

Training of youth councils for youth councils

Documentation from workshop in Karasjok, June 2022



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Publication year:

2022

Edition: 1st edition, 2022

ISBN

978-82-93866-18-3



Workshop in Karasjok June 2022

In the summer of 2022, the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir) and the Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) invited the youth councils in Karasjok, Alta and Hammerfest to participate in a learning development workshop on how to run youth councils.

The workshop was the first of its kind in youth participation, the purpose of which was to train youth councils from other youth councils. The organizers aimed to strengthen participation of youth councils through better organization, training and systematization of their work. After youth councils were adopted into law by the new Norwegian Local Government Act of 2019, there are many newly established youth councils. The degree of structuring, organisation and presence varies widely around the country. Some municipalities have had youth councils for a long time, while several municipalities have not yet established a youth council. But it is important to remember that there is no reason to reinvent the wheel in every new youth council.

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Yours sincerely

Haidi Bersanova and Thea Franck Bjørnstad, internship students

Welcome from the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs and how work is based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Bufdir welcomed the young people to the workshop as co-organiser with KS. The aim of the workshop and the collaboration was to learn about and inspire the participation of young people around the country. Bufdir emphasised the importance of young people’s participation, which is embedded in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and section 104 of the Norwegian Constitution.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is an international agreement that defines a wide range of rights and freedoms for children. The Convention gives children a special legal status and guarantees all children under the age of 18 their political, economic, social and cultural rights. The Convention was incorporated into Norwegian law in 2003, through Section 2 of the Norwegian Human Rights Act, and takes precedence over other laws. This means that where, for example, the Norwegian Education Act or the Norwegian Children Act provides weaker protection for children than the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, it is the wording of the Convention that carries precedence. The convention consists of 42 articles and four main principles:

- Article 2:** Non-discrimination
- Article 3:** The best interests of the child
- Article 6:** Right to life and development
- Article 12:** Children’s right to express their views and be heard

Bufdir emphasises that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is very important when working with youth participation and youth councils. As all states that have joined the Convention must follow it, it is important to emphasise the Convention in the work of youth councils and youth work. During the workshop in Karasjok, it was pointed out that there is a need to increase awareness of the Convention in current work with youth councils and that elected officials should receive the necessary training when taking office.

▶
The youth council representatives at the workshop in Karasjok were eager to share experiences and get new ideas for their work moving forward.

Bufdir emphasises that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is very important in the work with youth participation and youth councils.



Full endorsement from Karasjok’s political leaders!

The workshop in Karasjok started with a warm welcome from Karasjok’s Deputy Mayor John Nystad. The deputy mayor spoke enthusiastically about the importance of having a youth council in the municipality.

It was Deputy Mayor John Nystad who initiated the work with the youth council in Karasjok and who has facilitated the collaboration with KS and Bufdir. Nystad says that the origin of the collaboration was accidental and that a pleasant meeting with other collaborators made him aware of the opportunities and benefits of youth councils. This was the start of the youth council in Karasjok, which has now been operational for six months. Through the collaboration, the municipality has become familiar with the opportunities for support and funding via various grant schemes. The municipality has been granted funds and equipment for BUA. After only a short time in collaboration with KS and Bufdir, they are already in full swing, counting equipment and talking to young people to map out what kind of equipment they need.

The deputy mayor thanks KS and Bufdir for choosing to invest in Karasjok and hopes that this collaboration will continue. He is looking ahead, hoping to learn more and work together with the youth council for their continued development. Nystad sees the importance of gaining a full endorsement of the youth council’s work from local political leaders. This is important in order to make young people’s wishes a reality, ensure respect and inclusion in the municipality’s work with matters that concern young people.

▶ **The workshop included** time set aside for collaborative tasks and exchange of experience.





Engaged young people at the workshop in Karasjok.

Alta Youth Council

Johann Magnusson, Head of the Alta Youth Council, and Reina Svaler, Council Member, shared their experiences with the youth council in Alta during the workshop in Karasjok. Topics up for discussion included how youth councils can gain political and administrative support, how to ensure that youth councils are provided with matters for discussion and how to ensure good procedures.

The Alta Youth Council consists of 16 engaged young people between the ages of 14 and 19. Five of the members of the youth council are part of a youth committee that meets once a month. The young people from Alta explained that the youth committee functions as a board for the youth council. The entire youth council meets twice a year. The meetings are held in the youth council's own office premises, which can be used at any time. When electing both the youth council and the youth committee emphasis is placed, as far as possible, on gender balance and representativeness.

When new members are to be elected, former council members go around the schools in the region to inform other young people about the council's work and recruit new, engaged members. As of June 2022, the newly established youth council is only a month old. On the agenda recently, there has naturally been a focus on the election and appointment of the council.

Early inclusion in administrative proceedings

The young people highlight the importance of being included as early as possible in administrative proceedings. If matters reach the council too

late, real involvement is reduced or non-existent. Furthermore, they point out the importance of politicians following through on their promises – not just nodding and smiling until voting time. However, the representatives from the Alta Youth Council are very pleased with the mayor of Alta municipality, Monica Nielsen. “She often comes to meetings, either because there are exciting issues being discussed or because she wants to explain something,” says Johann Magnusson, Head of the Alta Youth Council. They feel lucky to have an open and inclusive mayor who is easy to talk to.

Council procedures

Furthermore, the Alta Youth Council has a faithful secretary and contact person in John Harald from the cultural administration. He helps them with the practicalities and makes sure that procedures are followed. For example, if some of the members cannot attend a meeting, he helps to call in deputy representatives as substitutes. The members point out that the youth council depends on a secretary who can help them with various processes. When difficult matters come up on the agenda, the secretary arranges visits by people from public administration who can



The youth councils shared their experiences from issues they are working on and how to achieve real participation.

explain the issues and make sure council members have the opportunity to ask questions.

The representatives from the Alta Youth Council go on to say that their procedures include having an agreed meeting calendar that ensures predictability. The meetings are set prior to Executive Committee for Youth, Culture and Inclusion meetings, so that they can go through the agendas and supply input. Before each meeting, the heads of the youth council, Johann and John Harald, review the matters so that they are prepared before the meeting starts. Furthermore, members can attend committee meetings, municipal executive board meetings and municipal council meetings, with the right to speak if there are any issues that are important to them. In addition, they have a Messenger group where the members of the council can submit matters they wish addressed. Members are expected to get involved at the meetings.

Work with reckless driving culture in Alta

During the last few years, the Alta Youth Council

has worked on a number of issues. Alta's own youth council leader, Johann Magnusson, talks about the work with road and traffic safety. Alta has a rough culture, with reckless driving and gangs who drive mopeds tuned to remove their speed limiters. There have been major problems related to reckless driving in residential areas. The topic is a recurring theme for a number of youth councils, and ensuring safe roads to and from school and safe play areas is a continuous challenge. He goes on to talk about the collaboration with the municipality and the police, but also the challenges associated with making cultural changes. There have been obstacles on the way, but neither Johann nor the Alta Youth Council are giving up the fight for a nice, secure and road-safe Alta city centre. In conclusion, the young people feel they are being heard and that they have the opportunity to influence the decision-making process. "Our votes can tip the scales one way or the other. As a member of the youth council, you have an important role," concludes Reina Svaler, member of the Alta Youth Council.

The Hammerfest model

The Hammerfest Youth Council has drawn up a system for their work with the youth council, which has been dubbed “the Hammerfest model”.

This systematises the work and makes it easier to handle the continuous turnover of members. During the workshop in Karasjok, the coordinator for the Hammerfest Youth Council, Astrid Gaup Skancke, explained the model and told of their experiences. The municipality and politicians must respect the youth council as elected representatives, and the members of the council must respect their own role as a part of the recipe for success in Hammerfest.

History of the Hammerfest Youth Council

The Hammerfest Youth Council is organised as a politically neutral body, focusing on promoting young people’s voices rather than pursuing party politics. The council is elected every autumn and currently consists of 13 members aged 13–18. The elections are held in collaboration with local schools to ensure representatives from all regions in the municipality.

Before 2015, the youth council meetings were random and unstructured. They met in the evenings and did not receive meeting allowances like other elected representatives. After canvassing by members and by the coordinator, the youth council were given new meeting rooms in the city hall, the right to time off from school for meetings and gatherings to be marked as a “political exemptions” for up to

10 days a year. In the past, the youth council had difficulty getting matters forwarded for review and ensuring real participation in the issues they dealt with. It was only when the coordinator had the youth council coordinate with the municipality’s political calendar that they received the same agendas, which increased the youth council’s opportunities to have an influence.

After the municipality mergers in 2020, two youth councils were also merged, and they both now provide a coordinator and a secretary. This is felt to be absolutely necessary for the council to function properly. Today, the advice is taken very seriously. They are part of the political calendar, and this means that they receive matters for review early in the decision-making process. This has produced good results and has given young people a real opportunity to participate, which in turn generates engagement among the members. The Hammerfest Youth Council feels that they are taken seriously and that their voice has an impact. The current head of the Hammerfest Youth Council, Sigrid Kvam Jørstad, emphasises that “including us early on in events is important to create a municipality that is nice to grow up in, nice to come back to and nice to take over”. Last year, the Hammerfest Youth Council was among the finalists for the youth municipality of the

year, and this year they received the “lighthouse award” (fyrtårnprisen).

“Everything that concerns adults concerns us”

The Hammerfest Youth Council believes that the respect they receive from the municipality is the reason for their success story. The fact that the municipality listens to them and that the youth council is included in matters early on is crucial. The council has drawn up its own slogan: “Everything that concerns adults concerns us”. Young people are engaged in far more than recreational activities. The young people in Hammerfest highlight road safety, the environment and school policies as important issues. For instance, the Hammerfest Youth Council has worked on issues such as mental health, homework-free schools and public transport, in addition to organising Pride celebrations.

Organisation and execution

The Hammerfest Youth Council consists of an executive team, members, deputy representatives, a coordinator and a committee secretary. The executive team is chosen from the members of the council and is the key to the strong position of the Hammerfest Youth Council. The executive team is responsible for managing the meetings, preparing agendas, receiving requests and making sure that everyone in the council is heard. According to Astrid Gaup Skancke, it is important for the coordinator/ secretary to ensure that the executive team receives enough training and confidence to lead the council.

The members of the youth council are permanent members of the council. This means that members have an obligation to attend. To do a good job, it is important to be prepared for the meetings. It is

also crucial that the members receive training in what it means to sit on a council. The members of the council also participate in working meetings and have the opportunity to travel to conferences outside the city and abroad. Deputy representatives often have a less prominent role in the youth council. They only attend meetings when one of the members notifies their absence. They are nevertheless members on an equal footing with the other members and are accorded the same respect and status. Some of the deputy representatives may also be recruited onto next year’s council and can thus bring with them the experience of what it is like to be on the council.

To ensure that the youth council works well with the municipality, the Hammerfest Youth Council has a coordinator and a committee secretary. They are the link to the other adults, take care of the practical aspects of the work and maintain continuity. Some of the coordinator’s most basic tasks are to give advice, follow up on the young people’s input and ensure respect when they interact with politicians and municipal employees. Coordinator for the Hammerfest Youth Council, Astrid Gaup Skancke, emphasises that it is important to constantly try to improve the quality of the work and to ensure that young people get into the political system and gain influence. Challenging young people and letting them challenge themselves in both larger and smaller contexts is important. By challenging the young people, they also experience how they can make a difference. After each year, the youth council organises a final meeting where they write an annual report on what they have done and not done. It is important to be honest when drawing up the report because you can learn from previous mistakes and experiences.

The youth councils' tips for other youth councils

With experience comes knowledge! Below, the youth councils share their best advice for both new and established youth councils.

1. **Speak up!** Don't be afraid to say what you think. Being heard does not necessarily mean that you always get your way. But you never know until you try. The youth councils at the workshop in Karasjok have many examples of where they have spoken their minds and had an impact.
2. **Make contact!** During the coronavirus pandemic, several meetings were held digitally – there is no reason to stop the work. The fact that it is easy to meet online means that elected officials and the public administration have no excuse for not communicating. A long trip is no longer an excuse. Contact other youth councils and politicians as well.
3. **Recruitment!** Both diversity and representativeness must be safeguarded, while at the same time, it is important to have engaged members. Pizza, soft drinks and meeting allowances are good enticements, while the youth councils emphasise that it is important to have engaged members, especially when there is a heavy workload. A good strategy is to use schools and other contexts where young people gather to advertise the council.
4. **Marketing!** Do you have the budget to buy jumpers, banners and get good photos taken? These things can be very useful when marketing the council. In addition, it is wise to use the media actively.
5. **Have a budget!** It is a good idea to have a budget at your disposal. You should set aside funds for travel, to highlight issues and for learning.
6. **Attend conferences!** There is a lot to learn from going to conferences. For example, the KS summit, the Norwegian State Housing Bank, the National Youth Conference.
7. **Open forum!** Does your local council provide an open forum for residents to come and raise issues? Use it. Write down everything you are wondering about and ask to come to a meeting.
8. **Right to speak!** Do you have issues you are especially passionate about? Take the podium at your local council meeting (it's a good idea to notify the mayor that you plan to attend).
9. **Follow the political meeting schedule!** In order to ensure real participation, it is important to plan meetings in conjunction with the political schedule and have the same case system, so that matters are not already decided before they come before the youth council.
10. **Cooperation with politicians and public administration!** Know who you should talk to, get to know the public administration, follow case proceedings and exert influence throughout the decision-making process.



Group work and the feedback tool, Mentimeter, accelerated the exchange of experience.

Participant experiences from the workshop in Karasjok

The workshop immediately generated a lot of positive feedback, and participants highlighted the balance between relevant training sessions and opportunities for participation, time for networking and for socialisation.

The workshop included games, collaborative tasks, brainstorming and lectures from the gathering's organisers and participants. There was also time to visit the Sámediggi (the Sámi Parliament), where the participants received a tour and information about Sámi culture and history, as well as how the Sámi Parliament is composed and how it works.

The participants were very positive about the exchanges of experience and the learning outcomes from the workshop. Sharing knowledge across youth councils is important in order to find good methods to ensure that youth participation actually works. In addition, participation in networking gatherings provides opportunities for future collaboration and contact with other youth councils.

Both newly started and more experienced youth councils benefit from such gatherings. For the newly started youth council in Karasjok, member Henriette Alexandra Mielonen says: “The workshop has been enlightening. We didn't know that much, but we have learned that we can travel around to seminars and talk to other young people and youth councils. We also didn't know that we could go abroad or that we could contact the media if we were unhappy about something! The more experienced youth council from Alta says that it is always useful to hear how others tackle the job. Even if you have been on a youth council for a long time, you never stop learning. Gaining insight into ideas, methods and models for organisation and implementation is of great value for youth councils in their further work.”

 **Visit and tour**
of the Sámediggi (the
Sámi Parliament).

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– Henriette Alexandra Mielonen, Karasjok Youth Council



