"Sésame, Ouvre-toi!"
Recommendations – Unleashing the full potential of political simulations

Dear fellow Political Simulations Organisers,

In political education, "learning by doing" scores among the most efficient methods. In that regard, **political simulations are our greatest tool!** However **involving a more diverse audience** - especially young people now underrepresented because of various obstacles - could achieve even more!

To help unleash the full potential of political simulations, YES Forum led the YourEP Project[1]. With the help of diverse young participants themselves, we explored ways of making a simulation of the European Parliament as **Inclusive** - regardless of participants' backgrounds and difficulties - and **Accessible** - regardless of participants' prior knowledge of or interest in politics and the European Union – as possible.

A thorough presentation of our results can be found here[2]. Based on these results, we summed up the following **key recommendations** specifically for you: we hope they can provide inspiration, and help you reaching an even bigger, more diverse audience!

"You're not alone!" – Diversify your audience through new collaborations

To diversify your audience, no need to struggle on your own!

Contact local NGOs with expertise in social work to help you **reaching out to new target groups through their own channels**. They could even contribute to your simulations, providing their skills in social inclusion. They'd also benefit from such collaboration, by getting a new learning opportunity for their target group!

If you need inspiration, have a look at YES Forum's own member organisations across Europe.

Participatory Design – Give a say to participants

To make your simulation **attractive and motivating to a broader audience**, and adapted to your participants' **interests and needs**, the easiest way is to ask them directly!

For instance, you can simply gather their **ideas on the simulation's future topic(s) online, and later on let them vote** to proceed to the final selection. No need to make it complicated: Facebook offers polling features, as well as other free online tools such as Doodle, EasyPolls or VoxVote.

Ongoing Support – Cater for everybody's needs

Participants who are not used to such events or have personal difficulties can feel intimidated by a political simulation. Often, they will refrain from even applying, or fully engage in the simulation. To alleviate this obstacle, **make sure participants can get support at any time.**

Volunteers participating in your simulation should be **sensitive to participants' potential needs** and difficulties. Collaborating with a social NGO can also be valuable: **social workers** can be involved to help with their own expertise. You can also think of a **mentoring scheme**: participants with prior experience can help "newcomers".

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[1] www.yes-forum.eu/projects/detail/yourep

[2] goo.gl/X5gMy5

Back to Basics! Include accessible learning solutions

Participants who don't have **prior political knowledge** will often see that as an obstacle and not join.

To remove this barrier, a first learning phase should be offered. For a simulation with a school, **teachers** can of course take care of it. If you collaborate with a local NGO, **youth & social workers** can take the lead to learn with their participants. Your own volunteers can also offer a **training before your simulation**.

Online learning is an easy, complementary option. Share a toolkit with applicants and later on participants. It can cover the basics (e.g. a political lexicon), and include links to accessible online material: to learn about the EU for instance, EuroparlTV offers many short, educational and subtitled videos.

Learning the fun way!

Roleplaying is fun: roleplaying politics, however, can look so formal it can discourage some potential participants.

Solution: **make the fun part as obvious as possible**! For example YourEP debated two topics: one was realistic, and the other one **unrealistic … and quite fun**! ("*Regulation on the Protection of European Fantastic Creatures*").

Such a fun topic made the simulation **more attractive and enjoyable** for participants who were not interested in politics at first, required **no prior expertise** and therefore focused the **learning experience on the political process**, and addressed **real-life issues nonetheless through a fun shortcut**.

Chill Out! Keep it simple

Many potential participants would rather **avoid reproducing formal social norms often prevailing in politics**.

To avoid **creating such "symbolic" obstacles**, a dress code or typical ceremonial greetings (e.g. "*Honourable Members, dear friends and colleagues*") should not be mandatory. After all, **focusing on the legislative process** itself is more important than not-so-indispensable aspects!

Flexibility is the Key! Plan alternative ways of participating

To cater for all participants' different needs and difficulties, **keep your simulation's process flexible**.

Keep a margin in your timeframe to take **time to accommodate the specific needs** of participants. Though a key part of any debate, **group discussions can also be overwhelming** for some participants: **alternative ways of engaging in discussions** (e.g. a spokesperson, time for one-on-one conversations) can give everybody a chance.

A Free Opportunity – Remove the financial obstacle

Making ends meet on a daily basis always come first: Travel and accommodation costs or participation **fees exclude participants with financial difficulties**. However organising an event is not free of course.
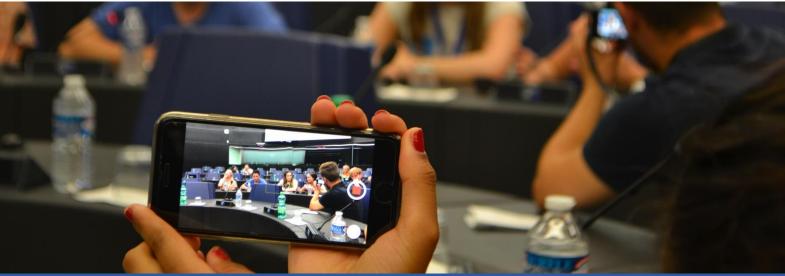
To cover organisational and participants' costs, **ask for public funding**: political education (especially if inclusive!) is a priority for many local, regional and national governments. EU programmes can help, like **Erasmus+**, Europe for Citizens or the European Solidarity Corps and its "Solidarity projects" for groups of young people without a registered organisation. The European Youth Foundation and other public/private foundations are also an option.

Be Pragmatic

Finally, remember there is no need to change everything in your simulation. **Assess which groups face the most obstacles** to get on board, and tweak a few features to **experiment targeted solutions**.

An even more flexible solution: don't start from scratch with your regular activities, and instead **organise a smaller simulation to experiment some tips for inclusion**. The ones which prove most effective can then be more easily implemented in your next simulation!

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From early 2017 to late 2018, 24 young people facing various obstacles from 7 different EU countries designed their own political simulation of the European Union, in order to experiment an Inclusive & Accessible method. They were accompanied by experienced youth workers from the partners. The whole process was supported by the European expertise of JEF Europe.

A thorough presentation of the project, how it led to and implemented the above-mentioned recommendations, can be found in its first output *"The YourEP Experiment – Key Lessons for Inclusive & Accessible Political simulations"*. For more information, please visit the **project's website** (www.yes-forum.eu/projects/detail/yourep) or contact us.

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