



Embracing youth leadership: A playbook for intergenerational dialogues

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INGKA GROUP
An IKEA retailer

Overview

This playbook offers practical strategies for engaging youth and fostering intergenerational dialogues based on the Ingka Young Leaders Forum, a global youth advisory council. It highlights five key pillars for successful youth-led corporate activism.

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Participating in the Ingka Young Leaders Forum has been a transformative experience. Engaging top-level executives of one of the biggest companies in the world and working together on how to tackle challenges related to sustainability has changed the way I view the private sector for the better. If more companies replicated this forum, I AM SURE we would increase the speed at which we reach net zero.

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Eyal Weintraub

National Geographic Young Explorer

Foreword

Recently, we have seen a drastic decline in trust in our leaders – this is even more evident among our youth. In a time when we need hope and action to guide us more than ever, we must cultivate trust that we can solve the challenges together. Lack of trust drives lack of hope and leads to cynicism. More than ever, we need optimism and collective action.

A few years ago, as Ingka Group, we took the initiative to connect leading CEOs and youth activists from climate action movements around the world. After a divisive start to the meeting, characterized by polarization, oversimplification, and ignorance, we built a shared reality and ended the meeting having made many new friends. The result was beyond our expectations.

The rules of engagement have been simple. Young leaders have access to any person employed in the company, any room, and any information. Together, we set an agenda for what to scrutinize, with a promise never to edit or refuse any topic.

We have had numerous meetings with the Young Leaders and the IKEA/Ingka Group Management in full. We have met the Ingka Group Supervisory Board and co-workers. We have spent time in our many locations – our forest, production, and at IKEA premises throughout the value chain. We also offered the young leaders the opportunity to write an unedited page in our annual sustainability report for the previous financial year. At COP and New York Climate Week meetings, we have collaborated to influence the political agenda with excellent results.

As we summarize the first three years of our engagement, we celebrate the collaboration. I profoundly believe that transparency and dialogue lead to only good things: better insights, better results from collaboration, speed in execution, and a deeper respect for each other and the challenges we face.

I am very grateful for the collaboration and look forward to creating real change and building even more trust together in the future.

Jesper Brodin

CEO Ingka Group | IKEA





The power of youth engagement

Gen Z will make up a quarter of the world's workforce by the end of this decade. Gen Z is also the first generation growing up as digital natives, with the internet integrated into their life experiences.

Youth voices are driving a transformative shift, and the sustainability of a company and the actions they take to promote human rights for all workers increasingly influential in consumer choices. This has pushed companies, more than ever before, to think beyond making profits towards how their business practices can be actors for good in society.

Not only do young employees demand that their employers create effective professional development pipelines and ensure transparent communication about company decisions, but it is also highly desirable to any company's success to integrate younger insights into business strategies.

Engaging with young leaders in conversations can help address challenges and opportunities, creating a stronger and more future-ready business.

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To me, the most important aspect of participating in the Ingka Young Leaders Forum was how it changed my perspective on the private sector, which I previously saw as something distant. I went from seeing it as one of the sectors most responsible for climate change, which it is, to recognizing it as a sector from which solutions can and must also emerge.

What I liked most was humanizing such a large company by getting to know the people who make it up, learning a lot about how a company makes decisions, and how it opened doors for working together at international events, like maintaining the 1.5°C ambition at the COP and participating in very interesting B Team events at Climate Week.

Nicole Becker

Co-Founder of Jovenes por el Clima Argentina

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Ingka Young Leaders Forum: our journey

The Ingka Young Leaders Forum has evolved over the last three years (2021-2024), composed of more than 20 young leaders between 17 and 30 years of age from various countries, including Australia, Argentina, Canada, China, France, Israel, Kenya, Malaysia, Moldova, Morocco, the UK, and the USA. These young leaders have each founded organizations, led movements, and built platforms that address pressing global issues like climate change, social justice, and economic disparity. They sit on various advisory councils, including the UN, IUCN, and the Global Center for Adaptation.

Each has been selected because they have shown dedication and capability to drive significant causes.

Ingka Group's senior decision-makers and the Ingka Young Leaders Forum members have co-created actionable and transformational strategies together. In a vibrant ecosystem, mentorship thrives, rapid feedback is seamlessly integrated, and diverse perspectives on Ingka's response to geopolitical issues are readily available.

Gathering diverse and often divergent perspectives has fostered a dynamic and sometimes challenging dialogue, embodying the Forum's commitment to authentic and transformative conversations.

It is not always about agreement; it is about learning to listen and integrate different perspectives and ideas.

Without traditional hierarchies, young leaders contribute to better decision-making and promote intergenerational exchanges that challenge norms. They have proven to be a strong and influential voice.



Key outcomes

Since its inception, the Ingka Young Leaders Forum has **led nine forum meetings** covering core topics such as Climate Justice, Circular Economy, Fair and Equal Practices, Net Zero Targets, Sustainable Consumption, Corporate Transparency, and Human-centric Technology and Artificial Intelligence. Young leaders have contributed to strategic policy formulation and direction to ensure equity across Ingka's internal and external business practices. Youth insights are incorporated into many efforts, including the **Ingka ED&I Plan and transparency agenda**.

The establishment of dedicated working groups has been instrumental in deepening engagement and producing tangible outcomes. For example, in the Transparency Working Group, a group of the Forum's young leaders worked with Ingka's reporting team to review the **Annual Summary and Sustainability Report two years in a row**. They contributed insights and recommendations that strengthened Ingka's business disclosure, including more transparency in progress benchmark. Their **independent opinion letters** are directly featured in the [FY22 report](#) (p.9) and [FY23 report](#) (p.9).

Moreover, engagements around significant events like the **UN COP conference and NYC Climate Week** have provided valuable platforms for Ingka's senior decision-makers and the young leaders to share networks and collaborate on global sustainability initiatives. The young leaders' participation during these events has not only amplified the impact of Ingka's sustainability efforts but also positioned youth as pivotal contributors to global discussions on sustainability.

One example is the Forum's insights and active participation in **dialogues around climate solutions such as Action Speaks**. This is a series of events, a community, and a platform where impactful, scalable climate solutions are showcased, to inspire and accelerate more action. The young leaders have been key in fostering co-engagement between Ingka leadership and the global youth in these vital discussions.

The Ingka Young Leaders Forum has been recognized as a successful case study of **intergenerational collaboration globally**. It was featured in an **intergenerational collaboration study conducted by the We Are Family Foundation, a B Team partner organization, in partnership with the Vienna University of Economics and Business**.

We Are Family Foundation (2024). Collaborating Across Generations Global Study: Insights, Challenges, and Best Practices (Global Study). Generations in Collaboration: Ingka Young Leaders Forum.
<http://www.study.wearefamilyfoundation.org/>





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As a member of the Ingka Young Leaders Forum Transparency working group, I read Ingka’s Annual Report drafts word by word, offering my honest feedback from a young leader’s perspective. It was rewarding to see Ingka listen to our input, incorporate our recommendations, and publish our independent opinion letter in the final report.

It felt like not just sharing a meal but being invited to inspect the kitchen and contribute to the recipe. This kind of collaboration was truly meaningful.

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Zhilin Xiao

Change Maker & Strategist

Practical steps: Implementing youth- led corporate activism

Reflecting on a successful 3-year journey, we have distilled our experience into five key pillars for effectively engaging young leaders and fostering intergenerational dialogue. These form the foundation of youth-led corporate activism and provide a roadmap for other businesses:



1

Establish the Engagement Objectives & Format:

Define clear goals and a structured format to guide the engagement process. As much as possible, invite young voices into this stage of the process – so young people are not only participants but also weigh in on the collaboration process.



2

Identify and Recruit a Diverse Group of Young Leaders:

Attract and select talented, representative youth voices who can advance your corporate advocacy.

4

Deep-Dive Engagement Around Core Topics:

Facilitate in-depth discussions on key issues to drive meaningful insights and actions.

3

Onboard and Build Relationships:

Recognize that an open dialogue is ensured by mutual understanding and trust. Foster strong relationships through effective communication and transparency to build trust.

5

Expand Impact Through External Engagement:

Participate in high-impact external events to broaden collaboration and visibility.

Establish the objectives & format of the engagement

Start by defining clear objectives and an effective engagement format. Set a regular meeting cadence to facilitate high-quality exchanges and dialogue. Establishing a strong foundation with well-defined objectives and engagement plans is the crucial first pillar. Whenever possible, include a few young leaders from the early stages to define objectives and design a format.

To illustrate, the Ingka Young Leaders Forum was structured around three central aspects:

1. Quarterly forum meetings
2. Topical working groups
3. Key-event engagements



Establish the objectives & format of the engagement

1. Quarterly forum meetings:

Barriers such as a long top-down communication process may deter youth from sharing their insights and slow progress at large. Creating space for direct dialogue between senior leadership and young leaders propels change in a faster, more authentic way, and fosters trust as well as proactive youth engagement. To remove the traditional hierarchical constraints that exist within most large organizations, Young Leaders Forum was built on a format to bring together Ingka's senior leadership with young leaders at quarterly forum meetings. These meetings are facilitated discussions centred around set topics, which are identified collaboratively with input from both senior Ingka leadership and young leaders.

In these meetings:

- **Young Leaders**

Hear about the challenges that Ingka, and at times the corporate sector at large, are facing, and may boldly state their feedback, insights from their own experiences, and suggested actions.

- **Senior Leadership**

Receive nuanced feedback from an audience they had not regularly interacted with and may authentically engage with perspectives and voices who are not typically invited into decision making spaces.

2. Topical working groups:

Small groups of 3-5 young leaders who contribute to an existing project or initiative that Ingka is undertaking. The young leaders take on project-specific roles such as providing feedback for new policies being drafted or authoring a young leader portion of a report.

3. Key-event engagements

Opportunities have arisen for Ingka senior leadership and young leaders to combine their voices at external key events by speaking on panels, attending sessions with other businesses, and embedding youth voices into Ingka-hosted events, such as One Home One Planet dialogues.

Identify and recruit diverse group of young leaders

Our goal for the Ingka Young Leaders Forum was to create a truly global group with expertise spanning climate, youth mobilization, human rights, and indigenous advocacy. While diverse focal points were essential, we intentionally kept the Forum size small to foster genuine conversations and relationships. Some key success factors in identifying and recruiting the final group of young leaders include:

- **Diverse backgrounds and identities**
The diversity is certainly a contributing factor to its success. When seeking out young leaders, select individuals from various backgrounds and identities. Divergent perspectives may foster challenging conversations, even among the young leaders themselves, but it is these challenging conversations that lead to growth and progress.
- **Varied working experience and sectors**
Young Leaders Forum members bring a range of working experiences and expertise. Some have experience as activists on the frontlines, while some have sat in numerous boardrooms. Leverage young people's specific areas of expertise, professional experience, and knowledge. An open call for advisors simply based on age can be performative. Focusing on the unique experiences and skill sets of advisors leads to more valuable outcomes.
- **Openness, expectations and availability**
Young leaders' willingness to engage with corporate leaders, their expectations, and availability to commit the time that's needed are all key factors in determining who will be recruited as a Forum member. Have an open dialogue with the candidates early in the recruitment process to discuss these elements.



Onboard and build relationships

Some young activists may initially mistrust corporate intentions, and trust is critical to valuable outcomes. Building trust requires candidness, openness, and time. Engage in people-to-people conversations, addressing concerns directly and transparently. Over time, this approach can bridge gaps and foster a trusting, collaborative environment.

Prior to officially kicking off the Ingka Young Leaders Forum, an onboarding plan and materials were mapped out and shared with the young leaders. This helped to:

- **Provide Understanding and Context**
Equipping young leaders with an understanding of structures and key challenges enables them to engage in meaningful conversations. A clear understanding of the historical context of your organization will set them up for success to best advise.
- **Build Community**
Fostering a sense of community among the young leaders, allowing them to collaborate as a trusted group.



- **Open Channels of Communication**
Empower young leaders to analyse challenges and provide untethered feedback directly to senior leadership during meetings, and offer optional ways to communicate in the interim.
- **Demonstrate Respect and Equity**
Convey Ingka's respect for young leaders and emphasize the value they bring to the Forum.

Consider honouring young leaders with an honorarium. In Ingka's case, this reinforced appreciation for their contributions and demonstrated a commitment to genuine engagement. The honorarium should respect the young leaders' time commitment over the year without compromising the integrity of honest and challenging dialogue.

Deep-dive engagement around core topics

Engaging around central topics and integrating young leaders into existing processes were key aspects of the Ingka Young Leaders Forum. While quarterly forum meetings with Ingka's senior leadership initiated discussions, their true value lay in identifying concrete actions beyond these meetings.

Recognizing that quarterly calls alone were insufficient, Ingka established deep-dive/topical working groups to collaborate with young leaders – taking shape as both short- and long-term engagements depending on the need. New topical working groups have emerged each year in connection to evolving global issues and fresh challenges Ingka tackles. These groups focused on various topics including:

- **Corporate Transparency**
A selected group of young leaders reviewed Ingka's Annual Summary and Sustainability Report during various drafting stages for the past two years. They authored a letter with their feedback and reflections that has been included in the report.
- **Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I)**
Young leaders engaged with the ED&I team to ask questions and provide feedback on Ingka's FY24-27 ED&I strategy before its rollout. Recognizing that younger generations have grown up in a different world, their ideas and criticisms are both necessary and valuable. Therefore, actively incorporating them when developing diversity and equity strategies becomes a significant engagement.
- **Forestry**
A group of young leaders have been working with Ingka on how to enhance transparency related to the key resource wood. We invited a selected group of young leaders to join senior leadership on an Ingka Investments forest visit in Romania. This gave our young leaders the chance to hear and see first-hand the responsible forestry management practices used and to ask questions to the experts. It was also an opportunity to learn from their questions and observations.



Expand impact through external engagement

External engagements at key events provide a platform for young leaders and Ingka to highlight and advocate for intergenerational collaboration. Positioning young leaders alongside Ingka's senior leadership at key events is an active statement to break the cycle of excluding youth activist voices from traditionally overlooked spaces.

Ingka identifies the relevant external opportunities and recommends engagement strategies for a selected group of young leaders. Once selected and confirmed, young leaders receive pre-event preparation to maximize their impact. Examples of events that Ingka and young leaders have collaborated externally include:

- The B Team RESET Dialogues
- The B Team Meeting Series on Energy Transition in Europe
- Events at NYC Climate Week (e.g. The B Team Catalysing 21st Century Leadership, Action Speaks Summit)
- One Home One Planet (OHOP) Dialogues – Circularity (hosted by IKEA US)
- World Economic Forum, COP27 CEO – Youth Dialogue





“ Being future-smart means being a part of shaping it. By providing insights into areas like sustainable consumption and forestry, we help align business strategies with global needs, ensuring that IKEA not only adapts to market changes but also leads the way in sustainability.

Michael Bäcklund
President of ClimateScience

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I am deeply grateful for the past three years of open and authentic dialogue with our Young Leaders Forum. This collaboration has been invaluable in exchanging ideas, challenging our business to do better, and taking a stand for people and the planet. The importance of inter-generational dialogue in solving global sustainability and business challenges cannot be overstated. By bridging the perspectives of young, passionate people with the IKEA experience of our leaders, we have created a powerful synergy that drives innovation, accountability, and meaningful action towards a sustainable future.

Huge thank-you!

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Karen Pflug
Chief Sustainability Officer, Ingka Group



The way forward

From collaboration to action

Creating this playbook represents the initial step to bridge the gap between youth voices and corporations. The real need is for businesses to translate these practical steps and strategies into action and collaborate with youth at scale to drive meaningful change.