

# Taking Young People Seriously

## Consulting Young People about their Ideas and Opinions

*A Handbook for Organisations Working with Young People*



**youthaffairs**  
COUNCIL OF VICTORIA INC.

**Victoria**  
The Place To Be

This handbook was written by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and funded through the Office for Youth, Department for Victorian Communities. Young people were integrally involved in the development of the publication. Many organisations and individuals have generously contributed their time and expertise to the production of this handbook. Their willingness to share their experiences of consultation has made an invaluable contribution to the project.

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For additional copies of this handbook contact Information Victoria on 1800 366 356.

# Young people's participation is valuable

Youth participation involves young people being active in decision-making processes on issues that affect them. Young people make invaluable contributions to communities and are empowered themselves when they participate.

Young people's participation is something to value.

## Their contribution enriches the community

Our society is enriched and better decisions are made when all members of a community can participate in decisions that affect their lives. It is important that young people have access to decision-making processes.

## The principles underpinning youth participation are:

**Empowerment:** young people having greater control over their lives through participation.

**Purposeful engagement:** young people taking on valued roles, addressing issues that are relevant to them, and influencing real outcomes.

**Inclusiveness:** ensuring that all young people are able to participate.

# Participation



## Foreword: Minister



*Taking Young People Seriously; Consulting Young People about their Ideas and Opinions* is the first in a series of three handbooks that will enable communities and organisations to enjoy the rewards of increased youth participation in decisions that affect them.

Including young people in decision-making about issues that affect their lives, or simply interest them, is a vital ingredient in the creation of strong and caring communities. It is essential that young people – who account for nineteen percent of our population – have an effective voice in our social, cultural, economic and political lives.

The Victorian Government values young people's contributions and is committed to listening to their views. We aim to foster the celebration of our cultural diversity and provide genuine opportunities for a broad range of young people's involvement in decision-making processes.

We acknowledge that young people's contributions benefit the community and the individuals involved.

For young people, participation can result in increased knowledge and skills, more social opportunities and a rewarding sense of community connection.

To organisations, young people offer valuable and diverse perspectives and opinions. Their input also helps to ensure that decisions about services, programs and events are responsive and appropriate to their needs.

And for those who work towards increasing youth participation, the rewards are opportunities to share their knowledge and witness a young person's confidence and experience grow.

The Government recognises its responsibility to provide some of the necessary tools and expertise to achieve effective youth participation. It is for this reason that the Office for Youth has worked in partnership with the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) to produce these handbooks.

I trust that you will find this handbook a useful resource for consulting young people so that their opinions are valued, and in doing so develop worthwhile opportunities for young people's participation in your organisation.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jacinta Allan".

**JACINTA ALLAN, MP**

Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs



Young people teach  
me something  
new every day.  
Both my work and  
my involvement at  
the Youth Affairs  
Council of Victoria  
give me opportunities  
to work alongside  
young people, and  
these experiences  
constantly challenge  
my work practices.

YACVic is working towards a Victorian community that values and provides opportunity, participation, justice and equity for all young people.

Young people's participation is a core value of YACVic. Without it, our organisation would be deprived of their unique knowledge and expertise.

More importantly, however, we would not be able to achieve our vision without the involvement of young men and women. Young people's participation is about more than what young people can offer an organisation or program, it is also about equity. It's about creating opportunities so that young people have equitable access to the decision-making processes that affect their lives and communities. Sometimes this means venturing outside the comfort zone or loosening the reins – our communities, though, are healthier for it.

Youth participation is also about valuing the gifts and abilities of people while they are young, rather than regarding them only as future citizens. One of the many ways this can happen is through young people engaging in consultations in which they are listened to and taken seriously.

Young people have told me that sometimes consultations can be tokenistic – young people's views are not really considered because decisions have already been made. One way to avoid this is to truly respect young people's views rather than doing a consultation for the sake of it.

We are very pleased to be working in conjunction with the Office for Youth to produce this series of handbook resources, which will provide organisations and individuals with information to help increase young people's participation in their communities.

We hope that you will find *Taking Young People Seriously; Consulting Young People about their Ideas and Opinions* a useful resource that will help you to promote young people's participation.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rowena Allen', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**ROWENA ALLEN**

Chairperson, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria





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# Introduction

## What is youth participation?

Youth participation involves young people being active in decision-making processes and issues that affect them. As members of our community, young people need opportunities to participate in all aspects of community life. Young people make invaluable contributions to communities and are empowered themselves when they participate.

For young people, involvement in the community is an enjoyable and rewarding experience. It can help develop skills, generate new friendships, establish networks and influence positive change; young people are empowered when they participate. Overall, young people's participation makes our society a better place and is something to value rather than a task to do.

## Why focus on young people's participation?

For any democratic society, it is important that all members have opportunities to participate in the decision-making processes that affect them and their communities. Young people have valuable contributions to make to these processes. However, sometimes this is overlooked or undervalued, resulting in young people having fewer opportunities to be involved or to influence decisions.

In addition, there are specific issues that may impact on young people's ability to participate, such as limited transport options or restricted time. These issues need to be considered to ensure that participation initiatives are open to all young people.

This series of handbooks aims to provide information to support young people's participation in their communities.



## About this handbook

This handbook is relevant to anyone who wants to know about how consultation processes can more effectively engage young people between the ages of 12 and 25. It provides resources to assist in planning, undertaking and evaluating a consultation.

The handbook draws from examples of consultation practices from around Victoria and in a variety of settings, and provides practical advice to address these key questions:

- **What** is consultation with young people?
- **Why** consult with young people?
- **How** are objectives set and the consultation planned?
- **What** methods can be used?
- **How** can the consultation be evaluated?

The worksheets and checklists provided throughout the handbook are designed to be photocopied and reused when planning and implementing a consultation with young people.

## Taking Young People Seriously handbooks

There are many ways young people can and do participate in their communities, and in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. This handbook is one of a series that promotes young people's participation. Other books in the series include:

- *Young People on Boards and Committees*, a handbook for organisations working with young people.
- *Creating Change in your Community*, a handbook for young people.

# Youth Participation





Consulting young people about their ideas and opinions

# *Taking Young People seriously*

## Part One

### Young people and consultation



# Part 1: Young people and consultation

## What is consultation?

There are many ways young people can participate in their communities. Consultation is one form of participation. It is a tool used to gather the views of a range of people for a specific purpose. Typically, these views will feed into broader decision-making processes.

Young people's participation in consultations has many benefits. For organisations, consulting with young people brings valuable and unique perspectives. Young people's input ensures services, events and decisions are more relevant and appropriate. For young people, being involved in a consultation enables them to have a say, develop new skills and gain an increased sense of connection with their community. It is empowering for young people to have their opinions sought and recognised as valid. However, if young people are asked to participate in a consultation in which their contributions are not respected, the process can instead be disempowering. This handbook outlines ways of making the process valuable for everyone involved.

## What is involved?

Consultation can be formal or informal, and can seek the views of individuals or groups. It may involve casual conversations, surveys, forums, reference groups or interviews. These methods may be carried out in a variety of ways, including in person, over the phone, through written or artistic responses, or by utilising technologies such as the Internet. Consultation can also involve longer term advisory roles (see Part 3, Case Studies).

Young people are interested in, and should be consulted on, as broad a range of issues as other community members. The development of skate parks is not the only issue that young people are interested in! Young people have invaluable insights to offer on all issues that affect their communities.

Young people can be consulted by a diverse range of organisations, agencies and people, including local, State or Federal governments; non-government and community organisations; educational institutions; and private organisations. Young people can also be consulted by other young people. All of us can benefit from learning more about how these consultations can be done effectively.

## A partnership approach

Taking a partnership approach to consulting with young people means working alongside young people, treating them as equal stakeholders in the process, and acknowledging their expertise and knowledge.

When a partnership approach is taken to planning, implementing and evaluating a consultation, young people have some ownership of the process and are more likely to engage with it successfully.

## Why consult with young people?

Key benefits resulting from consulting with young people include:

- Making better decisions when young people's opinions are heard; for example, understanding young people's diverse needs and consequently improving service provision.
- The development of community connections when young people are supported to participate in decisions affecting their lives.
- Building partnerships between young people and other community members, and improving and strengthening communities as a result.

*The Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council (VIYAC) aims to ensure that young Indigenous people have a body through which they can define their own issues and feel a sense of ownership about their vision and outcomes.*

bryan Andy, VIYAC Working Group

*Young people made a unique contribution to the design of our Career Information Centre by telling us how we could make it a comfortable space that young people would want to use.*

Barry Wright, Highlands Local Learning and Employment Network

*It is impossible to effectively provide for or create opportunities for young people without hearing their ideas and opinions first, and then involving them in developing those ideas.*

Denise Francesco, The Push





Consulting young people about their ideas and opinions

# *Taking Young People seriously*

## Part Two

### Planning a consultation



## Part 2: Planning a consultation

Effectively planning a consultation can help to ensure that the process is accessible to young people and will run smoothly, and that valuable time and resources are used effectively. Young people can play a valuable role in the planning phase by bringing to it knowledge and innovation, particularly when considering which processes might be the most engaging and accessible.

This section will outline:

- setting objectives and defining the aims of the consultation;
- considering the specific needs and interests of the participants, and what supports can be put into place so that the process is engaging and accessible;
- privacy and consent issues.

This section includes prompts and worksheets that pose useful questions for the planning phase, and a planning checklist at the end.



# Planning





## Setting goals and objectives

# Worksheet One

**Write a statement outlining the goal (or goals) of your consultation.**

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**Write a statement outlining the objectives of your consultation.**

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# Setting goals and objectives

## What is the purpose of the consultation?

Before thinking about how the consultation will happen, you need to consider its goals, objectives and strategies. The **goals** specify what outcomes you hope to achieve from the consultation. Goals should be clearly stated and realistic. The **objectives** specify what needs to happen to achieve your goals. Finally, **strategies** specify how your objectives will be met.

The goals and objectives will influence the method of consultation you choose and how the outcomes of the consultation will be used. The following points may be useful when thinking about the goals and objectives:

- This issue affects young people because...
- Being consulted will be beneficial to young people because...
- The information young people share will be used to...

### Example

#### Goal:

To deliver better health services to young people.

#### Objectives:

To determine which young people currently access the health service.

To determine if young service users feel comfortable in the waiting area.

To determine if young service users feel comfortable with staff.

To determine what would make the health service more attractive to young people.

#### Strategies:

Establish an advisory group of young people to inform the project.

Survey young service users while they wait for an appointment.

Print a questionnaire in different languages to include the diversity of young people who use the service.

Which young people should participate in your consultation?

## Worksheet two

**Reflect on the goals and objectives of the consultation. Which young people should be consulted to achieve them?**

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**How does this issue affect young people?**

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**How will these young people benefit from being involved?**

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**How are these young people a representative sample?**

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**What strategies will be used to recruit the young people?**

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## Which young people should be consulted?

Young people are not a homogenous group. They differ in their opinions, abilities, interests, backgrounds, experiences, age, gender, cultural practices, values, skills, the places they live, and in the access they have to services.

## Which young people will be participating in this consultation?

The following questions may be useful when thinking about who should be consulted:

- Which young people have an interest in or are affected by this issue?
- Which young people would benefit from involvement in this consultation?

A consultation benefits from involving a representative sample of young people. This means that the young people consulted are representative of the broader community or social group in terms of characteristics like gender, age and cultural background. It is important to consider who would make up a representative sample for your consultation.

## Recruitment

The next step is to consider how to recruit this representative sample of young people to participate in the consultation. Ideas include:

- Advertising through posters, postcards, email, zines, websites, leaflets, newsletters, magazines, local newspapers, ethnic press and street press.
- Making personal contact using your networks or word of mouth.
- Inviting a small number of young people and creating a snowball effect by asking them to bring along friends.
- Approaching agencies or organisations to nominate young people for involvement, or to run the consultation themselves. Because some young people have greater access to mainstream services than others, consider contacting cultural community organisations or agencies that work with marginalised young people.
- Using email lists. For example, Youth.com, Youthgas, YACVic Announce and Youth Affairs Research Network (YARN).

It is also possible to take a consultation directly to young people, rather than recruiting young people to be involved (see Part 3).





# Support

## Who should do the consultation?

Who would be the best person or people to do your consultation? Will young people carry out the consultation? Will someone from the organisation do it? Will an independent person be employed to do it?

Generally speaking, a good consultant will:

- enjoy working with young people;
- see young people's participation as valuable;
- communicate effectively with young people;
- have the time to devote to the process;
- ensure that all participants have an equal opportunity to have their say;
- make young people feel comfortable;
- treat young people with respect;
- treat information sensitively;
- make the process an enjoyable one for all.

## Supporting participants

Taking some time in the planning phase to think about the skills and needs of the participants can help make the consultation accessible to all of the young people participating.

The following tables highlight issues for consideration and offer useful strategies in anticipating barriers when planning your consultation. The issues raised, although not relevant to every consultation, highlight the diversity of young people and their circumstances, and focus on strategies to help make the consultation:

- empowering
- purposefully engaging
- inclusive.



How will young people's contributions be valued?

## Worksheet three

**Reflect back on why your consultation is being done. Write a statement outlining the value of young people's contributions to this consultation.**

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**If young people are to be consulted regularly, what strategies can be implemented to avoid using the same young people in every consultation?**

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## Consultation can be empowering for young people if their opinions and ideas are valued

### It is important to:

- Consider young people's participation as a core value of the process rather than a task to be done.
- Clearly understand why the consultation is being done.
- Respect young people's opinions and ideas.
- Take a partnership approach in which young people's knowledge and expertise are valued.
- Ensure young people have an interest or stake in what they are being consulted about.
- Avoid over-consulting with a narrow base of young people. Over-consultation means that the views and opinions of the same young people are sought too often, leaving other young people out of the consultation process and therefore limiting the diversity of young people's opinions.

*There's no point in asking for the same young people's opinions all the time – you end up with the same voices and a biased sample. There are masses of willing young people. Why not ask them?*

Anna Wood, YACVic Youth Reference Group

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*Young people will participate if they are aware of the opportunities to get involved.*

Cassandra Connelly, The Push Youth Advisory Committee

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Considering physical access, time, location and distance to make your consultation accessible to young people.

## Worksheet four

**What issues relating to physical access, location or distance affect this consultation?**

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**What space might be most comfortable for the participants and why?**

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**What times would suit the young people participating and why?**

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**What strategies will you use to make sure the consultation is accessible?**

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Taking into account physical access, time, location and distance can help make the consultation accessible to a diversity of young people

**It is important to:**

- Be aware of physical barriers for young people with disabilities participating in the consultation. Would wheelchair access or large print documents be useful?
- Consider whether young people should come to the consultation, or if the consultation should go to them.
- Pick a venue close to public transport to enable easy access for young people.
- Reimburse young people's expenses.
- Think creatively about where the consultation will be held to maximise young people's comfort and engagement.
- Consider distance and geographical isolation, particularly in regional and rural areas. Perhaps email, written feedback or phone calls would be useful alternatives for your consultation.
- Ask participants what times are convenient for them and whether they have much spare time.
- Consider family responsibilities, work or reliance on getting a lift.
- Consider if time is a problem and whether the consultation could be completed in the participant's own time.

*Youthink was an approach to youth specific consultation combining a variety of media that young people use, with a focus on bringing the consultation to young people. We received really positive feedback that going to them was fantastic.*

Report from a City of Melbourne Council Officer

*WYPIN does its best to find places where public transport is available. It also finds out when people are free, and takes the time to telephone people.*

Michael Nguensiri, Western Young People's Independent Network

How can the consultation be sensitive to the unique needs, experiences and identities of the young people participating?

## Worksheet five

**What might be some of the unique needs, experiences and identities of the participants that are relevant to this consultation?**

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**What more do you need to find out?**

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**Where can you find that information? E.g. an organisation that works with culturally and linguistically diverse communities.**

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**What strategies will you implement to make sure the participants' diverse needs are considered?**

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Being sensitive to the unique needs, experiences and identities of young people can help make the consultation inclusive

**It is important to:**

- Seek information about cultural and religious practices of the participants to ensure that they are accommodated during the consultation. Organisations that work with culturally diverse communities may be able to provide information.
- Establish trust and understanding between the consultant and the diverse communities to which participants belong. Engaging with the participants' cultural communities and ensuring that cultural protocols are followed will help build this trust. For example, talking with community Indigenous Elders about plans to consult with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander young people may be appropriate.
- Consider how participants' gender or cultural and religious practices might impact on decisions about the time, place and method of the consultation.
- Consider whether young women or men might prefer to discuss the topic in a mixed or gender-specific group.
- Consider how the gender of the consultant might impact on the process.
- Ensure there is an effective group facilitator who can direct the conversation within the group, and make sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to speak.
- Word questions in a simple and direct way.
- Use gender-neutral language, such as his/hers, he/she or they.
- Provide interpreters or documents in languages other than English.
- Provide information about the consultation to young people and other community members in ways that they can understand.
- Avoid using jargon and acronyms.

*Newly arrived young people have limited understanding of Australian networks and the political system. As a result, they often do not understand the aims of consultation and the benefit of their participation in consultations.*

Kavitha Shekera-Chandra, Western Young People's Independent Network

What strategies might be used in your consultation to acknowledge young people's contributions and give them feedback?

## Worksheet six

**How will participants be acknowledged during and/or after the consultation?**

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**How will participants be given feedback during and/or after the consultation?**

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**If the consultation is going to be a long process, what strategies can be used to engage participants over time?**

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**If outcomes are going to be slow to appear, what strategies can be used to keep participants engaged?**

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Young people are more likely to participate when acknowledged and provided with feedback

**It is important to:**

- Acknowledge young people for their contribution; for example, send a thank you letter.
- Explain to young people how the information that they provide will be used.
- Show participants the outcomes of the consultation; for example, provide them with a copy of a report, or similar documentation of the outcomes.
- Consider strategies to keep young people engaged in longer term consultation processes, such as providing regular updates, celebrating participants' efforts and recognising small gains, and broadening young people's roles so that they are engaged at different levels of the consultation process.

*So many times I've been involved in a consultation where we were told that there would be a report produced, but we never got to see it. It makes you feel like they haven't taken you seriously.*

Michelle Blanchard, YACVic Youth Reference Group



Acknowledgement

How can you avoid making assumptions and stereotypes about young people's interests?

## Worksheet seven

**List ways that assumptions are made about what issues interest young people.**

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**Why are young people interested in, or affected by, the issues raised in this consultation?**

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## Adopting a broad perspective about young people's interests can help in planning and carrying out a consultation

### It is important to:

- Avoid assumptions about young people's interests – young people are interested in a wide range of issues.
- Challenge stereotypes about young people's interests.
- Create space for young people to define what issues are important to them.

*Too often it feels like young people are put into a box. We get dismissed as not caring unless it has to do with Blue Light discos or recreation initiatives. We care about the same things adults care about.*

YACVic Board Member

*Young people's interests, concerns, ideas and needs are as diverse as any other segment of the community. At B-Central we aim to respond to the needs and wants of all young people in our region. To do it successfully, our organisation needs to ensure it has the appropriate mechanisms in place to listen and respond to that diverse range.*

Paul Henshall, B-Central Bendigo

How can young people be supported to engage in your consultation process?

## Worksheet eight

**Outline what you think needs to happen to make young people feel safe and comfortable during the consultation.**

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**How can trust be built between the participants and the consultant?**

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**How can trust be built between participants?**

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**Give examples of consultation protocols that will help participants feel comfortable.**

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**Outline an action plan for the consultant to use if they are made aware of an issue that they believe should be acted upon.**

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## Young people are empowered if they are supported to engage in the consultation process

### It is important to:

- Build trust between the consultant and the participants, and between the participants themselves.
- Establish protocols to help participants feel comfortable, such as 'everyone has the right to be heard' or 'this discussion is confidential'. Protocols can be established in partnership with participants or prior to the consultation.
- Create opportunities for participants to debrief after the consultation, particularly if personal or potentially distressing issues have been raised.
- Consider how to respond if a participant tells you something about their wellbeing or safety that should be acted upon.
- Consider how to make young people feel safe and comfortable during the consultation.

### Many young people have had certain experiences that might impact on the consultation, for example:

- Some refugee or newly arrived young people may have had negative experiences with authority. Informing them about social and political structures in Victoria, how they work, and the role of your consultation can help alleviate anxiety. The information will also help educate young people about their community and the role they can play in it.
- Young people who have experienced trauma, mental illness or homelessness may need specific support to feel safe and comfortable (see Part 3).
- The Victorian Indigenous community often feel over-consulted by a variety of agencies, with little or no apparent outcomes or feedback. As a result, Indigenous young people may be sceptical of consultation processes, and more emphasis may need to be placed on reporting back outcomes.

*One of my most successful informal discussion methods is to hang around after a meeting and chat with the young people outside while they're waiting to be collected. They tend to open up a lot more in this environment and I will quite often get more out of that ten minute chat than I will from the whole meeting. I think that the one-on-one factor and the informal setting both help.*

Monica Butler, Golden Plains Shire

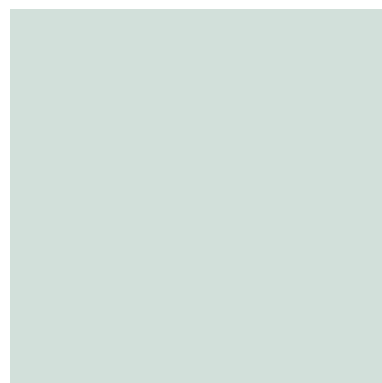
# Privacy and consent

In Victoria the *Information Privacy Act 2000* and *Health Records Act 2001* regulate the way that government-funded services can collect, use, keep, and secure personal and health information.

## Why consider issues of privacy and consent when consulting with young people?

- The privacy principles are binding to all government-funded services, and a breach of them may result in a complaint being investigated by the Victorian Privacy Commissioner or Health Services Commissioner.
- To help plan how the information is going to be collected, stored, used and handled.
- To design a consultation process that respects young people's privacy.

The following information highlights key issues about privacy information laws in Victoria and how they can relate to a consultation. **It is not legal advice.** If you require more information, see the Privacy Commissioner's website at [www.privacy.vic.gov.au](http://www.privacy.vic.gov.au) or the Health Services Commissioner's website at [www.health.vic.gov.au/hsc](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/hsc).



# Privacy

## What is personal information?

There are two legal acts that are relevant to the Victorian Privacy Information Laws. These are the *Information Privacy Act 2000* and the *Health Records Act 2001*. They outline what personal information is and how it needs to be handled.

The *Information Privacy Act 2000* sets standards for how personal information and sensitive information is collected, handled and disposed of. It applies to all forms of recorded information about a person, including information recorded during a consultation with young people.

The *Health Records Act 2001* sets standards for how health information about a person is collected, handled and disposed of, including information recorded in a consultation with young people.

Personal information is categorised as:

- **Personal information** is information or opinions about a person whose identity can be seen or reasonably gathered from the information. One example is a person's name, address and date of birth.
- **Health information** is information about the physical, mental or psychological health of a person, or information about a person's disability. It includes information about a person's access to health services, the type of services they are and an opinion about a matter relating to a person's health.
- **Sensitive information** is a form of personal information that includes information about a person's racial or ethnic origin, political views, religious beliefs, sexual preference, group membership or criminal record. Sensitive information must only be collected (with the individual's consent) if the information is required for the purpose of providing government-funded welfare or educational services, or for research of these services.

## Privacy laws and consultation

In consulting with young people, the following privacy issues should be considered.

### The purpose of the consultation

What is the purpose of the consultation? Reflecting on the goals and objectives (see Part 1), consider the types of personal information that need to be collected to meet that purpose. It may be that personal information is not required.

### Collecting personal information

Only the personal information needed for the purpose of the consultation should be collected.

### Privacy statements

If the information being collected identifies a participant, he/she needs to be informed of the following:

- the identity of the organisation and how it can be contacted;
- the purpose/s for collecting the personal information;
- how the participant can gain access to the personal information he/she provided;
- who, if anyone, the organisation is going to share the personal information with;
- how the information is going to be kept secure.

This information is called a privacy statement. Privacy statements are usually given to the person before or at the time of the consultation, and delivered in the same way as the consultation. For example, if a phone survey were being conducted, the privacy statement would be delivered over the phone.

### Tips on delivering a privacy statement:

**By phone:** Anyone delivering the privacy statement should use a standard script or refer to points, to make sure that all the requirements of the privacy statement are covered. The person's decision to agree to participate or not should then be recorded in a file note or similar.

**By website:** If consulting over the web, the privacy statement needs to be provided on the main page of the site.

**In a focus group:** The privacy statement can be explained at the start of the focus group.

### How can the information then be used?

When participants have been informed of the specific purpose of the consultation through the privacy statement, then the information collected can only be used for that purpose. If you want to use the information for another purpose, the participants' consent that the information may be used for this new purpose needs to be obtained.

## Consent and young people

People have the legal capacity to consent if they have the mental ability and maturity to understand the nature and effect of what they are consenting to. Age is a relevant factor in assessing this, but not decisive unless the person is very young. However, legal capacity to consent is not age-dependent. It is fair to assume that a young person has the capacity to consent to being involved in the consultation unless there is evidence or reason to believe otherwise. For example, if you know a young person has a learning difficulty or emotional maturity deficit, then you make a professional judgement about whether these are likely to significantly impair their capacity to understand relevant issues.

### What makes consent valid?

Consent needs to be informed, freely given, specific and current to be valid. If the information is sensitive or health information, signed consent needs to be given.

- **Informed** means the person has the capacity to understand the situation and consequences of taking part.
- **Freely** given means the person can make his/her own decision free from influences or pressures.
- **Specific** means the consent applies only for the information to be used for the purpose outlined.
- **Current** means the consent must not be given so long ago that relevant circumstances or the person's view may reasonably have changed.

## Storing and retaining information

The privacy laws highlight the importance of storing personal information securely. Some measures to consider are:

- storing information in a secure place;
- removing a person's identity from the information as soon as possible;
- protecting electronic information with a password;
- backing up discs and storing them separately from computers.

The laws also have a 'schedule' for retaining personal information.

This can be obtained from the Privacy Commissioner's website at [www.privacy.vic.gov.au](http://www.privacy.vic.gov.au) and the Health Services Commissioner's website at [www.health.vic.gov.au/hsc](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/hsc).

## Organisational openness

The privacy laws state that an organisation must have clearly expressed policies on how it manages personal information. These policies need to be made available to anyone who asks for them. Before launching into a consultation that involves collecting personal information, this policy should exist and be available to all participants.

## Consultation and contracts

If you are going to contract out your consultation services, you will need to be mindful that you are unable to contract out your obligations under the *Information Privacy Act 2000* and *Health Records Act 2001*. When you are contracting out services, a solution is to include a clause in your contracts or service agreements that your contracted agencies agree to abide by the Privacy Principles. You should also make sure that all information collected on behalf of your organisation is returned to you.



Information



The following questions are useful as a checklist at the end of the planning phase. It is possible that you will answer no to some of these questions for a valid reason. The purpose of the checklist is to ensure that all of these issues are considered.

### Setting goals and objectives

- ☐ Have the goals and objectives of the consultation been defined?

### Which young people?

- ☐ Have you decided which young people should be consulted?
- ☐ Are the young people who will be consulted a representative sample?
- ☐ Have you decided how to recruit participants?

### Who should do the consultation?

- ☐ Has an appropriate person been chosen to do the consulting?

### Supporting participants

- ☐ Have supports for participants been considered and strategies put in place?
- ☐ Is the venue accessible? For example, is it close to public transport?
- ☐ Does the time of the consultation suit participants?
- ☐ Are participants being reimbursed for expenses?
- ☐ Is your consultation process sensitive to the diversity of young people?
- ☐ Is your consultation process sensitive to the cultural practices of the young people involved?
- ☐ Is your consultation sensitive to gender?
- ☐ Is accessible language being used in the consultation and all related information?
- ☐ Has a strategy been planned to provide feedback and outcomes to participants?
- ☐ Has a strategy been planned to acknowledge participants for their input?
- ☐ If the consultation process were to take a long time, have strategies been planned to keep participants engaged?
- ☐ Will debriefing be available to participants if necessary?
- ☐ Will trust building activities or strategies be used?
- ☐ Have strategies been considered to make young people feel safe and comfortable in the consultation?

### Privacy and consent

- ☐ Have privacy and consent issues been considered where appropriate?

### Evaluation

- ☐ Has an evaluation technique been chosen and scheduled into the process?



Consulting young people about their ideas and opinions

# *Taking Young People seriously*

## Part Three

### Carrying out a consultation



# Part 3: Carrying out a consultation

Consultation methods vary depending on the circumstances of the consultation. In choosing an appropriate method, it is useful to reflect on the:

- aims and objectives of the consultation
- accessibility of the consultation process to the participants
- time available
- resources available.

This section outlines some consultation methods that can be used in individual, group, structured and informal settings.

## Consultation methods table

The following table lists some methods that are used to carry out consultations. The list may trigger other methods, or combinations of methods.

	Structured	Informal
Individual	Surveys	Casual conversations
	Interviews	Comments/suggestions box
	Internet discussions or feedback	
	SMS text consultation	
	Hypothetical stories or situations	
Group	Forums	Group casual conversations
	Mixed stakeholder forums	Graffiti board
	Youth reference groups	Postcards
	Youth peer consultations	Vox pops
	Arts programs	
	Writing letters to young people's organisations or groups seeking advice	
	Focus groups	

# Methods of consultation

Different consultation methods may be adaptable to different circumstances. The following breakdown highlights the benefits and limitations of certain methods, and provides advice on choosing a method.

## Surveys or questionnaires

### **Involve:**

A structured consultation process in which participants respond to a set of written questions such as multiple choice, tick the box, or a combination of structured questions and general comments. Telephone surveys can also be conducted in which the participant provides answers to questions over the phone.

### **Benefits:**

- Can be posted on the Internet, in the mail, completed on-site or taken home, and is useful if distance or time is an issue.
- Can be completed by a large number of people without creating much extra work.
- Can be completed in private and anonymously if privacy is an issue.
- Answers can be more easily collated and analysed through structured questions.
- Can use a consultant to record the answers if literacy is an issue.
- Questions can be tailored to meet the needs of participants.

### **Limitations:**

- No unstructured conversation, so those being consulted cannot raise other issues or concerns.
- Does not involve social interaction between participants.
- Participants may have difficulty reading or writing, which means that someone else may have to read questions and record answers, resulting in increased workload and margin for error.

## Internet discussions, surveys or feedback pages

### Involve:

Using the Internet as a medium to post a survey, host a discussion group or request feedback.

### Benefits:

- Useful if distance or geographic isolation is an issue.
- Allows for anonymity by avoiding face-to-face contact.
- Can be completed at any time, providing flexibility and allowing for time limitations.
- Effective for ongoing monitoring or receiving regular feedback.
- Can reach a broad population.
- Answers can be more easily collated and analysed through structured questions.
- Can use existing email lists or websites to post the information.

### Limitations:

- Dependent on young people having Internet access.
- Requires some technical capacity to post the survey onto the Internet.

### Tip:

Ask an organisation with young members if they can post the information on your behalf.



Discussion



# Interviews

## **Involve:**

A face-to-face discussion where one or more people ask questions of the person being consulted. It may be structured or more informal. Usually the same questions are asked in each interview to achieve measurable outcomes.

## **Benefits:**

- Can provide opportunities to discuss issues that may be sensitive and not easily discussed in a group.
- Encourages a rapport to develop between participant and consultant.
- Can be a comfortable and relaxed process if the interviewer adopts an informal manner.

## **Limitations:**

- Can be intimidating for young people who are unfamiliar with interviews, have limited English language skills, or have experienced interrogation or intimidation in interviews.
- No group interaction or opportunity for young people to bounce ideas off each other.
- Inefficient method if a large sample of young people needs to be consulted, as each interview needs to be individually scheduled.
- Unsuitable if participants have limited time or are geographically isolated, as the interview cannot necessarily be scheduled at a time and venue convenient to them.

## **Tips:**

- Providing some skill development for young people not accustomed to interview processes may be useful.
- Interpreters can be used when interviewing young people with limited English.
- Keep the language in the interview direct and simple to make it more accessible.

# Postcards

## **Involve:**

Printing reply paid postcards with questions on the back requesting written feedback. These are distributed broadly.

## **Benefits:**

- Brings the consultation to young people by distributing the cards directly to them; for example, in venues, shops and cafés, and through the street press or zines.
- Reaches a broad and large population.
- Provides details of how to get more information on the topic.

## **Limitations:**

- May not be appropriate for young people with language or literacy issues.
- May not promote interaction of young people.

## **Tip:**

Young people can be involved in the design of the postcards.

# Feedback







## Youth peer consultation

### Involves:

Young people consulting with their peers through methods such as interviews, surveys and peer-lead focus groups. The key factor is that young people carry out the consultation with other young people. Typically, the consultants receive training and often conduct the consultations on behalf of an organisation.

### Benefits:

- Can be accessible to young people who are more comfortable sharing their opinions and ideas with each other.
- Often involves skill development for participants in areas such as communication, research, interviewing skills or group facilitation.
- Can support young people and other community members to work in partnership with each other.
- Can be empowering for young people because they play a valuable role and have some control over the consultation process.

### Limitation:

- If the peer consultants require training, then adequate time and resources need to be incorporated into the consultation process.

### Tip:

Peer consultants can be employed for the consultation, or reimbursed for their work.



Peer consultation

# Forums

## **Involve:**

People coming together to share ideas about an issue, with the purpose of having some input into a decision-making process. Forums are usually facilitated, have a structured plan and involve coming to some resolutions or recommendations.

Mixed stakeholder forums are forums in which a variety of people who have an interest in an issue come together. Young people might attend a mixed stakeholder forum alongside employers, politicians, teachers, or others with a stake in the same issue.

## **Benefits:**

- Can involve a broad range of young people.
- Can be socially beneficial, with young people interacting with others in order to discuss issues and come to conclusions.
- Can develop young people's skills in communication and public speaking, group facilitation, working effectively as a team, and researching new topics.
- Can be an empowering experience if young people raise issues of importance to them and determine the forum's agenda .

## **Limitations:**

- Usually not a space in which young people feel comfortable discussing personal issues.
- Usually takes detailed planning and time to organise.

## **Tips:**

- Creative presentations can be part of a forum.
- An audience can be invited in order to hear the findings of the forum.

## Focus groups

### **Involve:**

A small to medium group of young people responding to an issue, information or questions presented in a consistent, structured way, so that each focus group produces measurable outcomes. The aim is to get feedback from the focus group, rather than devise outcomes or resolutions.

### **Benefits:**

- Can involve training and use of peer facilitators.
- Can involve a diverse range of young people.
- Can be accessible to everyone through effective facilitation.
- Can trigger discussion and provide a social experience through group interaction.

### **Limitation:**

May not be suitable for young people to discuss personal issues.

### **Tip:**

To get a broad sample, various agencies or organisations such as schools or youth services can be invited to run focus groups. The information collected can then inform one consultation.



Feedback



## Arts programs or initiatives

### **Involve:**

Young people expressing themselves through art in either a collaborative group effort or individual project, which can be structured and planned, or more spontaneous. Requires an audience so that the views and ideas expressed are seen or heard.

### **Benefits:**

- Young people can express themselves freely.
- Can engage young people successfully, particularly if they have language or literacy issues.
- Can provide opportunities for skill development.
- Can engage other community members as the audience.

### **Limitation:**

May require substantial planning time and specific resources.

### **Tips:**

- A wide range of art forms can be used, such as painting, theatre or role-playing, creative writing, or photography.
- Often effective alongside other methods of consultation; for example, a written explanation of the art may further outline the views and opinions being expressed.
- Young people can take on a variety of roles in design, direction or organisation of the process.



## Casual conversations

### Involve:

Simply asking young people their opinions through a casual conversation. Casual conversations can be one-on-one or conducted in a group.

### Benefits:

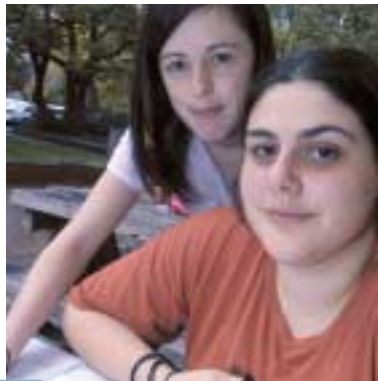
- Can be done anywhere; for example, in the workplace or after a meeting, and by various means including phone or email.
- Can be effective for ongoing consultation.
- Can be useful when there is limited time.
- Can help build up a relationship of trust.

### Limitation:

Information not easily recorded.

### Tip:

Young people need to be aware that the information they disclose in the casual conversation may be used as data. To avoid any misunderstanding, phrase questions so that it is clear that this conversation is part of a consultation. For example, 'I was wanting to know what you think about this because...'



Expression

# Comments/suggestions box

## Involves:

Encouraging people to place their written suggestions or comments into a readily available secure box. The box is usually placed in an accessible location with pens and paper available for use. The box may be advertised by signs and can be used temporarily or as an ongoing method of consultation.

## Benefits:

- Comments can be made confidentially, particularly if the box is placed in a private space.
- Can be useful if there are limited resources and/or time.
- Can be effective for ongoing consultation.
- Easy for participants to use.

## Limitations:

- May not be accessible to young people with limited literacy.
- Restricted in effectively following up comments or suggestions.
- Relies on young people taking the initiative to make comments.
- Comments may not come from a representative sample.
- Not a personally engaging process.

## Tip:

Where appropriate, outcomes stemming from the comments and suggestions can be posted near the box. This can be a way of reporting back to participants and promoting the effectiveness of making suggestions.



# Hypothetical stories and situations

## Involve:

Presenting participants with invented stories or situations and gauging their responses to them. By focusing on how characters in a story might feel, the discussion is de-personalised. A hypothetical can involve a discussion or written response.

## Benefits:

- Can be effective in discussing difficult or potentially distressing issues without asking participants to reveal their own experiences.
- Can allow for more free and honest responses than if asked directly about the same issues.
- Invented stories can make it more engaging for participants.
- Can be used in a group or individual setting.

## Limitations:

- Time and planning is needed for drafting the hypothetical stories and running the consultations.
- Can distress participants if asked to discuss an issue that is close to their own experience.

## Tips:

- Debriefing may be necessary following a discussion about a potentially distressing topic.
- Have a strategy in place outlining what to do if a participant reveals something that needs to be acted upon.



Encourage

# Vox pops

## **Involve:**

Spontaneously approaching people and asking them to briefly comment on an issue or question. Vox pops are usually recorded on film or audiotape.

## **Benefits:**

- Can access a large number of opinions.
- The consultation comes to the participants.
- People can be identified or remain anonymous.
- Not much planning required.

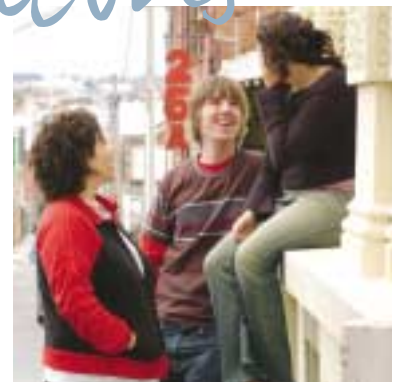
## **Limitations:**

- Does not usually allow for follow-up.
- Does not involve in-depth consultation.
- Does not usually involve a representative sample of people.
- Usually requires audio or film equipment.

## **Tips:**

- Can be more effective when the questions are short and clear, and when the issue being discussed is broadly known.
- Can be used effectively alongside other forms of consultation; for example, vox pops can be conducted at a forum.

# Spontaneous







# Youth reference group

## Involves:

A group of young people providing feedback or support to an organisation, agency or project. Variations of a youth reference group include a youth advisory committee or project action team. Youth reference groups can have a dual function of providing support and feedback to an organisation or project while actively pursuing independent projects. Youth reference groups may operate informally or within formal committee structures.

## Benefits:

- Can effectively enable young people to provide regular, direct feedback into a project or organisation.
- Incorporates young people's perspectives and input into organisational structures.
- Participants can develop skills in communication, group work and running a committee.
- Young people take an active approach to issues of importance to them.

## Limitations:

- Requires time, planning and adequate resources to work effectively.
- Formal committee approaches might be off-putting to some young people.

## Tip:

Reference groups may be more effective if young people are involved in establishing the group.





## Graffiti board

### Involves:

Creating an accessible public space, usually on a wall, where participants can write their comments in their own time. Hanging up butcher's paper on walls and providing markers can be an easy way to do this. Graffiti boards can be left hanging for as long as required and can be replaced at regular intervals.

### Benefits:

- Responses can be anonymous.
- Easy to establish and use.
- Informal nature can encourage people to respond freely.
- Fun to participate in.

### Limitations:

- Comments may be difficult to interpret.
- May not be able to follow up comments.

### Tips:

- Leading questions can be placed on the graffiti boards to guide the feedback.
- Graffiti boards can be displayed after use.



Consultation

# SMS text consultations

## **Involve:**

Sending out text messages through mobile phones asking for feedback or opinions on an issue or question.

## **Benefits:**

- Can target a large group of young people.
- Takes the consultation to young people.
- Quick and easy to do.

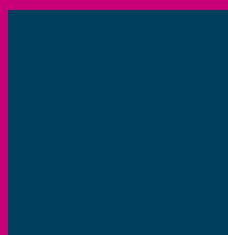
## **Limitations:**

- Excludes young people without mobile phones.
- Difficult to target a representative sample.
- Need access to mobile phone numbers to send message.
- Does not involve personal contact with young people.

## **Tip:**

Obtaining consent before consulting through SMS text messages may help ensure it is not intrusive.

# Case Studies



Following are consultation reports from four case studies:

- ORYGEN Youth Health: Platform Project
- Stonnington Youth Services: Youth Strategy Action team
- Victorian Settlement Planning Committee: Refugee Young People and Housing Issues Working Group
- Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues: leadership training 'Jigsaw' consultation model.

The reports are annotated to highlight aspects of youth consultation that have been discussed in this handbook, and are included as useful models for consultations with young people.

# ORYGEN Youth Health: Platform Project

ORYGEN Youth Health is an integrated mental health service for young people living in the Melbourne western metropolitan region. The Platform Project began as a consumer participation initiative in February 2001.

The Platform Project was introduced to ORYGEN Youth Health with the purpose of giving young people accessing the service the opportunity to have a say about the service at ORYGEN Youth Health. *(Participants are consulted for a purpose)*

In the absence of established models for youth participation within mental health services, the project relied upon learning from experience. The starting point for the project was to employ two young people who were recently discharged from the program as Peer Project Consultants. *(Young people empowered by being given valuable roles)* They were key members of the project advisory committee and in the initial stages they provided staff with important information on how the project should be done. *(Young people consulted in the planning phase)*

The peer consultants had the task of consulting with young people at the service. It was decided that the best way to get a true indication of issues for young people at the program was to ask. *(Employment of Peer Project Consultants a key strategy)* The two Peer Project Consultants worked with the project worker to develop a questionnaire as a tool to do that.

This helped shift the ownership of the project across the boundaries: rather than the 'them and us' ideology, it became 'us'. *(Young people and workers in partnership)* Over two months, consultations were also made on an individual basis with clients at the program.

The Peer Project Consultants took opportunities to consult with young people in the waiting room, the in-patient unit, the outside area and the group programs. *(Bringing the consultation to participants)*

Two major initiatives that stemmed out of the planning were the Platform Team and the Speak Out procedure. The Platform Team involves eight dedicated young ex-service users who meet regularly to discuss ways in which service delivery could be improved. The team was able to act on and make changes in some key areas identified by the peer consultants. The Platform Team continue to meet on a regular basis and eighteen months later have had a considerable impact on service delivery at ORYGEN Youth Health. *(Meaningful outcomes and change)*

One of the main topics from the consultation report highlighted the need for better information provision, particularly for new clients. A comprehensive and accessible guide for clients was developed by the Platform Team in response to this need. The Team also developed the Speak Out procedure enabling young people and family members to report any complaints, suggestions or comments about the service.

Signs placed strategically throughout the service encouraged them to fill in Speak Out forms and anonymously deposit them in red letterboxes. The Team also produce a regular newsletter entitled Jargon Filter. *(More than one consultation method developed)*

To stress that the participants' own wellness must take number one priority during their involvement in the project, we devised individual 'Wellness Plans and Procedures'. *(Support provided to participants during the consultation)* These plans also stressed that taking a break from the project will in no way impede participants' involvement in the project. *(Flexibility to help participants stay engaged)*

The Platform Team continues to break down the boundaries that exist between young consumers and adult workers within the mental health system. *(Breaking down barriers and providing new opportunities for consultation and participation)* Youth participation principles have worked well within this context. Most recently, Platform Team members participated in interview panels for employment positions at the service. Possible future developments include peer leadership and peer education programs.

# Stonnington Youth Services: Youth Strategy Action Team

Stonnington Council's Youth Services provide a range of services, programs and events, together with individual support, information and referral, for young people aged between 10 and 25. The Youth Action Team was established in September 2002 and is a mechanism through which young people can have input into Stonnington Youth Services and Council.

We put together the Stonnington Youth Action Strategy Team so that young people can have input into the Stonnington Council's Framework for Young People and an Action Plan for Stonnington Youth Services. [\(Young people consulted for a purpose\)](#) It is made up of a diverse group of five young people who reflect the local community. [\(Participants reflecting diversity of the community\)](#) To recruit young people we placed an advertisement in the local paper, and canvassed young people's networks. Interested young people filled out a resume style application form and then were interviewed for a position on the team. [\(Young people participating by choice\)](#)

Firstly, the team went through an induction process, which involved some team building activities and an introductory 'meet the council' activity. [\(Providing information support\)](#) Staff and the team went away for a two-night training program. To help create a level playing field we all participated in a circus workshop. The weekend's experiences were extremely valuable for building up trust and skills among the group. [\(Building trust\)](#)

Then the team members thought it would be useful to shadow members of the council for half a day so that they could learn more about the council. Each team member chose who they would like to shadow, with one shadowing the CEO.

[\(Training and providing information about council\)](#) This helped to build relationships between the Action Team and council's staff. It has also kept the council engaged with the team. The team then identified some key issues that they were interested in and researched these for current policy and practice information. [\(Developing skills and improving knowledge about topics of interest\)](#)

The next step will be to use the skills the Action Team has gained to consult with a broader base of young people, using local schools as the first access point. [\(Accessing young people through schools\)](#) The team has drafted and trialled a survey to be completed among student peers. Key issues for discussion will then be identified with the support of a youth worker. These key issues will then be discussed in more detail in student focus groups, facilitated by members of the Action Team. [\(Valuable roles as peer consultants\)](#)

The information from these focus group discussions, together with researched issue information and statistical data, will be drafted into a discussion paper. [\(Young people purposefully engaged in a process that will result in outcomes\)](#) After further consultation, the Action Team will then write up a draft Stonnington Council Framework for Young

People and an Action Plan for Stonnington Youth Services. These drafts will go to council for approval and then to the broader community for feedback before they are finalised.

As this is a long process of consultation, consideration needs to be given to keeping the team motivated and engaged. The team members have been given rewards for their involvement at staggered times throughout the process. [\(Engagement and incentives\)](#) This recognises the importance of their work throughout the process.

The fact that the team has developed skills and been involved at all levels of the consultation by the end of the process – from planning to implementation and writing up the results – has also helped to keep the/team engaged and focused. [\(Involvement at all levels of the consultation process\)](#)

# Victorian Settlement Planning Committee: Refugee Young People and Housing Issues Working Group

The Victorian Settlement Planning Committee established the Refugee Young People and Housing Issues Working Group in order to research culturally appropriate housing options for refugee young people in Victoria. The information was used in a reference book for mainstream and ethno-specific housing providers, entitled *Culturally Appropriate Housing Options*, produced in July 2002.

In order to explore the housing needs of refugee young people in Victoria, the Refugee Young People and Housing Issues Working Group conducted workshops with 80 refugee young people from a variety of newly arrived communities residing across metropolitan Melbourne. *(Diversity reflected in the young people consulted, in the expertise involved and in the networks used to access young people)*

The Working Group was made up of a diverse range of members, including people working in housing, education and trauma counselling. The diversity of the group meant we had access to a variety of young

people's networks *(Inclusiveness)* and consultations were conducted through these established networks. *(Tapping into established networks to access young people)* This meant that the established relationships between workers and young people ensured supportive and trusting environments for the workshops to take place. *(Ensuring a safe and comfortable environment, in which trust is established)*

We identified the key issues and developed a standardised workshop module, which included questions asking for written and pictorial responses. *(Both written and pictorial responses useful)* The supported workshops, as opposed to individual questionnaires, allowed workers to provide assistance to participants, particularly those with low levels of English proficiency. The workshop format also allowed young people to share ideas and experiences with each other.

Feedback from facilitators indicated that the workshop setting was not a good environment to raise and discuss personal issues, such

as hygiene and family relationships. *(Public workshop a barrier for discussing personal issues)* Private interviews would have been more appropriate for exploring sensitive personal issues. Nonetheless, the participants' open and honest responses were remarkable, a result that was due to the trust fostered between facilitator and participants.

Once the research was collated and the report written and launched, the document was also made available to all the participants in order for them to see the result of their input and, hopefully, gain a sense of ownership over the project. *(Young people seeing outcomes and a sense of ownership is empowering)*

# Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues: leadership training 'Jigsaw' consultation model

The Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues is a statewide, community-based organisation. It provides a range of support services to strengthen and build innovative partnerships between young people, support services and the community, while enhancing life opportunities for young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

In order to gauge the needs and opinions of young people participating in our leadership training, we used a 'jigsaw' model. *(Creative and fun activity)* To do this, we created our own small jigsaws, starting with a few good pictures of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds in a range of situations (someone in a pool hall, at home and on a train station). We stuck them onto a backing and cut them into six or seven pieces. Each participant was then given a piece of a jigsaw puzzle and asked to complete the puzzle by finding other people with pieces of the same picture.

Once the puzzles were assembled, the young people were asked to work with their group to create a story for the young person depicted using some guiding questions:

*(Guiding questions providing some structure)*

- What is his or her name?
- Where is he/she and why?
- Tell us about his/her background (culture, age, what's happened to him/her?)
- What does he/she like to do?
- What is going well in his/her life?
- What is not going so well or badly for him/her?
- What does he/she worry about in terms of his/her future?
- What is one of the things about his/her situation that he/she would like to change?

The young people came up with a great range of stories and issues that then informed a broader discussion. Issues raised included difficulties in learning English at school, depression, relationships with family, homophobia etc.

No one had to disclose their personal situation because it was all fictitious and created by the group. *(Provides anonymity for young people to describe their needs without revealing personal information)*

This allowed the deeper issues to be discussed in a way that was personal yet not intimidating, while also normalising the difficulties commonly faced by migrant and refugee young people. Group consultation like this can be particularly useful when working with young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds – they may feel uncomfortable about speaking up because of language issues, confidence or other barriers. *(Useful method for engaging young people with language issues)* We also focused on some positive aspects so that a holistic view of young people emerged, which revealed some of the strengths that young people can rely on in difficult situations.







Consulting young people about their ideas and opinions

# *Taking Young People seriously*

## Part Four

## Evaluation





## Part 4: Evaluation

Consultation processes are continually reviewed and developed.

Evaluating both the process of consultation and the outcomes highlights how effective a consultation has been, and how it can be improved in the future. The evaluation also measures whether your consultation has successfully achieved its goals and objectives.

Young people can offer expert advice to the evaluation phase of the consultation by interpreting data and outcomes, offering insight into the accessibility and appeal of the consultation and how it might be improved.

There are two forms of evaluation:

- **Summary evaluation:** Achieved by reviewing the outcomes of the consultation at the end of the process.
- **Formative evaluation:** Achieved by checking the progress of the consultation as it unfolds. You need to decide during the planning phase when you will conduct this evaluation.

It may be useful to do both kinds of evaluation, as well as evaluate the consultation from the perspectives of:

- the young people taking part
- those doing the consultation

Some ways that both formative and summary evaluations can be done include:

- surveying participants
- holding discussion groups
- using an external evaluator
- involving a review panel
- using a variety of the above methods

The next section provides examples of questions to consider when doing summary or formative evaluations.



# Summary evaluation

The questions below are relevant for summary evaluation. The first set is directed at the consultant, and the second set at the participants. These questions are useful because they can trigger other questions, and may be adapted to individual circumstances.

## Questions for the consultant

### Planning the consultation

What was the aim of the consultation process?

Was a clear consultation process developed?

Did the consultation engage young people who were affected by, or had an interest in, the issue?

How were the participants identified?

Was there enough time to undertake the consultation?

Were there adequate resources to conduct the consultation?

Were any barriers identified in the planning process?

If so, were appropriate solutions found?

### The consultation process

What strategies were used to do the consultation?

Was the consultation a positive experience for the participants?

Was the consultation inclusive? Did all the participants have equal opportunity to contribute?

Was the consultation engaging? Were all the participants engaged in the process?

### Outcomes of the consultation

Were the goals and objectives of the consultation met?

How were results reported?

Were participants informed about results?

### Future improvements

How could the consultation be improved in the future?

## Questions for participants

### Planning the consultation

How did you hear about the consultation?

Were you involved in the planning of the consultation?

If so, was it an effective process and why or why not?

### The consultation process

Did you understand the purpose of the consultation?

Did you enjoy being involved in the consultation? Why/why not?

Do you think you had the opportunity to voice your opinions? Why/why not?

Were you interested in what the consultation was about? Why/why not?

Were there questions or issues not raised that you would have liked to discuss?

Did you learn anything new or develop any skills by being involved?

### Outcomes of the consultation

How was your contribution acknowledged? Was this satisfactory?

Do you know how the information from the consultation was used?

Have you been told what the outcomes were?

### Future improvements

Would you have liked to be involved in the consultation in any other way?

Would you take part in other consultations?



Question



# Formative evaluation

The questions below could be considered when doing a formative evaluation as the consultation process unfolds. Both the consultant and participants can answer these questions.

- Are the aims of the consultation being met?
- Are the time and resources adequate?
- Is this an appropriate consultation method?
- Are the appropriate participants being targeted?
- Are the participants enjoying the experience?
- Are the participants receiving adequate support?
- Are all participants getting an equal opportunity to take part?
- Are the participants engaging with the process?  
What do they find interesting?
- Are any barriers appearing?
- How can these barriers be overcome?

# Evaluation





# Consultation resources

Australian Youth Foundation, 1996, *Youth Partnership and Participation*, Sydney.

CREATE Foundation, 2000, *Consultation and Participation Models for Children and Young People in Care*, Victoria.

Department of Education and Training, Queensland, 2002, *Two Way Street: How government departments can engage with young people through consultation*, Queensland.

Department of Education, Training and Employment, South Australia, 2000, *Youth Participation Handbook: A guide for organisations seeking to involve young people on boards and committees*, South Australia.

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 1999, *Youth Participation Manual*, United Nations, New York.

Kirby, P. & Bryson, S., 2002, *Measuring the Magic? Evaluating and researching young people's participation in public decision making*, Carnegie Young People Initiative, London.

Lansdown, G., 2001, *Promoting Children's Participation in Democratic Decision-Making*, UNICEF Innocenti Insight, Siena.

National Children's and Youth Law Centre, 1995, *Promoting Youth Participation: A rights perspective*, University of New South Wales, Sydney.

NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2001, *TAKING PARTicipation Seriously*, NSW Commission for Children and Young People, Sydney.

Willow, C., 2002, *Participation in Practice: Children and young people as partners in change*, The Children's Society, London.

# Office for Youth

The Office for Youth is part of the Victorian Government's Department for Victorian Communities and is the key agency driving a whole-of-government agenda in relation to Victoria's young people. The office is responsible for policy advice, research and strategic planning in relation to Government policies, programs and service delivery for Victorians aged 12 to 25. It is also responsible for providing a range of means by which young people's opinions can reach and be considered by Government.

The Office for Youth aims to respond to new challenges facing young people by working in collaboration with all levels of government, community agencies and businesses. Through its grants programs, the office seeks to expand young people's opportunities for participation in their communities.

Through the Office for Youth, the Government has a commitment to working with Victoria's diverse young people, and the communities and organisations with which they are involved.

Please contact the Office for Youth if you would like further information on youth consultation or other activities undertaken by the office.

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*Department for  
Victorian Communities*



# Youth Affairs Council of Victoria

The Youth Affairs Council of Victoria Inc. (YACVic) is the peak body and leading policy advocate on young people's issues in Victoria.

YACVic works towards a Victorian community that values and provides opportunity, participation, justice and equity for all young people.

The main function of YACVic is to make representations to government and serve as an advocate for the interests of young people, workers with young people, and organisations that provide direct services to young people.

YACVic is committed to assisting young people to participate meaningfully in the formulation and implementation of social policy in Victoria.

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## Participation



# The Government's vision for young people

The Government's vision for Victoria is for a society made up of supportive, active and caring communities. To achieve this, it is essential that everyone, including young people, has the opportunity to participate in organisations and decision-making bodies that determine our future. The production of these handbooks – *Taking Young People People Seriously* – is one way in which we are working towards realising our vision.

Young people's opinions and ideas count. We value and respect the breadth of what they have to offer and believe it is their right to achieve their full potential. The Victorian Government is committed to supporting and listening to all young people, and in doing so, we aim to deliver services that meet their differing needs.

The content of these handbooks provides information that enables organisations to effectively engage young people who represent our population's diversity of culture and language, sexuality, geographic location and ability. We recognise that some young people need extra support to become involved and these handbooks offer useful suggestions to ensure that possibility.

The Government's approach to effective youth participation focuses on strengthening young people's capacity to manage complex issues in healthy and flexible ways. We are designing policies and programs to help young people navigate successful pathways through adolescence, and build stronger ties with their communities.

It is through their connections with various communities that young people will be empowered to make a difference today and in the future. And in order for communities and organisations to reap the benefits of young people's participation, it is vital that they embrace young people's diversity and create appropriate opportunities for their involvement.

**For more information about the Government's vision for young people, go to [www.youth.vic.gov.au](http://www.youth.vic.gov.au).**





[www.youth.vic.gov.au](http://www.youth.vic.gov.au)  
[www.yacvic.org.au](http://www.yacvic.org.au)



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Victorian Communities*

