



EUROPEAN YOUTH PARLIAMENT FINLAND – EYP FINLAND RY

STRATEGY 2018 – 2020





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INTRODUCTION

Our vision for 2020 is to combine the professional aspect of EYP Finland with the fun, inspiring and empowering nature of volunteering in EYP.

EYP Finland

European Youth Parliament Finland – EYP Finland ry, established in its current form in 2001, is the National Committee of the European Youth Parliament in Finland. During its 16 years in operation, EYP Finland has provided thousands of Finnish youth with the opportunity to get excited and learn about European affairs, politics, active citizenship and volunteering. This time has seen its share of highlights both domestically and internationally. Some to mention here are the International Sessions of EYP held in Helsinki in 2009 and Tampere in 2015; sending a delegation to the European Youth Event hosted by the European Parliament in Strasbourg in 2016; earning the National First Place in the Charlemagne Youth Prize with our 2016 Your European Citizenship project; and the hiring of a full-time Secretary General in 2016. With the great advances made during the last strategy cycle of 2015–2017, EYP Finland is in a more professionally stable position than ever before. A great deal of thanks for this goes to the previous strategy and the relentless work of the boards and active volunteers of those years.

At this stage of affairs, our objective is to set this position in stone while looking forward and preparing for new visionary projects. This strategy has been written with the support of the strategy working group that started work in March 2017. The working group created a member survey where members were able to provide anonymous feedback on their experience in EYP Finland and insights for the future. Moreover, the Board Member for International and Academic Affairs as Head of Strategy has been involved in one-on-one discussions with members at member events and sessions throughout the year, gathering input on the strategy. The working paper has been shared with members for commentary and feedback. In collaboration with the working group and Secretary General, the board of EYP Finland 2017 supports this strategy for 2018–2020.



The strategy is divided into four main pillars: Inclusion, Enthusiasm, Networking and Stability and Participation.

Strategy

The pillars have been created based on the results of the member survey, the analysis of the outgoing strategy, and the vision of the board of 2017. While the strategy 2015–2017 has made EYP Finland a more professional and committed organisation, the general sentiment has been that members have been feeling somewhat left out with the increasingly bureaucratic and official nature of the board. The main aim for 2020 should therefore be how to combine the professional aspect, which we have spent a long time attaining, with the inspiring and empowering nature of volunteering in EYP.

The strategy is split in two documents. This paper provides an introduction to all four main pillars of the strategy and it is intended for all members to read. The Measures Catalogue contains the concrete measures and success indicators for every main pillar and their respective sub-pillars. The Catalogue is primarily intended for the board of EYP Finland to examine when writing their work plans and conducting end-of-year reviews, but it is also open to members for examination and comments.

The four main pillars of the strategy partly overlap, but also stand out as individuals. The first two, Inclusion and Enthusiasm, concentrate on welfare, fairness and equality within the organisation; the last two, Networking and Stability and Participation, discuss the role of the board and members from a more professional point of view. They are all bound together by the same ideology – doing things together, learning by doing, and having fun in the process. This is, we believe, the true essence of EYP.



1. INCLUSION

Vision: EYP Finland supports equality in all its actions and brings together young people from different socioeconomic backgrounds, educational backgrounds, cultures and language groups. Everyone has an equal opportunity to progress within the organisation and receive positions of responsibility based on their interest and motivation alone.

Inclusion is a key area in the work of EYP in general, and EYP Finland in particular. In EYP Finland, we have always found it important to maintain a low barrier of entry to our activities, personal background notwithstanding. Our Outreach and Inclusion activities are laid out in greater detail in the Outreach and Inclusion Strategy which pioneered in 2017. Intercultural encounters, seeking results via cooperation and learning about social affairs that impact the lives of the youth should not be viewed as an activity exclusively reserved for any distinct group of people – what we do in EYP Finland is relevant to everyone and open to everyone. The redefinition of our core target groups for 2018 also supports the concept of inclusion.

EYP Finland's approach to Outreach and Inclusion follows many of the guidelines either set in the International Strategy of EYP or outlined by the Governing Body, the executive board of EYP on the international level. Nonetheless, our approach should be tailored to our specific circumstances and needs. Income disparities are not, comparatively speaking, excessively high in Finland, and schools are not strongly segregated between socioeconomic classes. However, a major barrier to inclusion is the distinction between upper secondary and vocational schools as our participants almost exclusively come from the former. Moreover, Finland is a large and sparsely populated country, to the point where a delegate may have to consider travelling in excess of 200 kilometres simply to reach a session city. Consequently, our focus points in this pillar are regional and school equity, and the well-being of every participant. The relationships with schools is more extensively discussed in pillar 2.



a. Regional Equity

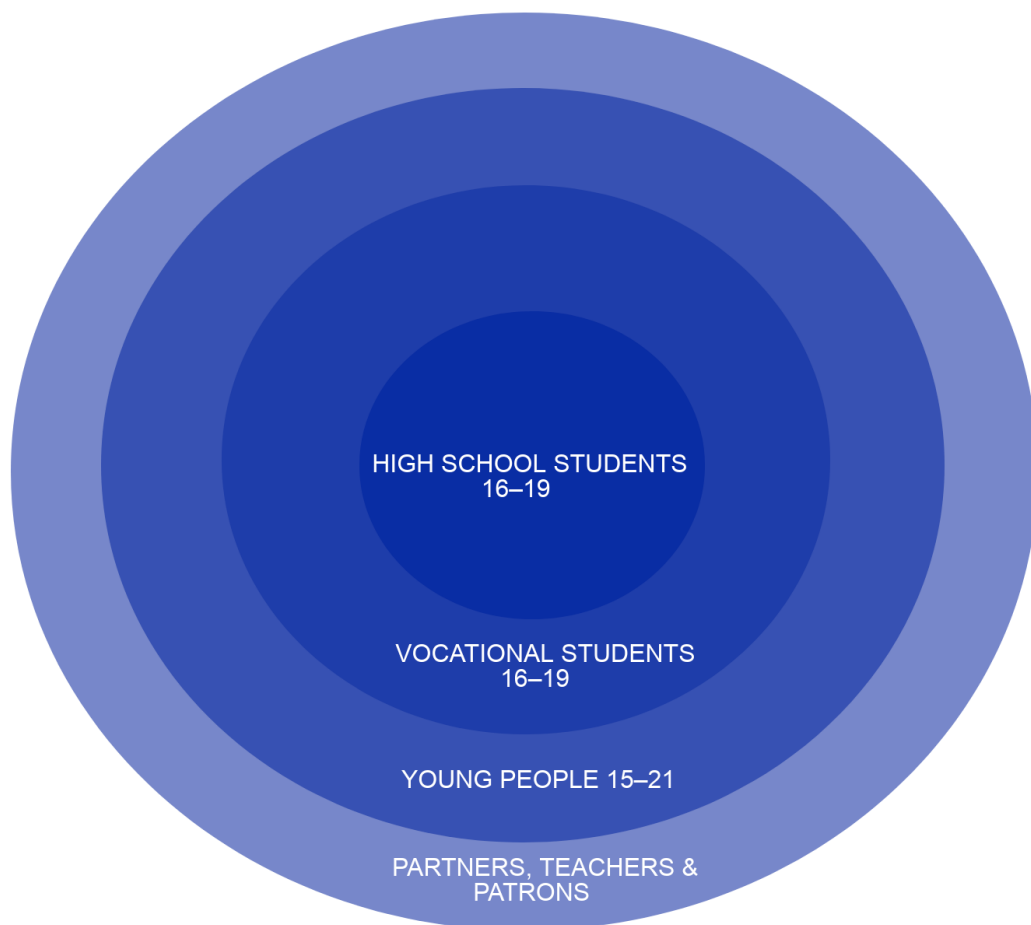
With its large surface area and small population, Finland is the most sparsely populated country in the European Union and one of the most sparsely populated in the world. Long distances between cities and high travel costs therefore present challenges to organising EYP activities – not everyone has the opportunity, for financial or purely geographical reasons, to attend sessions in Helsinki or the south coast. However, geography is a factor beyond our control. To answer to this challenge, we have five Regional Committees in major cities around Finland who organise EYP activities and bring together members from their respective regions. EYP Finland aims to organise activities equitably around Finland, and have its sessions at geographically representative locations, not just in the core population hubs. Moreover, we aim to reach out to people from all around the country by sharing travel tips, searching for partnerships and providing travel funds. We want to work together with, not against, our geography.

b. Sessions' Equity

High academic standards, little time for sleep and countless opportunities and desire to socialise – probably all experienced EYPers can agree that sessions can be, at times, somewhat demanding for participants. In EYP Finland, we want to ensure that the welfare of all participants is looked after. The sessions of EYP Finland should, first of all, be a place to experience something memorable and new. This is achieved by making sure that the sessions are a welcoming and safe environment for all participants. No one has to be a perfect debater or academically flawless in order to enjoy the session – and neither are we looking for participants based purely on their academic capability. We do not want to create a competitive atmosphere for anyone. Everyone, from first-time delegates to experienced head organisers, is there to learn and everyone should be able to express themselves and feel comfortable as themselves.

c. Appealing for All

From attending sessions to running for the board, the barrier of entry to our activities should be set as low as possible. In order to achieve this, we want to understand our member base and potential participants in more analytical detail. Therefore we have created the onion model for target groups which illustrates how and where we should concentrate our resources through four different layers of involvement with EYP Finland. In practice this means that even though we concentrate our efforts in the core of the target group, we want to signal through our activities and communications that we are open and welcoming for everyone regardless of personal background. It is important that our activities are genuinely interesting and rewarding to people from all target groups and address their needs accordingly. Finally, EYP Finland is discrimination-free and we constantly seek new ideas through our connections with other youth organisations on how to keep all layers of our target groups involved.



d. Connected with Past and Future

In 2018, EYP Finland turns 17. We would not be at the point where we currently are without the tireless work carried out by the previous boards and countless active members. Looking at the past should not only be carried out every three years in the strategy process, but all members should be familiar with our legacy. The Annual Ball, member events and History of EYP Finland are crucial in bringing old and new generations together and keeping our alumni involved. Our alumni also contribute to knowledge-sharing within the organisation: past head organisers, internationally active members or past board members, for instance, can provide valuable insights for life both inside and outside of EYP.



2. ENTHUSIASM

Vision: EYP Finland is known as the leading provider of informal education in Finnish secondary-level education. The communications of EYP Finland are acute, versatile and coherent, and reach out to young people, teachers, sponsors and patrons through the most relevant channels. Volunteering for EYP Finland is easy, appealing and rewarding for members.

While inclusion sets up an equal framework for everyone to participate in our activities, we still need to make sure that our members are enthusiastic. In the world of social media and immediate messaging, it is essential that we find the correct channels and methods of communication with our members, as well as our partners in schools, fellow youth organisations, public offices, businesses and the like.

It has been a long-term project for EYP Finland to set up an active network of teachers and schools. In this strategy cycle, we aim at even more measures to get ourselves recognised and established at schools throughout Finland. In the world of NGOs, we want to position ourselves more clearly and take a firm hold of our space as a politically neutral, educational youth organisation. Our new central location in Pasila in the office space of Finnish Youth Cooperation – Allianssi is a key asset in generating relationships. The Secretary General is chiefly responsible for maintaining good professional relationships with our key stakeholders, but the board and active members should also be involved since they are the greatest representatives of EYP Finland. There should be plenty of rewards for our volunteers in order to improve their well-being and make sure they receive more than give for their contributions. After all, without volunteers we would not exist.

a. Communication Strategy

EYP Finland is operating in a challenging space in the field of communications. Our core target group, 16-to-19-year-olds, constantly seeks new channels through which they communicate. Moreover, we employ completely different methods to approach our other stakeholders, for instance public offices, schools and businesses. When it comes to social media, the same app that was 'hot' two years ago might be completely dead in the eyes of our core target group today. We have sought to meet this challenge through hiring interns to work specifically in communications, and completely rethinking our approach to communications.

For the above reasons, this strategy will not cover communications extensively, but instead a separate Communication Strategy will be written for 2018. It is impossible to predict now which communication channel the youth of 2020 will be using. This is something that the Board Member for Communications should be prepared for in order to keep EYP Finland looking as contemporary, youthful and active as it is in reality.

b. Teacher Relations

Teachers are crucial partners for EYP both in Finland and internationally. We firmly believe that the extracurricular educational experience that we provide could benefit all students in upper secondary education and training. The majority of teachers that have attended EYP sessions in Finland have been very excited about the methodology, and some of them have set up an active EYP culture in their schools. With this in mind, it is unfortunate if students miss out on EYP due to a lack of teacher awareness. According to the onion model for target groups, the board should take an active stance towards cultivating and improving teacher relations in the long term.

c. Awareness in Schools

Together with improving teacher relations, school relations are absolutely vital for the continuity of our activities. We have seen time and time again that even though active teachers play an important role in gathering participants, the best way to attract a young person to attend their first EYP session is to have an active EYPer give a presentation at their school. Through establishing an EYP culture among students, we are able to reach out to those people who may not have a committed EYP teacher at their school. Students are also able to organise events in collaboration with the Regional Committees during times when the sessions are not on. We have been cooperating with the European Parliament Information Office in Finland to bring EYP to lower secondary schools through parliamentary simulations for many years and aim to be involved in parliamentary simulations also during this strategy cycle.

d. Rewarding and Empowering

As any EYPer would tell, enthusiasm and networking are intrinsically connected. One of the most rewarding aspects of EYP is to make lasting and relevant connections with interesting people. Here we should focus particularly on ensuring that our volunteers are invited to attend events that are relevant for them, and that they are able to trace a way through the organisation that suits them specifically. The board has a critical role to play in recognising the interests of members, and providing them with opportunities to attend fascinating events both through invitations and open calls. All volunteers, either in working groups, sessions' organiser teams, or Regional Committees should feel that their input matters and they are rewarded for the work that they do.



Vision: EYP Finland is familiar among young people as a reliable means for travelling abroad and gaining international experiences. EYP Finland is known among Finnish secondary schools, other youth organisations, public organisations, businesses and within the international governance of EYP as a credible international organisation. The members are able to build their social capital and make significant contacts in Finland and abroad.

One of the greatest aspects of EYP is how it brings together people from all over Europe and the world. As one of 40 National Committees of EYP, it seems only appropriate that we do all we can to utilise the full potential of the network. Ranging from International Session delegations to debates in the Board of National Committees and representatives in the Governing Body, EYP Finland has a long history of international presence. In the domestic field, we are gaining recognition as a result of a concentrated focus on building good relationships with our fellow youth organisations and NGOs.

Networking as a strategic pillar covers both international and domestic connections. For board members, networking is a crucial source of knowledge-sharing and learning from others who are holding similar positions in other organisations. For the members, on the other hand, this means providing valuable and relevant experiences at every stage of the EYP journey. The sessions of EYP Finland are a great opportunity for members to meet other people with similar interests and significantly build their social capital, but there are countless opportunities available in other EYP countries as well. The balance between national and international activity is delicate, and should be recognised by the board and by all members so that we can make the most of the pan-European EYP framework.



a. An Active Board

The role of the board in EYP Finland, as in all other National Committees, is to be connected on many different strands at once. Networking in the both domestic and international spheres are just as important as remaining connected with our own members and running our own sessions. Without this, we risk becoming blinded by our own ideas and repeating processes or mistakes where we could learn from others. The board members should utilise the opportunities in the vast international framework of EYP, for instance attend trainings and sessions to share their knowledge. Moreover, it is crucial that we are connected well domestically, particularly in the NGO field. No stones should be left unturned in networking opportunities, to showcase EYP Finland in the best possible light as an independent and established National Committee in the web of 40 fellow organisations.

b. An Involved (Inter-)National Committee

The international activity of EYP Finland stretches beyond what the board does. Attendance at the Board of National Committees and international training events for board members are crucially important for both organisational and personal development, but we should also bear in mind the needs and aspirations of all our members. We should seek international delegations to all our sessions and provide the possibility to attend events abroad for every delegate that so desires. EYP Finland should continue to be well represented in EYP Councils, the Governing Body and positions at the International Office, all the way up to the Executive Director. This is only possible through building an international career path right from the grassroots level.

c. Active Members

The above vision of an active National Committee can only be achieved if networking both domestically and internationally is made appealing and straightforward for members. Arguably the most memorable experiences EYP is able to provide are those of overcoming oneself. This need not mean that every Finnish delegate participates in an International Session, but rather that everyone finds a comfortable path to progress. For some it may mean travelling to a different Finnish city for a session, for some to travel to Estonia or Sweden, to use English abroad, or to make a point in a General Assembly. The opportunities here are endless and the important thing is that they are provided, in the way that the individual member sees comfortable. Thinking about the meaning of Europe and the values of EYP, and learning something new about oneself in the process, can be realised at a Regional Session in Kempele just as well as at an International Session in Amsterdam. Our task for our members, monumental but still achievable, is to provide both these opportunities and all in between.



Vision: EYP Finland is an active volunteer organisation with a professional culture. A full-time, salaried secretary general supports the activities organised by young volunteers. EYP Finland is a stable and continuous organisation year after year thanks to a culture of long-term commitment and active knowledge-sharing between younger and older members. Procedures in place that are proven to work well are preserved and evaluated critically in order to improve them further.

As a volunteer organisation, EYP Finland is defined by its members. They are the ones for whom our activities are planned and they are the ones who keep the organisation going year after year. The overwhelming majority of people who organise the activities and run the administration of EYP Finland are young volunteers. With this in mind, we distinguish the concepts of stability and participation.

Firstly, we need to provide diverse and clear 'career paths' through EYP for our most active and capable members to advance to the board and other senior positions. Secondly, we have to make sure that the people find it comfortable, worthwhile and rewarding to volunteer for EYP Finland. The board of EYP Finland is a notable decision-making body with a high social responsibility, a considerable budget and member base to look after, and a real possibility to positively impact the lives of hundreds of young people every year. We want to attract and empower the brightest young minds to contribute to our organisation, at every level of the organisation, and make it enjoyable for them to do so.



a. A Welcoming Board

Working in the board and being in contact with public offices, hundreds of schools around Finland, and dozens of young volunteers can be an intimidating task. Regardless, we want to make sure that board membership does not feel intimidating or overwhelming. Board members, like all other volunteers in EYP Finland, should in the end feel that they receive more than they give. Self-improvement, constant feedback of one's own progress, and learning new talents are some of the most important parts of EYP. They should be evident in the board as well. Even though we are professional in nature and run an organisation with high responsibilities, our active members are still young and learning as they go along. Everyone is here to learn, and everyone should be given the space and feedback to learn in the best way possible.

b. A Skillful Board

Even though EYP Finland is a welcoming and relaxed organisation designed for young people by young people, it is also established and professional. Applying for funding from various ministries and from programmes of the European Union, it is crucial that we present ourselves in the most professional light possible and know how to interact efficiently with such important stakeholders. Moreover, we are accountable to hundreds of young members at the sessions and other events we organise. It is therefore imperative that the board members are well trained in their portfolios and capable of fulfilling their responsibilities. This is achieved by striving for a great working relationship within the board, attending various trainings organised inside and outside EYP, and cultivating a mindset for self-improvement and feedback from both peers and superiors.



c. Established Sessions

In the end, EYP is all about sessions. They are the most important events for the majority of our members and the way we present ourselves to the external world. Just like the international governance of EYP strives to ensure that all sessions organised Europe-wide look like EYP, we want to make sure that our sessions look like EYP Finland. We have gathered a lot of know-how from former head organisers and boards, and want to preserve that knowledge in order to make future sessions even better. At the same time, we want to be open to thinking about new ideas for our sessions, such as considering a jury team or cross-border session concepts with our neighbouring National Committees. We do not want to reinvent the wheel each year when organising sessions, but at the same time we want to keep innovating to avoid getting stuck in a rut.

d. Openness and Continuity

It is one thing to draft and issue a strategy – it is a whole another thing to stand by one. None of the plans and ideas in the world matter unless they are put into use. Learning from constant feedback from our members and evaluating the success of the last strategy cycle, EYP Finland aims at becoming a more member-oriented, democratic and empowering organisation. This is reflected in the way the board communicates with members and in the way responsibilities are allocated. While being the head of a nationwide organisation, the board of EYP Finland should make sure it is as close to its members as possible. Our members should feel empowered to take initiative and organise EYP activities that matter to them in particular, and the board should be open and receptive to new ideas. By working together in a system of low hierarchy, we want to make everyone feel welcome as a part of the community that is EYP Finland.



IMPLEMENTATION AND RENEWAL

EYP Finland in 2020 is about learning new skills in a welcoming atmosphere and doing things together.

In the ideal situation, every single member of EYP Finland has their part to play in bringing the strategy to life. This document has been designed according to the views of our members and aims to highlight what they find important in our National Committee. Consequently, it cannot be the sole responsibility of the board to carry out and implement the strategy, even when they are the ones ultimately responsible. The members should be made aware of the strategy and what it means for the day-to-day work of the National Committee. This paper is made available for everyone: it should be available in at least English and Finnish, and board members should be able to explain its main points to members and stakeholders.

Implementation

The main pillars of the strategy all unite under a common theme – volunteering and doing things together. This is essentially what the European Youth Parliament has always been about and this is what EYP Finland in 2020 should be about. The board and Secretary General have a crucial part to play in ensuring that EYP Finland is every bit as professional as it can be, and worthy of the high public trust and awareness it has earned with hard work. However, this must not come at the expense of participant welfare, whether the participant is a first-time delegate or an experienced board member. From the grassroots level to the top of decision-making, it is crucial to recognise the potential in all our members, but also the limitations. Issues that active members are prone to, such as taking on multiple roles of responsibility at once and excessively prioritising EYP over other aspects of life, should be looked for, recognised and treated on a case-by-case basis. In the end, what matters above everything is welfare: making sure that EYP Finland is an organisation where every member is welcome, finds their own place and is able to learn new skills suited to their abilities in a friendly and supportive environment.



Renewal

The leadership of EYP Finland changes quite often, with the term limit for board members set at one year and hired employees leaving and entering the organisation. There will be three one-year boards in charge of EYP Finland during the mandate of the strategy, and the Secretary General will change at least once. Looking at 2020, the strategy should be seen as a document smoothing the board transitions, and carrying with it the experience and knowledge of past boards. By referring to the Measures Catalogue and other supporting documents such as the Outreach and Inclusion Strategy and Communication Strategy, the boards have a vast amount of knowledge to utilise.

Board membership in EYP Finland can be a daunting task, but in great company and with committed members working alongside the board, it will turn out successful, providing Finnish youth with extraordinary opportunities and experiences in the future like it has done for 16 years now. In 2020, the board will set up a new strategy working group to create the strategy for 2021-2024 based on the views of members, the vision of the board and the general state of EYP Finland.

A group of young people, seen from behind, are walking along a path. The path leads towards a dense forest on the left and a series of high-voltage power lines and pylons on the right. The scene is captured during sunset or sunrise, with a warm, golden light illuminating the sky and the silhouettes of the people and trees. The overall mood is contemplative and forward-looking.

CONCLUSION

This strategy should set us thinking about what in EYP Finland matters most to us and how we will achieve it in 2020.

Strategic thinking is not something done purely for the sake of writing complex documents. It is an opportunity for EYP Finland to critically evaluate its position, see where it has succeeded and where it could still seek to improve, and most importantly, see how it is working in relation to its members.

This strategy aims to set up a solid foundation for future boards in an era when EYP Finland is larger and more professional than ever, with a powerful international stance. This position opens up lots of opportunities to explore – but the explorations should be made wisely. What has to be borne in mind is that EYP Finland is run by young volunteers, for young people. Understanding this is key to making sure that EYP Finland remains inspiring and empowering in the future, just as well as today.



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