-led sessions, and more – that contextualise theory in practical application and allow participants to engage critically with the information – and each other – while they plan their projects. This tangible approach means that in addition to learning a process for strategic project development, participants leave with detailed project plans that they can action in their community.

While a Youth Innovation Lab goes a long way to enhance participants' knowledge and build good practices, it is merely the starting point for Young Cities' in-person delivery model. Every youth group that completes a Lab can apply for funding to action their project within their community. If successful, they will continue to receive dedicated assistance, including bespoke training sessions, materials and support to build the capacities that are most relevant for their projects over one, or multiple six-month delivery cycles.

Snapshot of a Youth Innovation Lab

Setting effective goals & objectives

Using creative mediums and designing campaign outputs

Using social media effectively for social change

Monitoring and evaluation, including measuring and reporting

Analysing a challenge & research techniques

Understanding target audiences and creating a detailed audience profile

Campaign comms including branding & messaging

Conducting a risk analysis and mitigating risk

Project, budget, and resource management

In this model, youth are encouraged to include online and offline outputs in their projects and tend to prioritise direct engagement with young people in the community. During this period, SCN will also work with the youth teams to enhance their sustainability. This can include connecting teams to relevant actors and organisations in their community, promoting and identifying additional opportunities and helping them find and apply for more funding.

The offline model offers numerous opportunities for meetings between youth participants and city officials. Often, representatives from the city will attend the final day of a Lab to see the youth groups present their projects and discuss ways in which the city could support them. The youth participants are also engaged in City Grants, provided to a municipal government to further its youth engagement efforts. Once the project delivery cycle is complete, youth participants, relevant city officials and civil society will participate in Young Cities Showcase events to exhibit the impact of the youth projects and discuss future collaboration. SCN may also organise additional mixed events, including Policy Workshops or Roundtables. These face-to-face interactions are crucial opportunities to build trust and common understanding on issues that both youth and the city care about but may not always agree on. It is also a chance to get more young people actively engaged in civic processes.

Strengths

+ **In-person workshops offer considerable opportunities for active and interactive learning.** It is often easier to keep participants engaged and allows the delivery team to more easily identify when a participant or team may need additional support. This allows the delivery team to keep more people engaged equally throughout the process. Likewise, delivering follow-up training and support in person can be more hands-on and give more focus to continual team building.

+ **Participants see their progress immediately.** The condensed time frame can be tiring, but participants can see their projects and themselves develop quickly, which boosts their motivation and confidence.

+ **The Lab is a controlled environment free from (most) distractions.** This allows participants to focus solely on their projects and interact with their team and other participants.

+ **Considerable opportunities for building relationships and meaningful networking,** both with the delivery team and with other youth teams. These relationships make it easier to keep participants invested in the programme long-term and committed to their projects. It also fosters lasting connections between teams, which has led to more active support and collaboration between youth teams during and after the programme.

+ **In-person touch points centred on collaborative action provide opportunities for building trust between youth and city officials.** It also enables cities to review and develop processes for youth inclusion in policy making.

+ **This model also creates many opportunities for informal learning and fun**, which has been critical for maintaining interest over long periods, especially as the programme requires participants to volunteer their time.

& Weaknesses

— **In-person workshops can limit learning.** The cost and commitment involved in in-person workshops limit their length, which in turn limits what you can introduce in a single workshop. While Labs manage to cover a lot of information in only four days, condensing so much into such a short period can be overwhelming and ultimately impacts retention. As a result, SCN follows up with additional training sessions spread throughout the programme period.

— **Labs can limit participation for some.** At four days, a Lab requires participants to take at least two days' leave from work or school, which prevents some people from attending. Others are deterred by the need to stay overnight, which is particularly problematic for some female participants whose cultural norms may discourage this.

— **Everyone must move at the same pace.** While each group is given individual attention during Labs, the workshop must follow a set agenda (as much as possible) and some teams require more time with a module than others, or, conversely, want to move faster. This can result in uneven outcomes by the end of the workshop, which SCN must account for with tailored support after the Lab.

— **The in-person model limits delivery to a single location.** While participants can easily travel for a one-off workshop, participants must be based in the same city to coordinate additional meetings and activities as part of Young Cities' extensive follow-up. Likewise, some members of the delivery team (or a delivery partner) must be based in or near the target city so they can offer consistent, in-person support. While SCN bridges this limitation through partnerships, city exchanges and facilitated team pairing between cities, it does pose a barrier compared to the other models.

Model 2: Online Live Delivery -
The Digital Bootcamp

The Digital Bootcamp is an online-only delivery model that delivers the same capacity-building curriculum – training, project development, project delivery support and more – as the Lab model previously described, but through online platforms. In place of a Youth Innovation Lab, participants kick off the programme with **an eight-week online webinar course** that includes weekly live training webinars, weekly team meetings and a series of assignments and tasks. Likewise, the youth-led projects are also moved online, incorporating digital content, outreach, and engagement into highly targeted social media campaigns. When SCN first delivered this model in Pakistan in 2020, during the height of the COVID-19 lockdowns, the youth-led projects were coordinated into a single social media campaign addressing COVID-19 disinformation in Pakistan. In this case, the four participating teams each developed their own content and coordinated its release through a page that they set up and branded collaboratively.

Snapshot of a Digital Bootcamp

Joint webinars

All the participating youth groups attend these one to two hour thematic webinars together, each focused on a core concept, skill or step in the project development process. To bridge the digital gap between presenters and participants, SCN utilises numerous tools to make sessions engaging and conducive to active learning, including live quiz software, games, break-out sessions for and between teams, participant-led presentations and more.

Home-work

Each week, teams are given assignments to help them further explore the concepts introduced in the webinars, build up key skills and advance their project planning. In addition to the presentations and materials covered in the webinars, they have access to a series of guides and resources that provide more detail, local case studies for inspiration and worksheets to guide application. All of this, along with their online project planner is kept in a dedicated Google Drive to enable co-working within teams and live support from the SCN team and partner.

Small grants

Teams who successfully complete the initial Campaign Bootcamp can submit their project plan as a proposal and receive a small grant to action it. In this online model, the resulting projects tend to centre on digital outputs and social media campaigns, although they may also incorporate offline community-facing activities to deepen impact.

Individual support

SCN and their partner meet with each team individually every week at a set time to discuss that week's materials, provide additional support or explanation, review their assignments, and help them continuously develop their project plan. If a team receives funding, SCN and their partner will continue that team's weekly calls to provide ongoing support and will organise additional webinars or digital resources as needed. Additionally, the SCN team holds open online office hours every week where teams can drop in and ask questions or request additional support.

Strengths

+ **Participants have more flexibility.** They can participate from anywhere, around existing schedules and (largely) at their own pace. While the eight weekly webinars and team meetings are mandatory during the initial phase of the project, they are scheduled according to participants' availability. Likewise, while the teams need to meet weekly deadlines, they can complete assignments at their own pace. Since participants can work from anywhere, teams do not need to be based in the same location.

+ **There is time to engage with information and build understanding gradually.** Delivered over eight weeks, rather than four days, the Digital Bootcamp offers participants more time to focus on each module. It also means teams have more time to apply the information to build out their projects, resulting in more robust project plans.

+ **SCN can offer a more individualised experience for each team.** The weekly team calls and consistent access to support allow teams to work at their own pace, allotting more time during weeks where they are struggling and working faster through concepts that come easily. These individual interactions allow the delivery team to adjust their approach for each team.

+ Without extensive travel or direct engagement between participants and the community, **an online-only model minimises cost, risk, and environmental impact.** In addition to minimising the risks associated with travel and exposure to environmental or health hazards, this model also enables youth to run anonymous campaigns that engage with controversial issues, unpredictable beneficiaries or in higher-risk environments.

& Weaknesses

- **The online platform offers fewer opportunities for active learning.** Discussion, exercises and activities are infinitely more difficult online and there are fewer opportunities to monitor a participant's engagement and keep them involved. When open discussions and Q&As became stagnant, SCN revitalised the webinars to make them more dynamic (and fun) with quiz software, collaborative brainstorming programmes, breakout groups and more.

- **Participants are subjected to many more distractions** that can split their attention during meetings or lead them to miss meetings altogether. This has impacted participation and retention compared to offline engagements.

- **The model limits team building and networking between participants,** due to its remote nature. While the programme designates time and spaces for collaboration between teams, participants do not form the same kind of relationships as witnessed during offline activities.

- **Full participation requires consistent power and access to reliable internet and technology.** Young people who do not have access to the Internet or a computer at home may be able to log in with other participants or join from a public place, but when this is not possible, participants may be forced to miss meetings or an opportunity to engage in the programme at all.
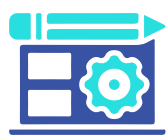
Model 3: Online Self-Guided Learning -
eLearning Course

The Young Cities eLearning Course is an alternative online delivery model designed for self-guided learning. It covers all the information included in the Youth Innovation Lab and Digital Bootcamp but is presented through a mix of multi-media resources rather than live webinars. Depending on the length of the course, the materials can be divided into four, six or eight modules with the option to add additional materials to suit a particular location or programme. This self-guided course is designed to speak to all learning styles and allow participants to work at their own pace around their schedules, revisiting the content they find most valuable. Because the eLearning course can be somewhat isolating for teams and individuals, follow-up activities place a strong emphasis on team building and networking, incorporating informal activities and community engagement.

Young Cities first deployed this model in Melbourne, Australia during the pandemic when travel and in-person meetings were highly restricted. The nine-hour time difference limited the flexibility for live delivery and support required for the Digital Bootcamp. So, SCN drew inspiration from online learning platforms like Coursera to develop a new model that could be run from a distance. With support from a locally based consultant, SCN successfully employed this model to guide four youth groups – two drawn from the University of Melbourne and two representing local CSOs – through the development and funded delivery of unique community-based projects.

Snapshot of an e-Learning Course

Online Course

The programme kicks off with an online course consisting of a set number of modules that participants must complete one at a time, building their understanding cumulatively. Each module includes short explainer videos that introduce core concepts, quizzes to assess comprehension, detailed infographic guides to build a more nuanced understanding, case studies for reference and inspiration, discussion guides for leading brainstorms, and worksheets to direct application. These resources are all housed on a dedicated Learning Management System (LMS) platform that enables the delivery team to track participants' progress.

Small Grants

Teams who successfully complete the eLearning course can submit their project plan as a proposal to receive a small grant to action it. Like the Digital Bootcamp, projects tend to centre on digital outputs and social media campaigns but may also incorporate offline community-facing activities to deepen impact.

Individual Support

SCN provides each team with individual support throughout the course and project implementation period, including additional training, resources, and other forms of support as needed.

Peer Support

Teams meet with each other virtually on a weekly basis during the initial course to share their progress and exchange ideas. These interactions enhance their projects, motivation, and networks.

Community Engagement

SCN organised meetings with local experts, officials, and practitioners who can offer inspiration and help the youth participants develop their projects and networks.

Strengths

+ **This model offers the most flexibility.** Participants can work at their own pace and from anywhere. They only need to coordinate with their team and stay mindful of the broad timelines that guide them through the programme.

+ A mix of multi-media content and supplementary activities ensure the training is **suitable for all learning styles.**

+ Peer-led feedback sessions give participants a weekly opportunity to interact with other young people from outside of their team. This supports **mutual capacity-building** and more meaningful project impact while enabling the sharing and widening of perspectives on key issues which projects may address.

+ **The model can be delivered at scale and across time zones.** As this approach requires the least direct support from the delivery team, it can be run with a larger number of groups or in multiple locations simultaneously. Although, SCN found it runs best with the support of a locally based consultant who can provide more immediate and contextualised support as needed.

+ **The course can be easily adapted to new environments.** Once developed, the core material is widely applicable. With the help of translators and local experts, the content can be easily adapted and updated to include localised case studies and thematic modules.

& Weaknesses

— **There is less direct support for participants.** As a result, this course is not suitable for absolute beginners. Rather, it is an intermediate-level course to help a team with some project experience to enhance their capacities.

— **Participation in this model requires a lot of discipline.** Participants must have the discipline to complete the course independently and in coordination with their team. While there is some flexibility for teams to carry out the course at their own pace, if they take too long, it can fragment their learning and they may miss out on exchange activities with other teams if they fall behind in their progress.

— Like the Digital Bootcamp, **the course itself offers limited opportunities for networking and team building.** SCN overcame this limitation by incorporating additional virtual and in-person activities for team building with each team, collaboration between teams and networking with other community actors.

Model 4: A Hybrid Model - The Campaign Academy

Guided by the experience of running both offline and online capacity building programmes, SCN developed a hybrid model that harnessed the strengths of each of the models previously described. The Campaign Academy combines the freedom of the eLearning Course with the dedicated support of the Digital Bootcamp and the direct engagement and networking outcomes of the Youth Innovation Lab. The Academy's flexibility means SCN can run the programme simultaneously in multiple cities, offering additional opportunities for exchanges between cities to build national, or even international networks. For example, the Young Cities Campaign Academy in Pakistan is supporting young peacebuilders in Lahore and Karachi concurrently to enhance cooperation between these cities. Participants connect virtually throughout the programme, as well as in person during retreats organised in Lahore and Karachi and during a joint policy workshop and showcase in Islamabad to discuss youth issues with local and national decision makers.

Snapshot of a Campaign Academy

eLearning Course

The Academy kicks off with an eight-week online course that immerses participants in the local P/CVE environment in their city and takes them through the process of developing a strategic social change initiative. These self-guided multi-media modules include short explainer videos, quizzes, detailed infographic guides, discussion guides, case studies and worksheets. They are accompanied by live webinars and weekly team meetings – both in person and online.

Small grants

Available to teams who successfully complete the eLearning, these grants support youth-led projects through two six-month delivery cycles, supplemented by ongoing support and training to ensure the projects are impactful and provide opportunities for capacity building with an eye to sustainability.

Individual support

Throughout the programme, SCN and their local delivery partner meet regularly with each group to support learning and application. In addition to providing further training and materials where needed, SCN also engages with city representatives and other stakeholders to help support and mentor the youth groups and develop their networks.

Buddy system

Youth groups across the participating cities are paired at the start of the initial training course, and throughout the programme. The paired teams meet regularly through calls to provide feedback and share ideas and inspiration.

Community engagement

SCN organises meetings with local experts, officials, and practitioners who can offer inspiration and help the youth participants develop their projects and their networks.

Retreats

Organised in each of the participating cities, the retreats bring the participating young people together to consolidate and exchange ideas, focus on team building and socialise and build connections with fellow peacebuilders in other cities.

Joint policy event

These events connect young people with local policy makers from each city as well as national representatives to discuss youth issues, examine youth-oriented policies and programmes and pursue collaborative approaches to involving more young people in civic processes and building trust.

Showcase event

Providing a platform for young peacebuilders to present their projects, Showcases emphasise the importance of youth leadership and the need for youth to connect with relevant stakeholders to pursue additional support and funding to continue scaling their efforts.
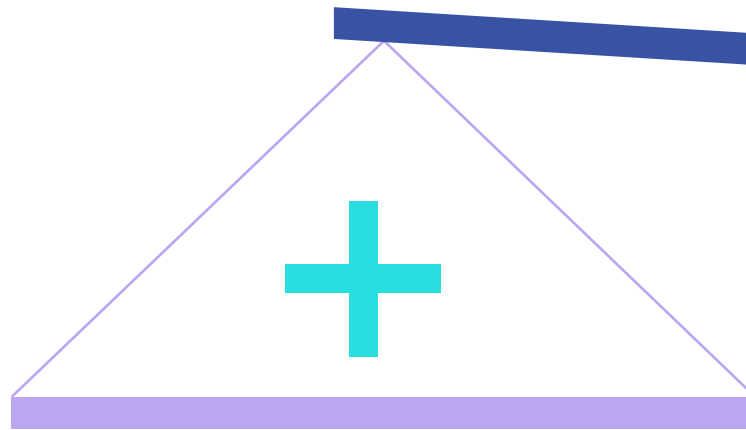
Strengths

+ **The extended delivery time** allows participants to build up understanding and develop skills more gradually, preventing potential burnout that can hamper retention in more condensed models.

+ Participants have the **flexibility** to work largely at their own pace and around their existing responsibilities. This also creates space for them to take ownership of their own learning and growth, enabling them to spend more time with the concepts that are challenging or of the greatest importance for their project and them.

+ **SCN can offer each team an individualised experience.** The extended timeline and multiple touchpoints provide numerous opportunities for consistent follow-up and targeted support to build a range of capacities.

+ **It prioritises networking.** There are many opportunities for youth groups to work with and support each other and build critical relationships within their city. Furthermore, because it **can be run in multiple locations** it also presents an opportunity for exchanges and collaboration between cities, contributing to stronger networked efforts nationally.

+ **It promotes a multi-stakeholder approach,** connecting young people with policy makers, civil society, and experts in their city. In the short term, this helps to enhance their understanding, the impact of their projects and their networks. Longer term, it is a chance to establish ways of collaborative working and jointly pursue inclusive modes of youth engagement in peacebuilding.

+ Like the eLearning model, it can be **easily adapted to new environments and is suitable for various learning styles.** Once developed, the core material is widely applicable. With the help of translators, local experts and a strong partner, the content can be easily adapted and updated to include localised case studies and thematic modules and rolled out in different cities with little time for ramp-up.
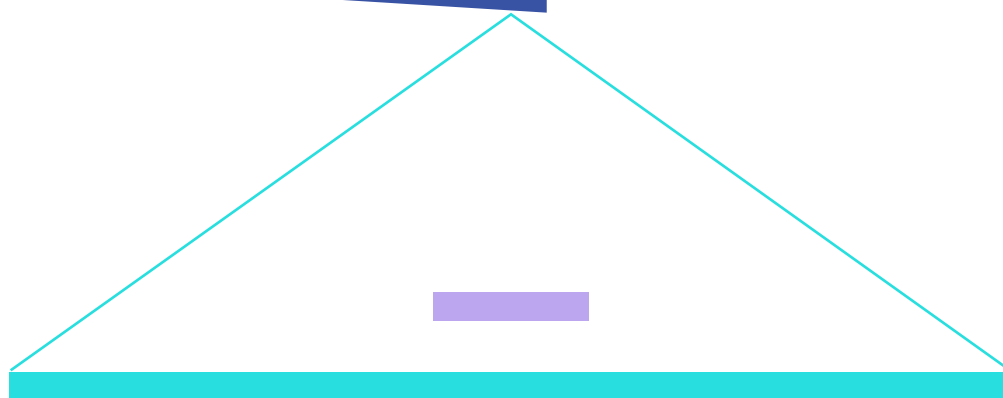
& Weaknesses

- Like the other online models, **the Academy requires discipline** from the teams. While the project is not necessarily time intensive, it does require consistent commitment from participants over an 18-month period in which they will naturally encounter distractions and disappointments. The delivery team monitors participants' ebbs and flows in the programme and will intervene early to address frustrations or declining motivation.

- **The model can pose logistical barriers to participation.** Taking part in the online course requires consistent access to power, a stable Internet connection and a quiet place to work. To minimise this potential barrier, a local delivery partner can consider establishing a workspace that participants can use throughout the programme to work individually and meet as a team.

- **Youth with limited experience may be intimidated from applying.** The Academy offers a range of opportunities that may be intimidating to some participants who do not have the confidence to speak publicly or with decision-makers. SCN is mindful for this during recruitment and works with a partner to speak with young people from under-represented groups who have limited experience but have a lot to offer and to gain from participating.

- **The need to travel can limit participation for some.** Some participants are deterred by the prospect of travelling and staying in different cities, which is required for the Academy's retreats, policy- and Showcase events. This may acutely affect female participants whose cultural norms may discourage this.

Good Practice for City-Focused Youth Capacity Building in Addressing Extremism, Hate and Polarisation

Know the environment. Every city is different, and a successful programme must reflect that. Begin with a comprehensive assessment of a city's strengths, barriers, opportunities and needs, as well as the stakeholders involved, the nature of their relationships and differences in their perceptions. This mapping exercise will help you identify which issue areas are most prevalent, the capacities needed and the kinds of approaches that are most likely to be successful. Also, consider the most salient pedagogical approaches to understand how people are accustomed to learning.

Keep it clear, concise, and relevant. To give your participants the best chance at understanding, retaining and eventually using the information you give them, keep a workshop or online course focused on a limited number of topics, organised into clear, short sessions, avoiding thematic creep. Focus on the elements that are most relevant for them and build their cognizance slowly, rather than overwhelming them with details from the start. Incorporate local examples and metaphors to boost comprehension. They ground new knowledge in familiar concepts and increase awareness about their local ecosystem and its actors to inspire action.

Make the objectives and expectations clear from the start. Make sure everyone who takes part in the programme – including youth, city and civil society participants, partners, benefactors, and other beneficiaries – understand what they will be doing and why. Present the learning objectives, expectations (both what is expected of them and what they can expect from you) and benefits from the beginning and how the experience will fit into their life and enhance their work.

Be inclusive. A programme should reflect a city's population, not just those who are most inclined to get involved. To avoid only recruiting 'the usual suspects' ensure your recruitment strategies consider different groups and potential barriers to their participation, including logistical and attitudinal barriers. Be mindful of representation across genders, affluence, background and any other relevant markers. Also be attentive to ensure that the programme's content is inclusive. Consider different learning styles and be aware of learning disabilities, language capabilities and differences in experience. Accounting for these factors will require significant preparation during participant recruitment and resource-development, supported by a reliable and experienced local delivery partner.

Ask questions. Avoid giving participants all the answers. Instead, use Socratic questioning[4] to help them find answers for themselves. This will encourage active learning and critical thinking and will often lead them to contextualise the material in their own experience, making for more relevant answers.

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[4] Richard Paul & Linda Elder. 'Critical Thinking: The Art of Socratic Questioning.' Journal of Developmental Education Vol. 31 Issue 1 (Fall 2007) pg. 36.

Choose a great location. The setting can have a big impact on how people experience in-person workshops and meetings. Always choose a safe, neutral place where all participants can feel comfortable and enter the meeting on equal footing. In addition to AV equipment and seating, consider what will make for a more relaxed, productive environment, such as having natural light and access to outside spaces. For longer workshops, consider venues outside the city to help reduce external distractions and keep people focused on the event and the other participants. Conversely, if you meet with participants frequently, agree on a location that is convenient and comfortable for them and consider providing a workspace if possible.

Combine informal and formal learning to keep it dynamic and fun and incorporate plenty of time for team building activities, facilitated exchanges and casual networking throughout the workshop, course or extended programme.

Keep it as interactive as possible. Whether it is in person or online, try and keep lectures short and instead prioritise learning through interactive activities that push participants to explore new information and build skills through application.

Be flexible and adapt to participants' needs. Things do not always go according to plan, for you or your participants. Respect your agenda and your programme plan but be prepared to adapt as needed to help every participant get the most out of the programme, even if their circumstances change. This patience and flexibility will show your participants your commitment to them and help ensure you can meet your objectives in a way that supports sustainable change.

Create connections. Offer opportunities for participants to connect with one another and with other stakeholders. These exchanges are important for helping all beneficiaries incorporate additional perspectives and build their personal networks, but also contribute to a more robust multi-stakeholder approach to peacebuilding within a city. It takes time to build sustainable relationships and establish collaboration, so incorporate these connections throughout the entire programme, rather than as one-off networking events.

Keep it fun. Capacity building programmes are all about learning, but that does not mean they cannot be enjoyable. Find the right balance between serious and fun to help keep participants engaged throughout the entire programme.

Check on each participant's level of engagement regularly. Participants' engagement with a programme will likely fluctuate over time, even if their commitment to it remains steady. Pay attention to these ebbs and flows and problem-solve with them to make adjustments and address bottlenecks as they occur, before they can derail an individual or group's participation.

Monitor, reflect and adapt. Throughout the programme, prioritise time and budget to monitor progress and identify opportunities to learn and grow as you go. In addition to evaluating outputs, regularly re-examine participants' progress and needs, and seek ways to make their impact more sustainable (e.g. additional funding, opportunities for networking and coaching, etc.). Ideally, this would be done in person with the support of a local delivery partner and should feed into a robust monitoring and evaluation plan that uses mixed methods actively throughout the programme.

Have an effective social media strategy. Social media platforms are a great way to build brand recognition and promote peace, but they also offer an effective way to keep participants engaged and connected. Closed groups and channels offer a private space communication, collaboration, inspiration and encouragement, while public pages allow you to share participants' work with a wider audience, amplifying their message and following.

Identify and invest in a trusted and credible local delivery partner. When it is not possible to have locally based staff, consider onboarding a partner that is experienced in engaging with the local youth peacebuilding landscape, delivering capacity building and forging multi-stakeholder ties. Their credibility among their community and young people will also be essential to ensure buy-in from all relevant stakeholders. Be sure you have a thorough onboarding process so potential partners are aware of the intricacies, demands, expectations and possible challenges of the programme from the very beginning.

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