

Include+ Project Report: Ethical Partnerships between Youth Work and Technology Sectors

Creating guidance to support the youth work sector to build positive, ethical, values-led relationships with digital technology companies

Authored by: Alex Hutchison, Førr Data

Date: March 2026

Contents

Executive Summary	2
Introduction	2
IN+ Principles Overview	2
Methods and Approach	3
Mapping Activities with the IN+ Principles	9
Key Insights and Emerging Themes	11
Impact and Implications	15
Recommendations	17
Next Steps	17
Appendices.....	18
Appendix 1 - Menti Design.....	18
Appendix 2 – Menti Word Cloud output	20
Appendix 3 – Menti feedback on preferred types of guidance	21
Appendix 4 – An image of the MIRO board for the online workshop to review prototype tools	22
Appendix 5 – An image of the complete set of final products	23
Acknowledgements	24
References.....	24

Executive Summary

The INCLUDE+ Network, working in partnership with YouthLink Scotland, supported a six-month fellowship to develop guidance that will help the youth work sector build ethical and effective partnerships with the technology sector. This report outlines the project's approach and decision decisions, focusing on three core goals: understanding the alignment between youth work and the technology industry, identifying opportunities for ethical collaboration, and creating practical tools to help youth work organisations navigate partnerships with confidence and integrity.

Introduction

As digital tools increasingly shape the everyday experiences of young people, it is essential that youth work organisations are equipped to engage with the technology sector in ways that uphold youth work's core values, particularly young people's rights, inclusion, and wellbeing. At the same time, the sector faces a challenging funding landscape, making it important to explore new partnership opportunities that can both attract investment and broaden the experiences available to young people.

Across Scotland, youth work organisations vary widely in their maturity and confidence when it comes to collaborating with the technology sector. Some are unsure where to begin, others find the idea of engaging with technology partners daunting, while many already have well-established and evolving relationships.

This project sought to learn from that full spectrum of experience, alongside insights from technology organisations, to develop a set of tools and guidelines that can support the wider youth work sector, and in turn, help the technology sector engage more effectively and ethically.

IN+ Principles Overview

The INCLUDE+ network promotes participatory, equitable, and whole-system approaches to digital inclusion. The IN+ principles shaped the way that this project was delivered, in that they lead to a real focus on co-creation of the guidance using participatory methods. The IN+ principles also promoted thoughtfulness across thorny topics such as; how we individually and collectively think about ethical practice, power imbalances, and collaboration across different organisational and sectoral cultures – all of which were key factors in the way that successful ethical partnerships are approached and nurtured.

Methods and Approach

The fellowship used a design thinking methodology, guided by the structured Double Diamond model - a widely recognised model developed by the [UK Design Council](#) to support structured, human-centred problem solving. The Double Diamond is a set of two connected phases of divergent and convergent thinking, thereby having four phases. This approach allows for wide exploration of the problem (**Discover**), before then focusing on a clearly defined problem (**Define**), followed by generating possible solutions (**Develop**), and finally refining these solutions through testing and iteration (**Deliver**). This approach was selected as it aligns with the reflective, iterative practice promoted by the IN+ principles and is well-suited to designing guidance with and for youth work practitioners while incorporating the perspectives and operating realities of technology organisations.

Methods at a glance

The work combined four evidence streams, each informing the next:

- **Desk-based research** to map the youth work–technology partnership landscape and identify recurring ethical tensions and practical needs.
- **Semi-structured interviews** with stakeholders from both sectors to validate desk findings and surface lived experience. (7 participants from the youth work sector, 6 participants from the technology sector)
- **Large-scale co-creation activity** at the YouthLink Scotland Digital Youth Work Conference to test early hypotheses and gather rapid insight (95 participants).
- **Prototype validation workshop** with youth work practitioners and partners to refine tools through structured feedback and iteration (9 participants).

Outputs progressed from insight synthesis to eight prototypes to a refined final toolset supported by short “How To” guides.

Discover Phase

The Discover phase began with structured desk research examining the current partnership landscape between youth work and technology organisations. This focused on: common partnership models; engagement drivers; recurring risks and ethical failure modes (including power imbalance); required roles and competencies; notable examples of effective practice; and typical barriers to ethical partnership working.

A stakeholder mapping exercise, undertaken in collaboration with YouthLink Scotland, identified priority voices across both sectors for interview and later testing. Youth work stakeholders included practitioners working directly with young people, digital inclusion

leads, income generation/fundraising leads, and organisational directors. Technology stakeholders included social impact and corporate responsibility leads from multinational firms and leaders from smaller technology organisations, including those actively engaged in third-sector partnerships. The mapping approach intentionally combined existing trusted relationships with new entrants, particularly from the technology sector, to avoid over-reliance on familiar networks.

Throughout this phase, the project maintained a map of partnership examples on a MIRO board. This supported early sense-making by enabling partnership examples to be tagged and clustered across multiple dimensions (e.g., partnership type, driver, risk profile), facilitating pattern recognition and informing subsequent interview prompts.

Define Phase

Insights from the Discover Phase showed that while there is strong ethical intent across the youth sector, there is a lack of coherent, tech-specific frameworks to support ethical partnerships with the technology sector. Existing guidance is fragmented, often rooted in fundraising or general youth work ethics, and does not adequately address the power imbalances or commercial drivers inherent in technology partnerships. Youth organisations frequently carry responsibility for safeguarding young people's interests without having the resourced roles, competencies, or negotiating leverage to do so effectively, while technology sector motivations are often misaligned with youth sector values and timescales. Although examples of ethical practice exist, they are isolated and not easily transferable. Overall, the exercise highlighted a clear need for shared language, practical partnership models, and human-centred ethical prompts that helps youth organisations engage confidently, critically, and on more equal terms with technology partners.

These insights informed the development of a semi-structured interview protocol to be used across both youth work practitioners and technology sector representatives, to hear their personal perspectives and experiences on cross sector partnering, whether they be positive or negative. By hearing these stories through a more personal and discursive lens, the design of the guidelines could be more responsive to the diversity of size, scale, and circumstances of a variety of organisations.

Interview questions focused on four thematic areas and conversations were based on the following interview guide, allowing for flexible probing to explore interesting avenues of thought:

1. Intro, ethics and values

- a) Can you describe your role and how it intersects with the third / tech sector?

- b) Have you been involved in any cross-sector partnerships before? What did those experiences teach you?
- c) How do you define 'ethical' in this context?
- d) What values do you believe should underpin ethical partnerships between the third and tech sectors?
- e) Are there any principles you feel are often overlooked or undervalued in cross-sector work?

2. Power, risk, and trust

- a) What power imbalances do you think exist between the third and tech sectors?
- b) How can trust be built and maintained across sectors with different cultures, incentives and capacities?
- c) What risks do you think third sector organisations face when partnering with tech companies?
- d) What risks do tech companies face when partnering with the third sector?
- e) How should guidelines help surface and mitigate these risks?

3. Practical components of partnership working

- a) What concrete elements or commitments would you want to see in a partnership guideline?
- b) How should accountability be built into these partnerships?
- c) What kind of support or infrastructure would help third sector organisations engage ethically and confidently with tech?
- d) What does meaningful participation from young people look like to you?
- e) How can we ensure youth, parent or community voices are not tokenised but actively shape the partnership?

4. Innovation & Close

- a) What opportunities do you see for tech to support third sector goals in ethical ways?
- b) Are there any examples of partnerships you admire or think others could learn from?

- c) Is there anything that you think should be avoided in these guidelines?
- d) Is there anything else you'd like to add that we haven't covered?

Questions were intentionally consistent across both groups to support comparative interpretation of how each cohort understood its own sector and perceived the other.

With regards to the semi-structured interview process – all interviews were conducted as online virtual meetings, ranging from 45 minutes to 1 hour. To protect privacy, interviews were not recorded. Participants consented to the capture of contemporaneous notes were captured in a private MIRO workspace, and confirmation was made that quotes would not be directly attributed to any participants. Notes were subsequently anonymised and used for thematic analysis. Access to the information on the MIRO board is completely secure and the MIRO board will be deleted within three months of sign off of the completed fellowship.

Develop Phase

Interview notes were analysed using a synthesis framework that combined the themes identified by desk research and used in the interview guide with capturing unanticipated insights in what people said in the interviews and adding those as new topics. Analysis was organised into eight thematic areas: Values & Ethics; Power & Trust; Risks & Barriers; Practical Guidelines; Inclusivity & Reflexivity; Innovation; Accountability & Governance; and Avoidances. Themes were clustered in three swim lanes; youth work sector insights, technology sector insights and a third area for cross-sector tensions. This structure supported transparent traceability from evidence to design decisions.

Findings informed the design of a Menti-based co-creation activity delivered at the YouthLink Scotland Digital Youth Work Conference, with 95 participants. Over a 20-minute session, participants responded to live prompts exploring: sector sentiment; perceived alignment/misalignment between youth and technology organisations; scenario-based stress testing of partnership examples; drivers and barriers; and priority needs for guidance and tools. This provided rapid validation of emerging themes and highlighted which prompts and tools would be most usable in practice. See Appendix 1 for details of the Menti activity and Figures 2 and 3 in Appendix 2 for some snapshots of Menti outputs.

Insights from the Menti co-creation session, combined with interview findings, informed the development of eight prototype tools, which were then taken forward for validation. Developing a wider set of prototypes enabled all candidate tools to be reviewed within a single workshop and created space for participants to indicate clear preferences about which tools should be prioritised for refinement. To support decision-making, the tools

were paired by the need they addressed, allowing participants to assess whether one tool, the other, or both were required.

These tools were;

1. A Youth Work / Tech Partnership Framework - a one-page framework wheel, which can support youth work organisations in considering all aspects required for their own bespoke Ethical Partnering Policy
2. A Five-Step 'Unique Selling Point' Reflection Guide - a series of five questions and subsequent prompts to help organisations reflect on what they can offer in a partnership – with an option of posing the same set of questions (without prompts) to the technology partner to home in on what their unique offer is
3. A Risk Assessment Tool - a sequence of scorable risk considerations with space for users to note mitigations for an updated score
4. A Risk Decision Tree - a one-page visual take on the risk assessment tool with a yes / no decision flow
5. An Ethical Partnerships Charter (One-page summary) - a list of commitment statements to be shared and agreed between partners, covering purpose, people, practice and partnership
6. An Ethical Partnerships Charter (Detailed version) - a longer list of principles to be shared and agreed between partners
7. A Partnership Agreement Checklist - a two page / ten section list of prompts to work through when developing a partnership agreement
8. A Partnership Agreement Template - some plain language paragraphs to consider including in a partnership agreement

Deliver Phase

A validation workshop brought together a diverse group of youth work practitioners (organisations at different stages of partnering maturity), alongside YouthLink Scotland and INCLUDE+ representatives. The session was hosted on an open MIRO board and enabled multiple participation modes: spoken discussion, written comments during the session, and asynchronous feedback afterwards.

Prototypes were organised as a four-stage “partnering journey” to reflect how organisations typically move from intent to agreement:

1. Frame Your Unique Value

Youth Work / Tech Partnership Framework

Five-Step 'USP' Reflection Guide

2. Determine the Risk

Risk Assessment Tool
Risk Decision Tree

3. Set the Principles

Ethical Partnerships Charter (One-page summary)
Ethical Partnerships Charter (Detailed version)

4. Write the Agreement

Partnership Agreement Checklist
Partnership Agreement Template



Figure 1. Image from the workshop MIRO board that was used to position the eight prototype tools

Participants reviewed each tool to identify strengths, gaps, risks, design considerations, and “avoidances” (what could be misused or misunderstood). Feedback indicated clear preferences about which tools were most usable and what adaptations would improve accessibility. The workshop also surfaced an additional need for “getting started” guidance to support organisations at the earliest stages of considering partnerships.

Following the workshop, preferred tools were refined based on participant feedback and follow-up discussions with YouthLink Scotland. This resulted in a final toolset comprising:

- **Getting Started Guide** – A guide which breaks down youth work / technology partnerships into practical achievable steps. This guide sets the scene for the other four tools.

- **Unique Value Blueprint** (with How-To guide) – A set of six questions with sub-prompts to use as a reflective exercise within the organisation to identify the unique selling points that you bring to any potential partnership. These questions can also be posed to a potential partner.
- **Ethical Partnership Charter** (with How-To guide) – A example / editable / ready-to-use charter for both partners to agree to. This charter has ten charter statements against categories of Purpose, People, Practice and Partnership.
- **Ethical Partnerships Risk Decision Tree** (with Linear Version and How-To guide) – A series of decision-making questions relating to partnership risks, to support evaluation of a potential partnership.
- **Ethical Partnership Agreement Checklist** (with How-To guide) – A quick reference tool to ensure both parties entering into the partnership have considered all key agreement elements.

Methodological considerations and limitations

Although a wide array of both youth work sector and technology sector participants (as identified through the stakeholder mapping exercise) were invited to interview, the final interview pool was relatively small, meaning that insights gained can not represent sector-wide findings. By having an approach that prioritised participant safety and openness by not recording interviews there was a real honesty in the discussions held and participants shared valuable insights as a result. Reliance on written notes may have reduced verbatim precision to an extent. Stakeholder recruitment also leveraged existing networks, which may under-represent actors not currently engaged in cross-sector partnering. Finally, the conference co-creation sample reflects attendees who are already interested in digital youth work and may not represent the full diversity of the sector. Young people were not directly engaged in this six-month activity, based on advice taken from YouthLink Scotland at the outset of planning the approach. It was felt that given the short timescales and the fact that the end users of the guidance developed would be youth work practitioners themselves, that engaging young people in guidance design would not be a meaningful use of young people's time and perspectives. With regards to youth engagement this was carefully weaved through the guidelines themselves to ensure that youth participation is a key consideration in the establishment and running of ethical partnerships.

Mapping Activities with the IN+ Principles

The fellowship was deliberately designed to apply the six INCLUDE+ Principles: Holistic Approach, Sustainability, Diversity, Responsiveness, Collective Care, and Meaningful Digital Inclusion. The use of the double-diamond methodology (Discover, Define, Develop,

Deliver), supported application of these principles through the project's research design, engagement activities, and participatory tool development.

1. Holistic Approach

A holistic perspective shaped the entire project, recognising that ethical youth work–technology partnerships are influenced by social, cultural, emotional, and organisational factors. Desk research examined interconnected issues such as power dynamics, partnership models, risks, competencies, and structural barriers. Interviews explored ethics, power, innovation, and practicalities together, highlighting the emotional and structural dimensions of partnership work. MIRO mapping further illustrated the breadth of partnership modalities. These activities reflected the IN+ principle that ethical partnership building requires understanding the broader contexts that shape practice from two very culturally different sectors. A challenge in applying this principle lay in creating guidelines that meet a broad set of size, scale and readiness to approach partnerships, with such a broad range of interdependencies.

2. Sustainability

The project prioritised long-term impact by creating tools and processes that organisations can use and adapt beyond the fellowship. Outputs such as the Risk Decision Tree, Unique Value Blueprint, and Partnership Agreement Checklist were designed to build sustained capacity for ethical decision-making. A co-creation session with ninety-five participants fostered shared ownership, increasing the likelihood of future uptake. Collaboration with YouthLink Scotland and INCLUDE+ ensure alignment with wider sector strategies and adjacent activities. The project's emphasis on reflection, values alignment, and intentional decision-making mirrored the IN+ focus on resilient, sustainable practice.

3. Diversity

Diversity was embedded through the intentional inclusion of varied organisational types, identities, and experiences. Stakeholder mapping represented everything from small youth work groups to national organisations, incorporating a breadth of partnership experiences. Technology sector participation similarly ranged from small developer organisations to large global technology firms. All interviewees were treated as experts, whether offering professional, lived, or organisational insight, reflecting the IN+ commitment to diverse forms of knowledge. Participatory tools (MIRO, Menti, online workshops) enabled contributors with varying communication styles and access needs to participate fully. This ensured the final tools reflect multiple contexts rather than a narrow view of partnership working.

4. Responsiveness

Responsiveness guided the project's iterative design. The double-diamond approach

enabled continual refinement based on emerging insights. Interview themes shaped early prototypes, which were then adapted through real-time feedback during the large co-creation session. The online validation workshop offered flexible input options, enabling written, verbal, and asynchronous reflection. Participant feedback directly informed which tools were prioritised, how they were adapted, and the creation of an additional Getting-Started Guide. This iterative process aligned with IN+ principles of agility and openness to emerging challenges.

5. Collective Care

Collective care underpinned the project through safeguarding, respect for participant comfort, and shared ownership. Interviews were not recorded to reduce pressure and support psychological safety and openness. Workshops were designed to accommodate varying capacities, offering multiple ways to engage, with a warm up to using the MIRO technology at the beginning of the session. YouthLink Scotland and INCLUDE+ representatives were actively involved throughout, ensuring transparency and collective responsibility. The tools themselves emphasise mutual benefit, ethical alignment, and shared responsibility, modelling the caring partnership practices the project seeks to promote.

6. Meaningful Digital Inclusion

Meaningful digital inclusion was integrated into both process and output. The tools developed promote ways of youth work organisations engaging with engaging with technology companies in a variety of formats to increase support digital literacy for young people. The guidelines also promote supporting organisations to assess risk, power, data implications, and values alignment, moving beyond basic digital skills. Within the fellowship itself, MIRO and Menti were used with accessible, flexible participation options, modelling inclusive digital practice. Interview topics encouraged consideration of how digital engagement affects young people, while workshops ensured participants shaped tools that promote equitable digital participation.

Across all stages, the fellowship was shaped by the INCLUDE+ Principles, resulting in tools that are practical, inclusive, value-driven, and grounded in the lived realities of the youth work and technology sectors.

Key Insights and Emerging Themes

Values & ethics must lead or partnerships will falter

Partnerships that keep youth work values front-and-centre, i.e., rights, safety, dignity, and meaningful participation, are seen as both credible and durable by both sets of sector participants. Transparent intent-setting on both sides is essential. One participant in

interview suggested “state your intentions on what you’re looking to do and then ask them [the technology partner] for the same.” Organisations from both sectors explicitly weigh reputational alignment and will walk away from misaligned offers. For example, there were concerns from the youth work sector about platform safety or red lines around data sharing. While concerns from the technology sector exist around only wanting resources or the association with a ‘big name’ rather than sharing truly aligned intentions. The youth work sector participants were keen to highlight that “Nothing about us without us” and co-design with young people are viewed as ethical baselines within the partnership, not optional add-ons.

This builds the case to begin every engagement by agreeing shared values, public-facing intentions, and non-negotiables (e.g., safeguarding standards, data ethics, and reputational “red lines”).

Power, trust & reciprocity need to be designed in

Power imbalances appear in both directions – technology organisations may seek brand elevation while youth work organisations seek resources, which can distort goals unless reciprocity is explicit. One rural youth work organisation highlighted that geography significantly limits access to technology partners: opportunities for engagement are scarce, and this scarcity can weaken negotiating leverage. In such contexts, the need to secure any partnership at all can create an uneven starting position, increasing the risk that terms are shaped more by partner availability than by mutual fit.

Youth work sector participants highlighted “money is power” dynamics and struggle with restricted funding conditions and tokenistic youth engagement. One participant recommended asking early in the relationship building: “Is this part of a tender?” to surface hidden drivers. Power imbalances are not just driven by size and funding but can be based around influence, including where a sufficiently well positioned charity with notable connections can hold power even over large technology companies. Trust grows where due diligence is mutual and where youth organisations negotiate value rather than “going cap-in-hand.”

Building reciprocity into the engagement model (mutual benefits, shared decision-making, and role clarity) and normalising early questions about funding provenance and procurement context is key.

Practical readiness & governance are make-or-break

Participants called for clear Statements of Work, roles, milestones, and a single point of contact to avoid “side-of-desk” drift. There were a wide range of models evidenced from the technology sector participants, which were driven by organizational policy on social

impact. Some had very structured and formal ways of engaging, while others had more leeway on what type of engagement they can use their team for. The less structure, the more likelihood that other core business priorities will take over. A partnership agreement checklist was explicitly requested, alongside clarity on legal clauses, data stewardship, GDPR, and safeguarding from day one. Without this scaffolding, scope creep, payment delays, and “lost in translation” moments become likely.

It is important to start small but formally, with pilot scope, Statements of Work, decision rights, check-ins, and compliance guardrails, before then scaling. Providing templates and briefing guidance can level the playing field.

Risk management is key - from reputational hazards to long-term costs

Participants from both sectors flagged reputational risk (e.g., misalignment with mission, supply-chain harms, platform safety controversies) and hidden total cost of ownership (“building is free but what about the long-term costs”). External risks (infrastructure, approvals), scope drift, cloud/platform lock-in, and uneven technical knowledge can compound exposure if not surfaced early. Operational risks were also raised in terms of clarity around governance and accountability, which can be mitigated by building solid and trusting relationships. A specific risk around the fluidity of teams and priorities of the fast-paced technology industry was called out by the youth work sector, with a participant citing that an entire team that they were working with on a project was suddenly shut down. This type of risk can be mitigated through implementing a strong legal agreement around commitments.

Using a risk decision tree and due-diligence checklist that covers ethics, finance, technology architecture, and communications, along with explicit “avoidances” for deal-breakers will mitigate this concern.

Inclusion means compensated, accessible, youth-led participation

A key message from the youth work sector is to “Pay people what they’re worth,” avoid tokenism, and design multiple and engaging ways to participate. Accessibility standards (e.g., Web Content Accessibility Guidelines level ambitions), age and ability segmentation, and attention to carers’ influence were emphasised. Inclusion is measured by agency and voice, not just attendance - “what would you like them [the communities] to know?” would guide partnership design choices.

Clarifying the budget for youth participation, publishing accessibility commitments, and embedding feedback loops that let young people shape scope, language, and evaluation criteria would strengthen inclusion aspirations.

Innovation is welcome when it is responsible and purpose driven

Stakeholders are enthusiastic about AI, VR, and game-based learning, but cautioned that anxiety rises as novelty rises, and that “cool tech” can crowd out learning if it is not accessible at group scale or clearly tied to outcomes. Early-career technology volunteers value opportunities to build communication skills but require structure and supervision.

Innovation should be treated as a means, not an end. It is important to co-design problem statements, test scenarios with young people, and plan for facilitation, throughput, and safeguarding in immersive formats.

Outcomes & measurement - co-design what “good” looks like

Partners want measurable outcomes that matter, but not just commercial Key Performance Indicators. There was strong support for co-designed Key Performance Indicators, narrative evidence (“strength of story”), and transparency about why a particular framework or method is used (demystifying jargon).

Agreeing a small set of shared Key Performance Indicators (youth benefit, equity, safety, skills progression) and evidence types (quantitative and narrative), as well as documenting how they will be reviewed and communicated would support both parties in a partnership.

Relationship pathways top one-off activities

Stakeholders prefer a pathway of engagement: start with short, scoped pilots; establish “skin in the game” commitments; plan growth; then formalise into a longer-term relationship. They cautioned against tick-box volunteering and favouring structured roles. It was proposed that an intermediary (e.g., sector bodies) could accelerate matchmaking, translation, and trust-building.

Publishing a partnering ladder (from “explore” to “embed”), with expectations, decision gates, and time commitments at each step could be useful. However, it would be difficult to create a one size fits all tool for this purpose.

Funding realities - diversify and name the tradeoffs

There’s appetite for unrestricted funding and in-kind support (space, kit, mentoring), but caution about sponsorship optics and mission drift. Many warned against over-reliance on recurring grants and encouraged diversified income (“heart of a charity, mind of a business”). Pooling efforts across the third sector can help, but internal competition for the same pots is a persistent tension. There is also a precarious tightrope to walk in terms of knowing how and when to ask for money.

Mapping out acceptable funding sources and red-lines upfront and establishing governance for reviewing offers (including procurement-linked motivations) case-by-case would benefit bigger organisations.

Communication & ways of working - demystify and document

Technology jargon and assumptions can leave youth orgs “on the back foot.” Stakeholders asked for briefing templates, clarity on roles and responsibilities, and explainers for methods (“explain frameworks - with the ‘why’”). A named relationship manager, realistic timescales, and planned check-ins reduce friction.

It is important to model plain-English in briefs and shared glossaries; set cadence and decision rights early; and ensure accountability “down to individual level” on both sides.

Cross-Cutting Tensions to Navigate

- **Purpose vs. PR:** Authentic youth outcomes vs. brand-led storytelling and “sponsorship” framing – addressed by creation of the ‘Unique Value Blueprint’ to really bring purpose into central focus, as well as the ‘Ethical Partnership Charter’ having ‘Purpose’ as the primary section.
- **Speed vs. Safety:** Tech’s pace vs. safeguarding, governance, and consent processes in youth work – addressed through the suite of tools allowing multiple points of reflection, without being excessive or burdensome.
- **Innovation vs. Inclusion:** Immersive, novel tools vs. accessibility, throughput, and group facilitation needs – addressed through the tools highlighting values, safeguarding, inclusive throughout to ensure that it prioritised appropriately.
- **Short-Term Wins vs. Sustainable Capacity:** Pilot enthusiasm vs. the resource needed to embed and scale – addressed in the Getting Started Guide which highlights the importance of starting small and growing from there.

What all of this means for the tools developed - why these, why now

These findings directly shaped the final toolset requests and via the workshop validation, especially the call for a Partnership Agreement Checklist, risk-based decision support, and “how to brief” guidance. The appetite for a Getting-Started Guide reflects the need to reduce jargon, set shared expectations, and start ethically while building confidence.

Impact and Implications

Impact on Young People & Communities

- Safer, values-led engagement - The Ethical Partnership Charter and Risk Decision Tree give youth organisations a practical way to uphold rights, dignity, safeguarding, and data ethics as non-negotiables, translating participants' emphasis on transparency, “nothing about us without us,” and reputational red lines into everyday practice.
- More meaningful participation - By budgeting for paid involvement and providing multiple ways to contribute, organisations can move beyond tokenism and embed agency, accessibility, and cultural relevance, core elements of meaningful digital inclusion.
- Better navigation of emerging technologies - Guidance that frames innovation as a means (not an end) helps ensure AI/VR and game-based approaches are inclusive, youth-appropriate, and facilitated at group scale, addressing concerns that “cool tech” can raise anxiety and crowd out learning if not designed well.

Impact on Youth Work & Technology Organisations

- Confidence and parity at the table - The Unique Value Blueprint and Getting-Started Guide help youth organisations articulate strengths, negotiate reciprocity, and avoid “cap-in-hand” dynamics, meeting the expressed need to clarify intentions, roles, and benefits on both sides.
- Reduced operational risk - The Partnership Agreement Checklist address failure points flagged by participants, scope drift, unclear accountability, payment delays, GDPR/safeguarding ambiguity, by formalising responsibilities, decision rights, cadence, and guardrails from day one.
- Sustainable capacity, not one-offs - The Getting-Started Guide that encourages starting small and building up the relationship as well as the potential to diversify in-kind pathways (space, kit, mentoring) respond to calls for long-term capability over short-term PR or tick-box volunteering.

Influence on Digital Policy & Sector Standards

- Practice-informed standards - The tools operationalise principles that align with inclusive digital environments, offering a concrete foundation for sector guidance and funder expectations.
- Ethical due-diligence norms - Consistent use of risk, charter, and agreement tools can normalise transparent intent-setting, red-lines, and public accountability, contributing to better sector self-regulation.

The tools translate the project's insights into every day, reusable practices that can improve safety, equity, and effectiveness in youth-tech partnerships, advancing INCLUDE+'s vision of inclusive digital environments while creating a practical bridge between policy principles and frontline decision-making. As these tools are adopted, with a youth work sector webinar in plan to encourage adoption, the sector gains a common language, stronger governance, and a clearer pathway from exploration to embedded, ethical collaboration.

Recommendations

While this fellowship activity has created tangible outputs ready for adoption by the youth work sector, further work, subject to resource availability, could be done to embed the broader partnering concepts into practice and build capacity across the variety of organisation types that this work seeks to support. Follow up activities could include:

- Partnership Clinics - Time-boxed sessions to review prospective partnerships using the tools, to support building organisational capacity and confidence.
- “How to” Mentoring - Short courses on writing clear briefs, Statements of Work, and co-designed Key Performance Indicators; demystifying frameworks and cross sectoral jargon.
- Matchmaking Function - A light-touch service to broker relationships, translate expectations, and maintain a case-study repository of ethical exemplars.
- Matchmaking Event - A one off speed-dating type event to bring partnership supply and demand together, with clear criteria to build meaningful connections.
- Innovative Tooling – Development of a technology solution which helps users to unpack the content of the tool in a more interactive way, such as a chatbot.

Next Steps

An adoption webinar is planned for early May 2026 to invite youth work practitioners to hear about the tools and participate in some interactive activities to bring the tools to life. Beyond that, YouthLink Scotland will continue to promote the tools and guidelines and consult with youth workers, technology partners, and young people on their adoption. Insights gathered will feed into the INCLUDE+ Digital Youth Work Research Hub as evidence of impact.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Menti Design

Ethical by Design: Co-creating what 'good' looks like in Tech Partnerships

1. What ONE word describes how you currently **feel** about youth-work tech partnerships?
2. How **aligned** do you feel the **youth work and tech sectors** currently are in terms of **shared purpose**? (Where 10 is strongly aligned and 0 is not aligned)
3. Scenario One; The MikMok Youth Creators Challenge

Scenario One for Menti

A youth charity partners with MikMok to **teach** young people about **online safety** and **creative expression**. MikMok provides **funding** and **training** materials.

In return, MikMok asks for:

- A commitment that young people produce short videos about "**positive platform use**"
- Moderation **feedback** from youth workers on MikMok's safety **tools**
- Permission to **feature** selected **youth videos** in a public campaign

Rank the following statements from Strongly disagree to Strongly agree:

- Young people are creating content that benefits MikMok more than themselves
- Moderation feedback is turning staff into unpaid testers
- Public campaigns expose young people to unwanted visibility
- MikMok is extracting more value than its giving

Do you go ahead with the 'MikMok Youth Creators Challenge' partnership?

4. Scenario Two: The Boogle Youth Futures Lab

Scenario Two for Menti

A youth organisation partners with Boogle to run **workshops on digital careers**. Boogle **funds** the programme and provides **mentors**.

In return, Boogle asks for:

- **Early access to recruit** the most engaged young participants into their internship pipeline
- A requirement that all workshops use Boogle **tools exclusively**
- A **branded case study** featuring the youth organisation's logo alongside Boogle's

Rank the following statements from Strongly disagree to Strongly agree:

- The partnership is still centred on young people's needs

- The programme is more a recruitment funnel than youth development
- Young people are being pushed into endorsing a single company's ecosystem
- Boogle is extracting more value than its giving

Do you go ahead with the 'Boogle Youth Futures Lab' partnership?

5. What's the biggest **barrier** or **risk** in forming partnerships with tech companies?
6. Rank the following **elements** by how important they are for **guidance** on ethical partnerships
 - Values & Ethics
 - Power & Trust
 - Risks & Barriers
 - Inclusivity & Fairness
 - Accountability & Governance
 - Practicality & Usability
7. Rank the following **types of guidance** on ethical partnerships that you are most likely to use
 - Partnership Principles
 - Top Tips (e.g., Governance FAQs)
 - Case Studies
 - Risk Assessment Tools
 - Agreement Checklists
 - Pitch Development Guide

Appendix 3 – Menti feedback on preferred types of guidance



Figure 3. Preferred formats for guidelines as ranked by conference attendees on Menti

Appendix 4 – An image of the MIRO board for the online workshop to review prototype tools

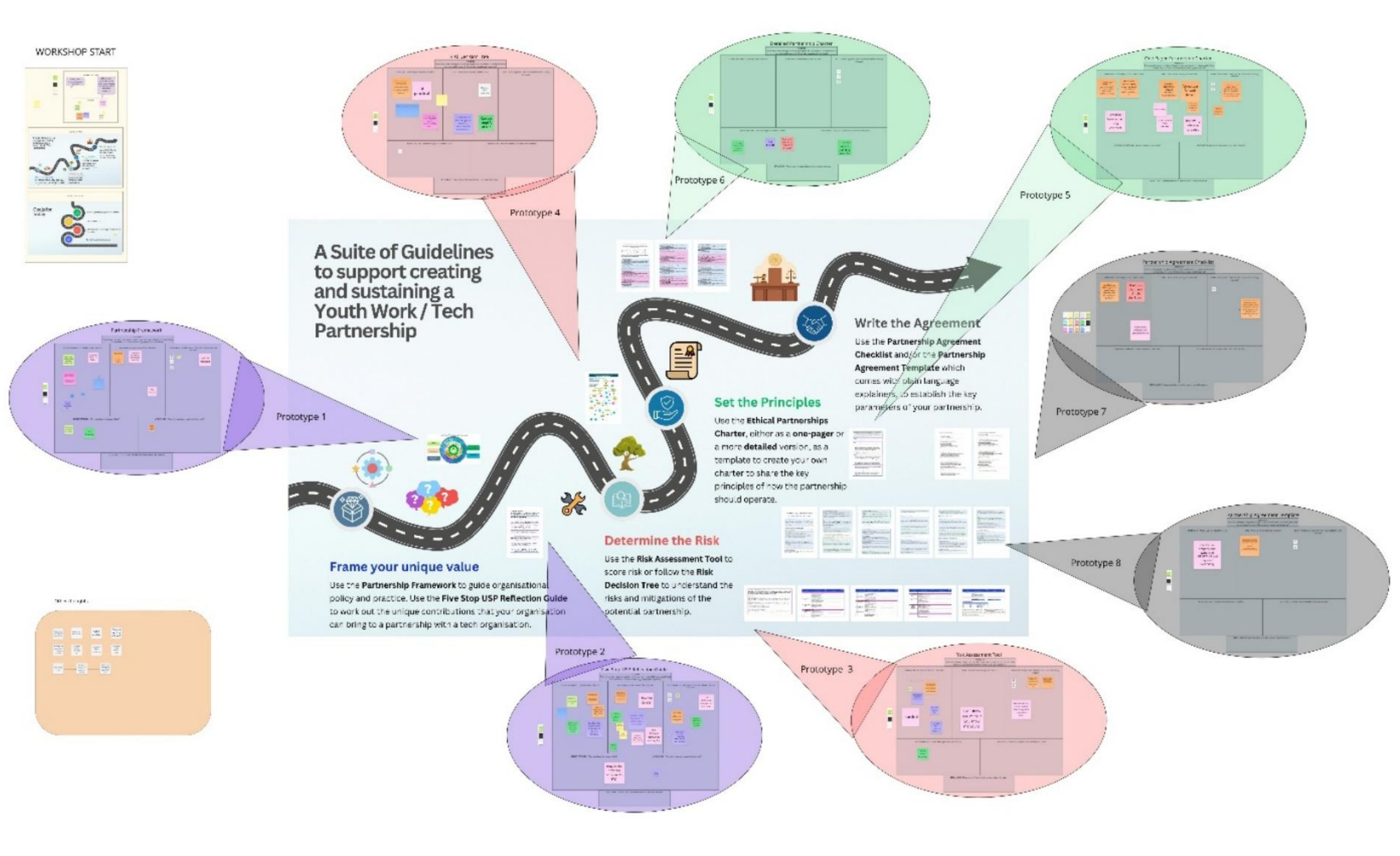


Figure 4. An anonymised visual of the workshop Miro board with prototype guidelines and participant feedback

Appendix 5 – An image of the complete set of final products

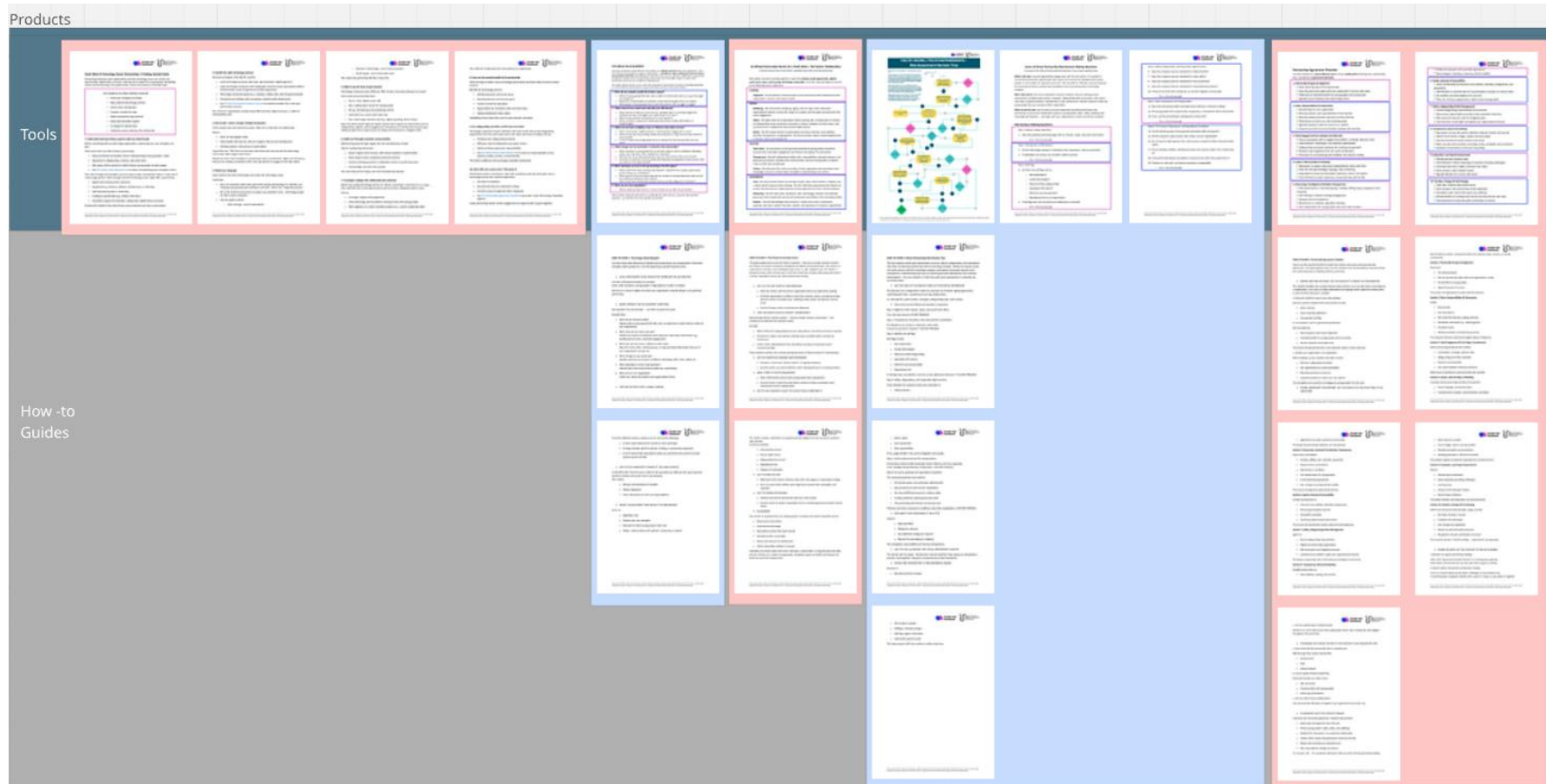


Figure 5. The finalised guidelines collated in one view

Acknowledgements

The author would like to express sincere thanks to the INCLUDE+ Network for funding this fellowship and enabling the exploration of ethical, inclusive approaches to youth-technology partnerships. Deep appreciation is also extended to YouthLink Scotland for their partnership throughout the project, for shaping the requirements, championing the work at the 2026 Digital Youth Work Conference, and collaborating closely on the development of the project outputs.

Gratitude is owed to the many youth work and third-sector practitioners who generously contributed their time, insights, and lived expertise through interviews, surveys, and prototype reviews. Their perspectives were essential to grounding the work in the realities of practice. The author also thanks the technology-sector social impact leads and business leaders who shared their knowledge and experience through interviews, enriching the project's understanding of cross-sector partnership dynamics.

References

Adrian Bridgwater (2019) Why Partners Partner: 7-Reasons IT Organizations Collaborate, Forbes.

Bjorn Manuel Hegelich (2024) The Importance of Building the Right Partnerships as a High Technology Startup.

Brianne Lynch (2025) Big Tech's Favorite Startups: The New Era of Strategic Alliances, EquityZen Blog.

Charlotte di Corpo (2021) Ethical Fundraising Policy for Sponsorship & Charitable Donations, Glasgow Life.

Consultancy.uk (2018) Ecosystems and partnerships a revenue driver for IT and Tech companies, Consultancy.uk.

Culture & Business Scotland, Board of Directors (2023) Ethical Fundraising & Funding Policy, Culture & Business Scotland.

Daughery, Paul; Lacy, Peter; Podder, Sanjay; Kumar Singh, Shalabh (2022) Uniting Technology and Sustainability, Accenture.

Fundraising Regulator (2025) Code of Fundraising Practice.

Ina M. Sebastian, Peter Weill, and Stephanie L. Woerner (2020) Three Strategies to Grow via Digital Partnering, MIT CISR.

Iryna Sussha, Boriana Rukanova, Anneke Zuiderwijk, J. Ramon Gil-Garcia, Mila Gasco Hernandez (2023) Achieving voluntary data sharing in cross sector partnerships: Three partnership models.

Kent Buse, Andrew M. Harmer (2006) Seven habits of highly effective global public-private health partnerships: Practice and potential.

KidsAid (2025) KidsAid Corporate Partnership Policy.

Koch, Thorsten; Windsperger, Josef (2017) Seeing through the network: Competitive advantage in the digital economy, EconStor.

Peake, Ken DSW; Gaffney, Susan MS; Surko, Michael PhD (2006) Capacity-building for Youth Workers Through Community-based Partnerships.

Peiyao Qiu ,Benrui Chang (2025) The impact of digital transformation on open innovation performance, Research journals, PLOS.

Rohit Sharma, Mohit Singla (2025) Reimagining Innovation Through Strategic Collaboration: A Case-Based Study Using Adecumas, IJCRT.org.

Sarah Banks (2010) From oaths to rulebooks: a critical examination of codes of ethics for the social professions.

Sarah Banks & Umme Imam (2012) Principles, Rules, and Qualities: An Ethical Framework for Youth Work.

Sylvia Rowe, Nick Alexander, Alison Kretser, Robert Steele, Molly Kretsch, Rhona Applebaum, Fergus Clydesdale, Deborah Cummins, Eric Hentges, Juan Navia, Ashley Jarvis, Ken Falci (2013) Principles for building public-private partnerships to benefit food safety, nutrition, and health research.

The National Youth Agency (2004) Ethical Conduct in Youth Work, a statement of values and principles from The National Youth Agency.

UK Youth, Director, External Relations (2024) UK Youth Ethical Fundraising Policy.

Yassanye, Diana M. MSeD; Anason, Andrea P. MPH; Barrett, Drue H. PhD (2021) Mitigating Ethical Risks in Public-Private Partnerships in Public Health.

Youth Scotland (2025) Acting on Funding, Youth Scotland.