

Taking Young People Seriously

Young People on Boards and Committees

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 boards and committees has made an invaluable contribution to the project.

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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



Given the opportunity,
young people offer
unique and valuable
perspectives on a
broad range of issues.

This document, *Taking Young People Seriously; Young People on Boards and Committees*, expresses the Government's commitment to supporting and encouraging young people's involvement in decision-making bodies.

When young people's opinions are sought and valued in decision-making bodies, it's not just an organisation that benefits. A greater understanding and respect is developed, greater self-worth can be generated through learning new skills and belonging to a community and better decisions are made. These experiences then have the potential to impact positively on society as a whole, and work towards creating strong and cohesive communities.

The Government is working towards ensuring that all young Victorians have the opportunity to benefit from and contribute to a full range of social, cultural and educational activities. We acknowledge that young people's input in decision-making bodies is vital.

The Government recognises its responsibility to provide some of the necessary tools and expertise to achieve effective youth participation in decision-making bodies. 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.

Regardless of a person's age, it is important that their efforts are respected. I trust that you will find this handbook a useful resource for including young people in your decision-making body, and making it a positive experience for everyone involved.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jacinta Allan". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'J'.

JACINTA ALLAN, MP

Minister for Employment and Youth Affairs



In a democratic community, everyone has the right to participate in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.

Often young people's rights to participate are overlooked, and they are marginalised from the structures or processes through which those decisions are made. Our organisations and communities miss out on the invaluable contributions that young people bring to those processes when that happens.

YACVic is a membership-driven organisation. Young people, both members and otherwise, are key stakeholders in the work that is done by the organisation. As such, it is imperative that they are involved at every level of decision-making. Through involvement on our reference groups and our board of governance, young people bring their experience and ideas to the shaping of YACVic policy direction.

Young people bring fresh and unique perspectives to YACVic's work. Sometimes these perspectives can be challenging and confronting, and might prompt the older members to look outside the square and to challenge our personal perspectives and work practices. However, learning is a two-way process. Participation provides our younger members with opportunities to develop their skills and learn about decision-making within a peak body.

It is in understanding the importance and value of young people's contributions to decision-making structures that we are very pleased to be working together with the Office for Youth to produce this handbook resource. This partnership has presented an exciting opportunity to combine the resources of government and the knowledge of young people themselves and organisations in the youth and community sector.

We hope that you find *Taking Young People Seriously; Young People on Boards and Committees* a useful tool to help you promote young people's participation in the decision-making processes that affect their lives.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rowena Allen'. The signature is fluid and cursive.

ROWENA ALLEN

Chairperson, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria



Introduction	1
What is youth participation?	1
Why focus on young people's participation?	1
About this handbook	2
Part 1: Why do it?	4
The benefits of young people's participation on boards and committees	4
'We'd love to have young people involved, but...'	9
'I'd love to be involved, but...'	12
Part 2: The value of planning	14
Turning principles into practice	16
Some models of young people's participation on a board or committee	19
Recruitment and selection – the why, who and how	26
Worksheet 1 – Why are young people being recruited?	27
Worksheet 2 – Who will be recruited?	29
Some recruitment tools to consider	33
Application and selection – issues to think about	34
Worksheet 3 – Resolving the selection process	37
Induction	38
Part 3: Providing support	40
Part 4: Evaluation	50
Why do it?	51
How can we do it?	51
Evaluation Methods	52
Worksheet 4 – Evaluation questions for young people	53
Worksheet 5 – Evaluation questions for older committee members	54
Worksheet 6 – General questions relating to the whole committee	55
Appendices	58
1 – Breaking down the barriers in organisational structures and individuals' attitudes	58
2 – Legal, risk management, and insurance issues to consider relating to the participation of minors on boards and committees	59
3 – Equal Opportunity Exemptions	62
4 – Tips for facilitators on a board or committee	63
5 – Glossary of terms	64
Other resources	68

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. Our communities are made stronger by the many and varied contributions that young people make through their participation.

Involvement in the community is an enjoyable and rewarding experience, and 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, resulting in young people having fewer opportunities to be involved.

In addition, there are specific issues that may impact on young people's ability to participate, such as limited transport options, restricted time, or limited experience in such an activity. Between the ages of 12 and 25 young people grow and change developmentally. The ways in which they engage in decision-making, and the supports they may need to do that also shift with this development. These issues need to be considered to ensure that participation initiatives are open to all young people.

About this handbook

Many decisions are made through boards or committees. They are created so that people can work together to investigate or consider a particular issue, or get a particular task done. Through their direct participation on boards and committees, young people can share in decision-making processes.

This handbook is relevant to anyone who wants to know about how young people between the ages of 12 and 25 can be effectively engaged on boards and committees. The handbook draws from examples of young people's involvement on boards and committees from around Victoria and in a variety of settings. It provides advice on how a partnership approach may be taken to young people's participation, so that a board or committee is **inclusive** and that young people's participation is **purposefully engaging** and **empowering**.

Practical advice, activity sheets and tools are included to address the following key issues:

- Why young people should be involved – outlining the benefits and addressing the anxieties held by young people and organisations.
- The value of planning – turning principles into practice, some models of participation, and recruitment and selection strategies.
- Providing support – outlines the key ideas that young people have identified to help make their participation on a board or committee successful.
- Evaluation and review – issues to consider in keeping a board or committee on track and monitoring its success.

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:

- *Consulting Young People about their Ideas and Opinions*, a handbook for organisations working with young people.
- *Creating Change in your Community*, a handbook for young people.

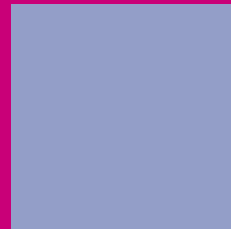


Young people on boards and committees

Taking Young People seriously

Part One

Why do it?



Part 1: Why do it?

The benefits of young people's participation on boards and committees

Young people's participation on boards or committees has many benefits for young people, for organisations and for the community. For young people, being involved provides opportunities to share in decision-making, develop new skills, pursue an area of interest, and have the satisfaction of using their skills to effect change in the community.

Many organisations now recognise that young people are stakeholders who should be involved in the decision-making done by boards and committees. They also recognise the value of the contributions young people can make to help ensure that services, events or decisions are more relevant and appropriate. Young people can bring fresh perspectives to a board or committee. Their participation can contribute to the diversity of skills and opinions at the table, and help an organisation build more effective links with young people in the community.

The community benefits from young people's participation on boards and committees; a healthy democratic society needs everyone to engage in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. Young people's involvement in these structures builds social connections for young people and helps organisations effectively serve community needs.

While the benefits to young people's involvement on boards and committees are many, there are also important responsibilities involved for organisations that wish to benefit from young people's participation. If young people's contributions are not respected, or a committee structure is not inclusive, participation can become a disempowering experience. Careful consideration needs to be given to the reasons why young people are asked to take part, and careful planning can help make a board or committee inclusive, empowering and purposefully engaging for young people.



Benefits

Key reasons why young people should be involved

The reasons why young people get involved on boards and committees and the reasons organisations involve young people reveal much about the benefits to both.

Key reasons young people get involved on boards or committees:

- to make a difference;
- to improve the opportunities, services and profile of other young people in the community;
- to do something new;
- to support other young people;
- to develop skills and gain experience in an area;
- to follow an interest;
- to have some fun;
- to open up new social opportunities.

Key reasons why organisations include young people on boards and committees:

- To recognise the need to be accountable to young people, and the responsibility they have to provide space for young people's input in decision-making.
- To make better decisions by accessing the knowledge and skills that young people can offer. Young people are more likely to act on decisions if they have been involved in making them.
- To provide young people with an opportunity to learn more about the organisation and develop skills through their participation.
- To build stronger links between the organisation and young people in the community.

Case study

Loddon Mallee Women's Health is a non-government, non-profit health promoting organisation providing health services, information and support for all women in the Loddon Mallee region. Over the past several years we have aimed to increase the participation of younger women on the Council of Management, with the philosophy of nurturing leadership skills and mentoring young women's ability to participate in community organisations. The advice we would give to young women considering making this type of contribution to the community is that it is a two-way process. It is enriching and rewarding for the young women involved and adds to their skills. Participation by young women also augments the reach of our service's consumer input and assists decision-making within the organisation.

Case study

At the **Austin Hospital Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS)**, we run a Consumer Advisory Group. The group involves the participation of young people who have accessed the service themselves, their carers and CAMHS staff. Meetings provide a space for these key groups to come together to discuss the service and how it may be improved. One of the first things the group achieved was to survey consumers and carers about signage at the Centre, resulting in the removal of the term 'mental health' from the sign, according to their requests.

*I was complaining to a friend of mine that there is not much for young people to do in Wodonga, and she said – 'why don't you get involved in the Wodonga **Action Crew** and do something about it then' – so I did.*

Dan Hanley, Wodonga Action Crew

*I want to contribute to the committee of management because I want to see **Platform** succeed. I've had a long attachment (with Platform) and it's been a starting point to so much in my life.*

Michael Carmody, participant and secretary, Platform Youth Theatre

Most trains after 7.00 p.m. will have the first carriage only available for passengers.

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“We’d love to have young people involved, but...”

Many organisations like the idea of having young people involved on their boards or committees, but believe it is too hard or not relevant to them. The table below highlights some of the anxieties and misconceptions organisations might have, and some alternative points to consider:

It would be great, but....

- Young people are not really interested in the things we talk about in our meetings;
- This board or committee is not relevant to young people;
- Young people do not have the experience to be involved on this board or committee;
- We don't have time to provide a supportive environment for young people's participation on our board or committee;
- Young people do not stay engaged in a process long enough to be involved on our board or committee.

However, have you considered?

- That young people have a diverse range of interests and opinions. With effective recruitment strategies, interested young people might get involved.
 - That young people can be involved at various levels of organisational decision-making. If they are not interested in those meetings, perhaps there is another way they can offer input.
-
- That young people are active, engaged members of the community – they have an interest and stake in as broad a range of issues as other community members, and have valuable contributions to make to more than just ‘youth issues’.
-
- That some young people may not have had much time to gather practical experience on boards and committees, but they have a range of other experiences that will enrich the diversity of views and perceptions brought to the decision-making table.
 - That young people will pick up new skills through their participation quickly. Effective mentoring skill development strategies can assist in the development of those skills.
-
- That planning effective placement of adequate resources and supports may take time initially, but will make the board or committee run more efficiently in the future.
-
- That the expectations of young people’s engagement need to reflect their developmental stage – a young person’s developmental stage will impact on their level of engagement with a board or committee.
 - That young people are often expected to get involved on a voluntary basis without payment, where others are not – offering adequate incentives and always reimbursing costs to young people can help.
 - That a bit of flexibility can go a long way towards encouraging young people to remain involved and will accommodate young people’s changing lifestyles.



“I’d love to be involved, but...”

There are also some key reasons why young people might be deterred from getting involved on a board or a committee, including:

- I didn’t know the option was there.
- I was put off by the fact that I didn’t know anyone involved.
- I didn’t think I had a valuable contribution to make.
- A formal committee seems like a pretty boring way to work.
- I was unable to turn up for a couple of meetings and felt embarrassed to come after that.
- I couldn’t get to the meetings by public transport from my place.
- My expenses, like travel costs, weren’t reimbursed so I couldn’t afford to go.
- I can’t afford to participate voluntarily, and need to have that time open for shifts at work.
- I had never been to the place the meetings were held, and couldn’t find the room. The receptionist made me feel pretty uncomfortable when I asked for help. Maybe if I’d known what to expect it would have been easier.
- I was involved, but it became pretty clear that my opinion wasn’t being taken seriously.
- While I understood most of what was being said, there were a few things I needed explained but I didn’t feel comfortable asking questions.
- I was the only young person there, which made me uncomfortable.
- I was expected to be a representative for the young people in my area, but I can’t speak for all of them.
- I was expected to be a representative, but I didn’t have any resources to go out and talk to other young people about what they thought.
- I wanted to be involved, but my parents didn’t know the organisation and so weren’t comfortable with me going.

Careful planning can help to address these issues and ensure that young people do not have the above experiences when participating on a board or committee. The next section outlines issues to consider when planning, and some activities that may be useful through that process.



Young people on boards and committees

Taking Young People seriously

Part Two

The value of planning



Part 2: The value of planning

The best way to avoid some of the problems raised in Part 1 is to take time to plan so that the board or committee is accessible to young people. Planning can help ensure that time and resources are used effectively.

The earlier young people are involved in planning how a board or committee will operate, the more it will reflect their needs and interests, and the more likely it will be to engage them.

If a new committee is being established, young people have a central role to play in planning how it will run. If young people are being invited to participate in an already established board or committee, the planning process may be a little different – the board or committee may need to think through a few key issues.

Information and activity sheets are provided throughout this section to help think through the following issues:

- Turning key principles of participation into practice.
- Which model of young people's participation to consider for your board or committee.
- The why, who and how of recruitment to a board or committee.



Planning

Turning the principles into practice

This section outlines how taking a partnership approach to young people's participation, as well as providing support and resources, creates a firm foundation upon which to build participation experiences that are inclusive, empowering and purposefully engaging for young people.

Taking a partnership approach

An initiative in which young people and other community members are working together in a partnership is more likely to be successful. The indicators below are a useful measure of an effective partnership between young people and others on a board or committee.

- Decision-making control is shared by both.
- Both share in the committee's vision.
- Space exists for both to contribute equally, and contributions are equally valued.
- Effective communication exists to negotiate and learn from each other.

Creating an inclusive board or committee

A board or committee is inclusive of young people when:

- Young people's unique experiences and needs are considered so that young people can get involved and participate equally.
- Young people are not simply asked to fit into 'adult' structures or expectations; rather, a common decision-making process is negotiated.

Ensuring the experience is empowering for young people

Participation on a board or committee can be empowering for young people when:

- Young people's participation is part of the decision-making processes that affect their lives.
- Being involved is a positive experience for young people, and it helps them develop personally.

Offering young people purposeful engagement

Young people are purposefully engaged on a board or committee when:

- Young people have real, valued roles on a committee or board so that their participation influences outcomes.
- The purpose of the committee incorporates young people's interests and issues. These may be identified by young people, or the committee as a whole.

Providing resources and support

Adequate resources need to be placed into supporting young people's participation. For example, flexibility with time and financial support for participants are issues to consider. During the planning phase it's also important to consider both the resources that are needed and the resources already available. Some key support issues for consideration are outlined in Part 3.

Acknowledging the learning that sometimes needs to be done by individual adults and organisations

In Part 1, some common anxieties organisations may have about young people's participation were highlighted and addressed. Young people are not the only ones who may need support to participate in partnership with adults on a board or committee. Commonly, adults and organisations also need to be open to learning new things before working in partnership with young people. Tools to overcome organisational barriers can be found in **Appendix 1**.

In our committee, both young people and more mature members work together to share a diverse range of skills.

Erin Clarke, Foundation for Young Australians

In summary:

Key issues to consider when approaching young people's participation on a board or committee are:

- taking a partnership approach;
- creating an inclusive board or committee;
- ensuring that participation is an empowering experience for young people;
- ensuring young people are purposefully engaged;
- providing adequate resources and support to allow these things;
- acknowledging the learning that organisations and adults sometimes need to do to engage effectively with young people.

The next section provides information about models of young people's participation on boards and committees, through which these key principles can become practice.

Case study

The **Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council (VIYAC)** is a newly established platform for young Indigenous voices in the state of Victoria. VIYAC was established by ATSIC Victoria and Aboriginal Affairs Victoria, both of which are part of the State Government's Department for Victorian Communities. VIYAC is made up of two representatives (one male and one female) from each of the five regions of Victoria (North West, North East, Gippsland, Western and Central), plus two representatives from the Victorian Torres Strait Islander youth community. It provides a structure that young people themselves facilitate, to respond to and influence both Government and non-government organisational policies that affect young Indigenous Victorians. VIYAC demonstrates the Government's commitment to including young Indigenous people in all aspects of community life. VIYAC allows young Indigenous people in Victoria to assert their aspirations and needs, and to have real impact on the decision-making that affects their lives.



Some models of young people's participation on a board or committee

The two key factors that influence the different ways young people get involved on a board or committee are the function of the board or committee and the decision-making power held by the young people on it. This section outlines some key roles of boards and committees and presents some models for consideration.

There are some roles with specific legal responsibilities that people under the age of 18 cannot take on boards or committees: **Appendix 2** outlines legal issues and indemnity insurance considerations that need to be addressed. **Appendix 3** outlines issues to consider when seeking equal opportunity exemptions for young people on a board or committee.

The different functions of boards and committees

A board's key functions are managing and directing

Essentially, a board (usually a board of directors or management) is an organisation's highest level of accountability. It is typically responsible for making sure the legal requirements of the organisation are met, appointing the managing executive officer, approving the budget, and making general decisions about the strategic direction of the organisation. They are usually, though not necessarily, reasonably formal in the way they work.

A committee's key functions are considering, advising, steering, and getting a project done. Committees can take many different forms, and within an organisation's structure are usually concerned with more specific, targeted tasks than boards. A committee can be formal or casual, and the role of a committee is usually described by its title. For example, the role of an advisory committee is to give advice on a particular issue.

A quick snapshot of roles:

Directing or managing – such as a board of directors.

Managing – for example, a board or committee of management.

Advisory – for example, a youth reference group.

Steering – providing advice specifically to guide a project (often called a project reference group).

Subcommittee – a smaller committee concerned with a subsection of the broader committee's work, such as a fundraising committee.

See **Appendix 5** for more detail.

Decision-making power in numbers

On any of these different types of boards or committees, young people's influence over decision-making will depend on the number of young people involved. The following models of young people's participation are based on the level of control they have over decision-making as a result of the number of young people involved.

A few young people with a mix of other people

This is a committee in which a few young people work with a range of other people for whom the issue is relevant. Young people might be involved on this type of committee because they have an individual interest or stake in the issue, or they might be involved as representatives of a broader base of young people.

Key issues

If young people are being invited to join a committee where they will be a minority, it can be useful to invite at least two young people to be involved. One young person on their own may find the environment intimidating and unfamiliar, particularly if they have limited or no experience on a committee. Providing personal support such as mentoring and information may have particular relevance in this situation ensuring that young people are empowered to participate effectively.

Examples of when it is effective to include at least two young people

- any situation where an issue is being considered that young people have a stake in;
- committees that are set up to deal with issues relevant to a local community are also relevant to young people.

Participation



Case study

The **Victorian Multicultural Commission** was established by the State Government to provide independent advice to the Government on how to build on the strengths of Victoria's rich multicultural community. In 2002, we decided to co-opt two youth commissioners to improve our response to the needs of the state's young people from ethnically diverse communities.

The Minister for Youth Affairs facilitated the process of nomination and selection with the assistance of the Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues. Naomi Ngo and Abdiaziz Farah were appointed to the roles. It is their role to attend commission meetings to provide advice and advocate on behalf of the commission to the broader community, particularly with regard to issues facing young people. They are provided with casual mentoring from the Chairperson of the commission, Mr George Lekakis, and are encouraged to contact him with any questions or concerns they may have.

The commission is enriched by the viewpoints that Naomi and Abdiaziz bring. They help the commission meet the responsibilities it has to young people in the community, as well as representing and responding to their needs and ideas. We are working towards increasing young people's involvement in the future, with a focus on changing the Victorian Multicultural Commission Act 1993 so that three youth commissioners may be appointed with full powers.

My experience as a co-opted youth commissioner on the Victorian Multicultural Commission (VMC) has been a valuable learning experience. It has taken me some time to gain sufficient understanding of the role of the VMC, my role and responsibilities as a youth commissioner, and the current state of multicultural affairs. As this is the first time that the VMC has co-opted young people as commissioners, there is a lack of appropriate support structures for these positions to be effective and meaningful. At the recent VMC Forward Plan meeting with the Minister Assisting the Premier on Multicultural Affairs, both myself and Abdiaziz Farah, who is the other youth commissioner, proposed that the VMC develop relevant support for our positions. We also proposed our plans to combat racism amongst young people and address the disadvantages that refugee and migrant young people face in education, employment and training. All these proposals have been adopted and incorporated in the VMC's Forward Plan, which will be implemented over the next two years.

Naomi Ngo, Victorian Multicultural Commission Youth Commissioner

Young people as the majority of board or committee members

The principle of having young people with a majority of membership helps to ensure an even power balance between young people and other community members. This model usually aims to bring together the skills of a mixture of young people and other community members, but allows young people to be either the majority decision-makers, or to have at least as much decision-making power as other committee members.

Key issues

This model can be a particularly useful way for young people to learn from interaction with more experienced older committee or board members. Thought needs to be given to the different roles to ensure that power is shared.

Examples of when it is effective for young people to hold the majority

This model is commonly used when a board or committee needs young people to be either equal or primary decision-makers. It would be more commonly used to make decisions about the delivery of a program or service to young people.

Case study

Platform Youth Theatre is a theatre company for young people aged between 16 and 26 from Melbourne's northern suburbs, and is supported by the City of Darebin. It has recently established itself as an incorporated association. This process gave us an opportunity to create an operating structure that ensured young people are key decision-makers on the committee of management. Kath, our support worker, worked with a team of Platform members to write our constitution. The language used in an official document like this was sometimes a hurdle for young Platform members, so it was important to take the time to ensure that we all understood the process.

Our committee of management is made up of both young members and older members of Platform. This mix brings the right combination of skills and experiences to the table, and creates a great opportunity to learn from each other. To ensure that young people's voices are heard in this setting, eight of the 13 members must be young people.

- The chairperson of the committee of management can be a young person or an older person; however, a young person must hold the position of vice-chairperson.
- The role of treasurer is shared between a young person and an experienced older person, who also takes on a mentoring supporting role.
- An under-18s liaison/development officer supports young people in that age bracket to participate at Platform.
- Quorum at meetings is achieved only when four members of the committee are present, and at least one of these needs to be a young person.

Young people's central involvement in the committee of management is essential because Platform is a youth driven organisation. It helps to keep the company relevant, and facilitates strong connections between the committee of management and the broader membership of the organisation. It adds to the creativity of the group and helps keep the committee reflective of the local community.

Young people as 100% of committee membership, with or without older people as a support or reference

This is a committee made up exclusively of young people. It is often used when young people are supposed to have complete decision-making power. They may be receiving the support of other community members who are available as resources for the committee. This model is typically used when a project or organisation is youth driven.

Key issues

Support levels can vary and will depend on the role of young people. The support worker's role can also vary: working as a connection to resources or power, or as administrative support. If the committee is attached to an organisation, the committee needs good communications channels with the organisation, a clear purpose and resources to work within that structure.

Examples of when it is effective for the committee to be 100% young people

This model is commonly used in youth driven projects or reference group models, where young people are providing consistent advice. May be a useful way for young people to be involved when other organisational boards or committees are inflexible or unappealing.

Case study

Stuffest is an annual youth arts and cultural festival in Ballarat. The week-long festival is organised by the Stuffest committee, made up entirely of young people who are supported by staff of Ballarat Youth Services.

The committee was made up of a mix of young people who had become involved through other projects, through word of mouth or after reading about it in the paper. The group didn't all know each other at the start, but the casual committee environment helped them to make friends.

The committee made all the key decisions about how the festival would work, including the schedule, acts, venues, and budget. Being in control of the agenda was one of the things that attracted young people to the committee and that sense of ownership helps to keep them engaged.

For some members, balancing their commitments of school, work and the committee was sometimes difficult. Being flexible about changing meeting times was really important to help people attend. Other key things that helped to make the committee a success were the support of encouraging staff, having access to resources like phones and computers, and being in a casual, fun environment.

Create your own model

There is plenty of room for creative variations of the models just discussed. Any committee needs to find a way of working that meets its needs and purpose, and a committee model might reflect the unique identity of its members. Having the flexibility to operate in a way that caters for the objectives of the committee, meets the needs of members, and acknowledges the reality of resources can be a central ingredient to making a committee effective.

It may be that the committee changes the way it operates over time, gradually working out how best to operate. A committee may start with a formal structure and break that down into a more casual way of operating so that it works for them, or vice versa.

One of the central advantages to young people's involvement in determining how the committee will operate is that it is then more likely to suit their needs, reflect the type of structure they would like to be involved in, and give them some actual ownership over the committee. It is a great way to ensure that a committee structure is inclusive rather than imposed.



Create

Case study

Reach Out!, an initiative of the Inspire Foundation, is a national web-based service that aims to improve young people's mental health and well being by providing information and referrals in a format that appeals to young people. The Reach Out! Youth Advisory Board (ROYAB) plays an essential role in guiding the direction of Reach Out!

The committee operates via online and offline structures – an online discussion forum and a three-day face-to-face meeting in Sydney where participants come together to further develop many of the ideas discussed online. The online forum, in the form of a bulletin board, allows participants to contribute to discussions by posting messages. The Reach Out! staff enter into the forums to offer feedback and advice where appropriate. This means that ROYAB members can learn from the experiences of staff and each other, and reinforces the link between staff and the board.

One of the benefits of the online model is that it reflects the way in which young people interact with Reach Out!, via the Internet. It provides a very non-confrontational forum through which board members can discuss issues that may be sensitive or stigmatised, such as mental health or sexuality. It means that young people from all over the nation can participate without the barriers of geography.

The model recognises that young people can't be expected to operate between nine and five during the working week, and provides a space for members to log on and contribute when it suits them. To help cover the costs involved in being online, the program offers participants a \$100.00 honorarium at the end of their tenure on the board.

Reach Out! has been a very worthwhile experience. Since being a part of it I have been given a chance to work with young people in my own community and around Australia. It has helped me understand myself as well as other people, and I have made a heap of new friends.

Danika Fraser, Reach Out! Youth Ambassador



Information



Recruitment

Recruitment and selection – the why, who and how

Boards and committees are made successful because of the mix of opinions, skills and experiences that people bring to them. As such, recruitment and selection are important issues for any model of board or committee. For many young people operating on youth driven committees, working with other interested, motivated young people is an important factor for staying involved.

This section provides advice and worksheets to help clarify three key questions that need to be asked before recruiting:

- Why are you recruiting?
- Who should be recruited?
- How can it be done?

Young people's participation in recruitment and selection

Young people's involvement in the recruitment and selection processes can help set the foundations for an inclusive committee structure.

- Young people can offer great ideas on how other young people may be recruited – where to go and how to make getting involved attractive.
- Young people may have a greater sense of ownership over the committee if involved in the recruitment or selection processes. This may help increase their engagement with the committee.
- The presence of young people can make selection processes more comfortable for new applicants.

Some questions to help you resolve why young people are being recruited to your board or committee.

Worksheet one

What is the purpose of the committee or board?

What is the role of young people on the committee or board?

How do the young people benefit from participating?

How does your organisation, committee or board benefit from young people's participation?

Why are young people being recruited?

All members of a board or committee need to clearly understand their roles and why they are there. Whatever type of committee young people participate in, whether it's a mixed committee or driven by young people, it's important that the roles and expectations of the young participants are clearly thought through, negotiated and understood. This helps to ensure that young people's participation is purposefully engaging.

Key issues to consider are:

- What are the benefits to young people of being involved?
- What are the benefits to the organisation?
- Are young people expected to be representative, or just provide their own personal perspectives?

If young people are recruited on the basis of age alone, their participation risks being tokenistic. The contributions that young people can make as individuals – their skills and talents – should always be considered.

Case study

The Push is a non-profit, state-wide youth entertainment organisation providing opportunities for young people of all ages to have access to safe, affordable, drug and alcohol free programs in Victoria. The Push is contracted by the State Government's Office for Youth.

The Youth Advisory Council (YAC) is a central part of The Push. We provide essential advice to the staff and board about the programs The Push run, advertise what it's doing through various media, and work as volunteers, providing hands on support to The Push's activities and programs, like gigs, training sessions, workshops, as well as helping around the office.

We are about to embark on another recruitment drive. In the past, the majority of young people getting involved have come from FReeZA committees. However, we are hoping to recruit from a broader network of sources and aim to target a more diverse cross-section of young people in the future. We also aim to maintain a gender balance in the group and try to recruit at least three young people from regional Victoria.

The Push Youth Advisory Committee

Questions for consideration when deciding who will be recruited to your board or committee.

Worksheet two

Are there specific young people your committee or board is relevant to?

Who would benefit from being involved?

What skills will young people need?

Considering this, what resources does the board or committee have to offer as support?

Considering the resources available and the issue of representation, how many young people should be recruited?

Who should be recruited?

Young people are not a homogenous group. They differ in their opinions, interests, skills and experiences. Who should be targeted for recruitment onto this board or committee? To answer this question it is useful to reflect on what the committee's purpose is and why young people are involved, while considering the following issues:

Diversity and representation

The diversity of young people's experiences, lifestyles, and cultural connections are reflected in the various perspectives and contributions that young people bring to a committee or board. If the young people's role is to be representative of a broader group, the committee's membership needs to reflect the diversity of that group. Consider issues such as gender, age, cultural background and socio-economic status when deciding who should be involved on your board or committee, to ensure it represents the interests of those affected by its outcomes.

Who would benefit from being involved?

There are many ways that young people benefit from sitting on a board or committee. They can contribute to decision-making about something that impacts on their lives, learn new skills or meet new people. When young people experience those benefits, they are inspired to stay involved and engage more in the committee or board. Considering the benefits of being involved that were outlined in Part 1, which young people would benefit from being involved?

What attributes do young people need to be involved?

Considering the resources available, and the nature of the committee or board, what skills, experiences or attributes will a young person need to participate?

Is motivation to be involved the central ingredient, or is it important that young people also bring specific skills to the committee?

How many young people should be recruited?

As the different models of young people's participation on a board or committee show, the number of young people involved can make a difference to young people's decision-making power on the committee. In some cases, a young person may feel isolated on their own. Having strong, personal supports, like a mentor or the presence of other young people, can really help. Another consideration is resources and how many young people can be supported to participate. For example, if you are reimbursing young people's costs for travel, how many young people can your budget cover? If you are hoping that all young people will have an older mentor, how many young people can be involved?

How to get the word out

There are many different strategies that can be used to get the word out to young people who may be interested in becoming involved. Regardless of which method is used to recruit, these four tips are relevant:

Make it attractive to young people

Young people will only become involved if it's their own choice. Highlight those things that young people list as the key benefits to being involved (as outlined on page 6), such as the opportunity to have a say, develop skills, meet people and have some fun.

One of the most efficient ways to make recruitment or promotional materials appealing to young people is to involve them in the design. There may be scope for young people to use their skills as artists, writers, designers or marketing strategists to create promotional materials.

Take the information to young people

- What is the common thread between young people who may be interested in being involved? Do they belong to a local community? Do they have a specific area of interest?
- If the common thread is geographical, think about recruitment methods that target a local area, such as advertising in the local press, local distribution of posters or flyers, targeting local public spaces young people use, etc.
- If trying to recruit young people with a specific interest, consider advertising in zines, student bodies, shops, venues, or services related to that interest.
- Also consider making use of existing networks that young people access. Organisations that work with cultural communities or services that young people might access could be approached to pass on the word.
- Considering the diverse lifestyles of young people in the community, which young people in the community will the information reach? For example, if schools are targeted, young people who are not students will not be included and you will need to advertise more broadly to reach those young people.

Make the information accessible

Think about how accessible the process of application is to young people you need to recruit.

- Is the verbal language or written documentation easily understood?
- Is the necessary information located somewhere that young people can easily find?

Don't be afraid to be creative

There is no need to stick to conventional methods of getting the word out. It may be beneficial for young people to take part in developing creative methods of advertising to other young people.

- Could a fresh, creative design be used for a poster, flyer, postcard or web site page to get the word out?
- Are there media outlets you are not using, such as community or student radio, or alternative press?

Look for unprocessed talent everywhere. Often the rockiest ground leads to the smoothest path in life.

Michael Crompton, Young Person



Recruitment tools to consider

- Advertise through posters, postcards, local and street press, zines.
- Talk to school groups, tafe and uni groups, social groups or clubs.
- Use email lists; for example, Youth.com, Youthgas, YACVic Announce, Youth Affairs Research Network (YARN).
- Approach organisations and services young people access – ask them to nominate young people or advertise the committee.
- Consider using different strategies to target different groups of young people. For example, send information out to schools as well as dropping leaflets in letterboxes, local shops or at services young people use to attract young people who are not at school.
- If it is appropriate for the committee to be open to any interested young people, the snowball effect can be effective: invite a small number of young people and have them invite friends.
- Word of mouth is always a useful tool.
- Consider recruiting young people from your own organisation, if possible.



Recruitment

Application and selection – issues to think about

Figuring out a strategy to get the word out to young people is one part of recruitment. It is also important to think about the process through which young people will get involved. The application process should be an empowering, learning experience for young people, regardless of the outcome.

Will young people be asked to apply and go through a selection process?

This may be particularly useful if young people need specific skills or personal attributes to be involved. A selection process can be useful to find out the reasons why someone wants to be involved, their expectations of involvement and the supports they may need to participate. Particular strategies can be used to make the application process accessible to a cross section of young people.

Will nominations be taken?

This process can be a useful way of making use of already existing networks. If young people have a representative role on the committee or board, you may need them to be nominated from a broad group of young people. A cross section of agencies, organisations or networks of young people can be targeted for nominations to ensure that a diverse range of young people becomes involved. If a young person is nominated by an outside organisation, it may be possible for that organisation to assist in supporting that young person to be involved.

Do you need a selection and nomination process?

This process may be useful when the core purpose of the committee is to provide an opportunity for any interested young people to take part. If a young person has nominated himself or herself for involvement, they may be expressing a keen interest to be involved. It is important to realistically consider the available resources and how many people can be supported for involvement.

Case study

At **Princes Hill Secondary College**, students are invited to volunteer for our student forums. This is valuable because the process of getting involved is not based on students' popularity, but instead depends on their level of interest in taking part.

Application processes

Usually involves applicants answering some questions, either in a written application, an interview, or just a casual chat. Key questions are about why someone wants to be involved, what they can offer the committee or board, and what being involved can offer them.

Possible application pitfalls for young people

- Could the application process be alienating some young people?
- If applying involves a written application, will some young people be disadvantaged?
- Some young people may not be able to access certain technology, such as the Internet, in order to apply.
- Some young people may find the application costs difficult to meet.
- Has the application information reached all the young people it should?

Ideas for supporting young people's applications

- What kinds of supports would be useful to young people wanting to apply?
- Could someone be available to answer questions from applicants?
- Avoid asking young people to write long applications.
- Could technology, such as computers, be made available to applicants if needed?
- Make it possible to return an application at no cost to the applicants, such as over the Internet, reply paid postage, or leave a box for applications in areas young people access.
- Ensure that there is adequate time for young people to put an application together. A reminder before the due date could also be useful.
- What personal encouragement can be given to get young people involved?



Support

Selection

Involves choosing young people for involvement on the basis of criteria that suit the board or committee. Selection processes might include making decisions based on applications, interviews or casual chats.

Issues that might be considered as part of the selection criteria are:

- What does this young person hope to gain from their involvement?
- What can involvement offer this young person?
- What can this young person offer the board or committee?
- Does this young person have the skills they will need to be involved?
- Can this young person be adequately supported to be involved?

Tips for interviews

- Informality can make young people feel more comfortable in an interview, particularly if they have limited experience of interviews.
- Group interviews can be a great way to make the process less formal and see how people relate in a group setting.
- When young people are involved on the interview panel, they have more control over who is involved. Young applicants will also feel more comfortable under these circumstances.
- If young people are being asked to undertake an interview, less formal processes will suit a broader selection.

Case study

The **Foundation for Young Australians** is a not-for-profit organisation committed to supporting opportunities and outcomes that enable young people to reach their potential and participate fully in society. This is done through provision of seed funding for young people and community organisations that support young people. A major priority for the foundation is to support and champion youth participation. Young people are involved on every level of decision-making at the foundation, through their direct participation on our Board of Directors, board committees and as the majority of members on our state and territory committees. Young people at the foundation are directly responsible for making many of our grant decisions and currently grant approximately \$1 million annually.

To get involved with the foundation, young people are alerted to opportunities through public national calls. Young people then submit a written application, and applicants are interviewed in groups, which is a more relaxed, informal and interactive method than individual interviews. Foundation staff and existing committee members facilitate the interviews.

It is important at the foundation that the process of expressing interest in participation should be a positive, learning experience for young people – regardless of whether an application is successful – and this is a central consideration in the recruitment and application process.

Some questions to consider when resolving the process that will be used for young people to become involved.

Worksheet three

What is the best process for you to use – a selection, nomination or open door process?

Describe your strategy:

How will the information get to young people in an accessible way?

How will they express their interest or apply?

How will interested young people be supported in this process?

How will this process be empowering and beneficial to young people involved?

Reflecting on the key attributes that a young person needs to be involved on the board or committee, what are some questions they can be asked?

Induction

Induction is a process through which a new member of a board or committee is familiarised with the information they need for participation. The induction process can be formal or informal. It might involve giving out an information pack, or having an information session. It might also include a social get-together, in which committee and board members spend time together, building familiarity within the group. Regardless of what sort of induction process is used, it is important that all information is in accessible, clear language. Below are key pieces of information that may be included in an induction process. It can be used as a checklist:

- Information about the organisation or network that the board or committee is attached to, including the purpose, vision, or goals and structure of the organisation.
- The goals, vision or purpose of the committee or board.
- Any information about the structure of the committee or board – how does/will it work?
- A clear statement outlining what is expected of members of the board or committee, and what their role involves. It may be useful to include information about each of the roles within the committee or board, such as the role of secretary or chair.
- A clear code of conduct or statement outlining how members are expected to treat each other, highlighting issues such as respecting everyone's contribution time during discussions and effective listening.
- Tips on how to be an effective board or committee member, such as suggestions to check email regularly, or read relevant information before the meetings.
- Some key questions that the committee or board member can ask themselves to check their personal progress, such as how comfortable they feel in participating, what they are learning, and what questions they may have.
- Contact details of the organisation and any support or mentoring figures.
- A list of other current members.
- A map of where the venue is, or of the venue itself.
- Dates of meetings, if they have been set.
- Information about the tools that will be used during meetings, such as an agenda, minutes or reports. (Some definitions of common roles and tools used in a meeting are included in **Appendix 5**.)

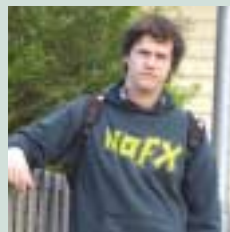


Young people on boards and committees

Taking Young People seriously

Part Three

Providing support



Part 3: Providing support



Ensuring that young people are receiving the support they need to get involved and stay engaged in the board or committee is essential to making the committee inclusive, empowering and purposefully engaging.

Young people with experience on boards or committees have identified some key elements that make their participation work. This section outlines some of those elements, and offers ideas that can help achieve them.

Mutual respect

An environment of mutual respect is where everyone's contribution is valued.

Things that can help:

- Considering young people's participation as a core value rather than a task.
- Taking a partnership approach.
- Ensuring that everyone feels comfortable contributing and having a say.
- Having clear and acceptable codes of behaviour can help any board or committee function in a productive way, so that everyone's right to participate is respected. For a young person who is not familiar with a committee setting, codes of behaviour can help build a clear understanding of what is expected of members. If these codes of behaviour are negotiated with all committee members, including young people, they will have more meaning for those involved. Establishing codes of behaviour helps avoid future hiccups. For example, having a plan for resolving a conflict of opinions within the committee can reduce inefficiency and helps people feel comfortable.
- Having someone act as facilitator so that everyone is given the opportunity to have a say. An effective group facilitator also ensures that the discussion moves along productively, covering all areas that it needs to. On a board it is the chairperson who takes this role. On a committee, someone is usually nominated to take up this role. (See **Appendix 4** for tips on effective facilitation.)

Case study

At **Princes Hill Secondary College**, one of the aims of our student forums is for students and staff to work together to build a positive sense of community at the school and achieve positive outcomes. The forums provide an opportunity for staff and students to discover together what the forum group has to say. This is done by a leading teacher and the assistant principal who ensure a balance between student control and staff support.

Trust and familiarity

When committee members know each other and get along well, the committee is more comfortable and socially rewarding.

Things that can help:

- Putting time aside for committee members to get to know each other socially before they get down to the serious stuff. This may be formally built into induction processes or it might just involve an afternoon tea.
- Putting time aside at the start of each meeting for a short, warm-up activity can help everyone relax and have some fun before the serious agenda begins.
- If young people are on a mixed committee with older people, ensure that they are introduced to someone else involved in the committee beforehand so that there is a familiar face at meetings. A mentor figure or the chairperson could fill that role.
- Building familiarity is not just relevant to young committee members. It can be a useful way for older committee members to challenge any preconceptions they may have about young people's participation.
- Building trust and familiarity is something that can be worked on through induction processes.

Case study

For a committee to work well, it's important that group members can relate to each other, have something in common and are comfortable with each other. We take time to have something to eat and drink together before we do a fun warm-up activity at the start of each meeting. Having some fun helps to build trust.

South Eastern Local Learning and Employment Network, Youth Advisory Panel

Having clear and shared goals

A board or committee will work effectively as a team with clear goals and objectives. Young people are empowered to participate if they have been involved in setting those goals and objectives.

Things that can help:

- Having a clear vision or mission statement that is negotiated by the committee, outlining the committee's core values and goals.
- Having a clear constitution, rules or codes that outline strategies for how goals are achieved.

It's important for young people to be involved in decision-making because the future is in their hands.

Kim Lee, Create Foundation

Allocating tasks and roles to each member of a committee makes the workload equal, and dissolves the formal hierarchy that usually exists in a committee or board. By giving each member their own project to take control of, people feel less like a voice in the crowd and more like a team member.

Maddy Orgill
Chairperson of The Push YAC

Control

Young people are much more likely to engage in a board or committee if they have some control over the processes and its outcomes. This makes participation empowering and engaging.

Things that can help:

- Young people involved in establishing the board or committee, or having some input into how it will operate.
- Young people having real decision-making power within the committee or board and their opinions being equally valued.

Personal and Administrative Support

Consider strategies that will provide ongoing and lasting support for young people involved in the committee. An ongoing support mechanism can help ensure that issues are addressed when they arise. The type of strategies needed to provide ongoing support are best negotiated with the young people involved so that their individual needs are met.

Things that can help:

- A mentor can be a useful anchor and reference point for young people, particularly if they are not familiar with this type of committee.
- A support worker can provide support to all the young people involved. He or she might be employed by an organisation, specifically to resource and support the young participants.
- A support worker from an outside organisation, which recruited one of your board or committee members, may provide a valuable, neutral support mechanism. There may be some issues that are more easily discussed with someone not on the committee.

Case study

The **VICSRC** is an independent network of current and past secondary school students involved in their Student Representative Councils (SRCs). A committee of current students runs us with assistance from older members of the support group.

We find that SRCs are best supported by teacher advisors who are personally and philosophically interested in being involved, rather than just available. It is great if the teacher advisor is able to provide support without taking over. It's also really important for the principal to clearly support and engage with the group so that you have that support from the top.

Knowing what to expect

Members feel more comfortable when they have all the information needed about the committee or board, and know what participation involves.

Things that can help:

- Induction packages or processes through which they are given information they need to participate.
- Mentors, chairpersons, coordinators or just someone involved taking the time to chat with young people becoming involved. The person should give them an idea of what participating is like, ensure they have all the information they need, and reassure them.
- Making sure that all the information provided is easily understood.

Being able to get there

There are several things that can be done to make sure young people are able to get to meetings or events.

Things that can help:

- Ensuring meetings are held in a venue close to public transport so that young people can get there independently. If not, is someone able to pick them up or can a cab charge be used?
- Reimbursing young people's travel costs can improve accessibility.
- Considering the young people's other time commitments. How much time will be needed to participate on this board or committee?
- Scheduling meetings at times when young people can attend.

Case study

The Voice Regional Youth Reference Group is a committee of 12 young people, two from each shire within the Albury and Upper Hume Catchment. The committee feeds into the Upper Hume Primary Care Partnership and is supported by Upper Hume Community Health Service and the local councils' youth services.

We have two strategies to overcome the problems of distance and travel: meeting places are rotated between the different locations that committee members are from; and if needed, Sarah the youth worker will pick up members in a bus and drive them to meetings.

We are also putting together an Internet chat group so that we can communicate easily outside of the times when we get together for meetings. This also helps people who can't attend a meeting to have a say.

Accessible language

Unfamiliar language can be a barrier for young people on a board or committee; it can make contributing to conversation or debate intimidating.

Things that can help:

- Avoid unnecessarily complicated language, jargon and acronyms.
- Some types of language used in legal documents or when describing financial issues can be particularly unfamiliar to young people and may need translating.



Flexibility

Being flexible and accommodating young people in meeting settings can help young people stay engaged.

Things that can help:

- Consider changing the location in which meetings are held every now and then. This can be incorporated with an activity to build relationships or to develop skills.
- Have a guest speaker occasionally to provide a format change and a new perspective.
- Allow for some spontaneity. Take a drink break when it's needed rather than when it fits in the agenda.
- Alter the practices of taking notes or designate tasks to how best suits the group. For example, instead of taking minutes, draw up a task sheet to outline the decisions made in the meeting.

Being acknowledged

Often young people are not acknowledged for their contributions. Being acknowledged affirms the value of their contribution and is of particular relevance when young people are voluntarily giving their time to participate.

Things that can help:

- Take time to acknowledge individual contributions to the board or committee.
- Recognise committees of young people for the work they have done or the reference information they provided.

Case study

As members of the **Mooney Valley Youth Access and Participation Committee**, one of the things we do is provide advice to organisations about how accessible their service is to young people. Seeing the results of that advice and being thanked and acknowledged for our work is really satisfying.

Seeing outcomes

Seeing outcomes is a great motivator. If young people are not advised of outcomes they can feel as though their involvement wasn't valued.

Things that can help:

- When outcomes are slow to appear it can be useful to devise a way to report back regularly with updates and celebrate small gains along the way.
- Having more than one focus is a good way of delivering outcomes, or allowing for focus on an alternative issue while awaiting another issue's outcome.
- Supporting small-term projects with relatively quick outcomes is a useful technique for keeping young people engaged.

Case study

The **Wodonga Action Crew** is a committee of young people, supported by the City of Wodonga Youth Services, involved in strategic planning, advocating to local government on behalf of local young people, and promoting local arts and cultural activities. Recently, they successfully lobbied for an extra bus service to be made available after hours in Wodonga, which makes a real difference to local young people's ability to get around.

Food

Providing food is a good idea for several reasons:

- It can be a drawcard.
- Being hungry is distracting.
- Putting aside ten minutes to grab something to eat can be a great strategy to promote relaxed social interaction.
- Make sure you have varied food and be aware of the young people's cultural or dietary issues when choosing food. Not all young people like pizza and coke!

Fun

Enjoying and feeling positive about the experience are great ways for young people to stay engaged in a committee. Working together on a committee to achieve outcomes can be a fun and socially rewarding experience.

Things that can help:

Running a fun activity as the committee's first meeting or event will help attract young people to the committee and be a good way for people to start getting to know each other.

Clear channels of communication

It is important that the board or committee has clear channels of communication with other relevant organisational structures or decision-making bodies; for example, a youth reference group should have a way of communicating directly with the staff and board of the organisation. This is important, not only so that the reference group can provide direct input into decision-making by staff and the board but also for the board or staff to report back to the reference group.

It may also be valuable for effective channels of communication to exist outside of meetings as well so that contact and discussion can happen when needed.

Things that can help:

- Would it be useful for a member of the reference group to report to board meetings and vice versa? Having a regular position for each representative, or reporting back sessions can do this.
- Create time outside of meetings for members of different committees to meet and get to know each other in a casual way, such as at an afternoon tea or casual lunch. This may be most useful when a new committee is forming, to create a personal context and promote understanding about the organisation.
- Establish a clear process through which the committee feeds into decision-making at the organisation, such as through reporting to the board of management on a regular basis. Outlining how the committee will operate in the constitution/rules or in a statement of purpose can be a useful way of strengthening the process.
- Establish clear processes outlining how other decision-making groups will be accountable to the committee of young people. For example, if a youth reference group is reporting to a board, clarify how the board will report back to the youth reference group to maintain its accountability. Again, this could be outlined in a constitution or statement of purpose.

Case study

At **The Push**, it is important for our Youth Advisory Committee (YAC), Board of Management and staff to communicate effectively. To help this happen, the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the Youth Advisory Committee sit on the board. Also, a staff member attends Youth Advisory Committee meetings.

After recruiting new members to our YAC, we have a get together afternoon tea, giving board members, staff and YAC members a chance to get to know each other and have a chat.

Also, our project subcommittees are made up of staff, YAC and board members. This opportunity to work together means that we gain the valuable perspectives of members of each group and strengthen communication between them.

Learning something new and developing skills

Being involved on a board or committee is a great way for young people to learn new things and develop new skills. The opportunity to learn valuable skills within an area of interest is a driving motivation for young people considering involvement on a board or committee.

Things that can help:

- Have engaging roles within the committee structure and an opportunity to take responsibility for tasks within those roles
- Designate specific tasks and roles to young people through which they can see their participation making a difference – they will be more likely to stay engaged with the committee. The more challenging these roles are the better!
- Consider some structured skill development, such as communication workshops.

Reviewing to make sure you're on track

A review system that ensures goals are being worked towards, objectives are being met, and the committee process is engaging everyone can help keep a committee on track and provides opportunities to learn as you go. Reviewing might be a formal process and involve a clear and accessible way for young people to provide feedback on how they think the process is going and whether individuals are finding it engaging.

The next section outlines ideas and techniques that can be used when evaluating a board or committee with young participants.



Learning

Student Representative Councils allow students to experience and develop leadership, representation and governance skills.

Chris Varney, VICSRC



Young people on boards and committees

Taking Young People seriously

Part Four

Evaluation



Part 4: Evaluation

Why do it?

There are many benefits to a board or committee from having an evaluation system. A board or committee needs a system of review to ensure that it is staying on track, and evaluating effectiveness can show how the board or committee can be improved in the future. The evaluation also measures how successfully the board or committee is achieving its goals and objectives.

As was explained in Part 1 of the handbook, young people's participation can be a disempowering experience if their contributions are not respected, or a committee structure is not inclusive. Evaluation processes can help to identify if that is happening, and draw strategies to avoid it.

How can we do it?

When taking a partnership approach to young people's participation, it is relevant to take a partnership approach to the evaluation process. If young people are involved in the design and implementation of the evaluation it is more likely to be inclusive and effective.

An evaluation can be done in many different ways. Evaluation processes can be casual or formal. Evaluation can be done in an ongoing way or every now and then.

The purpose of an evaluation would most likely be to determine how effectively the board or committee is operating, and how effectively young people are participating within it.

Key issues

- Is the board or committee achieving its goals and objectives?
- Is the board or committee accessible to all members?
- Do all committee members have the support and desire to contribute effectively to the board or committee? Is everyone comfortable to contribute?
- How can the board or committee be improved?

Evaluation methods

These issues can be resolved through either a casual or more formal evaluation method.

One effective casual method is to make sure that there is open, ongoing, flexible communication outside of meetings between young people on the committee and someone who can support them, such as the chairperson or a mentor figure. Sometimes a casual chat after a meeting is a good way to see how young people are feeling about their participation on the board or committee, and if they need more or less support.

Some other more formal methods of evaluation include:

- surveying participants
- holding discussion groups
- using an external evaluator
- peer research models (young people researching other young people)

It is often effective to use a combination of methods, such as encouraging casual chats while also using a more formal method like a group discussion to offer more than one way for people to give feedback.

In some cases, it may also be relevant for young people and older people to have an opportunity to contribute to the evaluation process both separately and as a group. Equally, providing opportunities for board or committee members to contribute to the evaluation in private as well as openly can be a good idea. This helps provide the opportunity to speak honestly about identified problems, while allowing for evaluation of individual participation, and effectiveness of the committee as a whole.

The next activity outlines some questions that may be used in an evaluation directed to young people, older people and the committee as a whole.



Evaluation

Worksheet four

Why did you get involved on this committee or board?

Are the aims and goals being achieved?

What have you learnt from participating?

What have you enjoyed about participating?

What has been difficult about being involved?

What would make being involved easier or more appealing?

Worksheet five

What are your goals for this committee?

Are they being achieved?

What have you learnt from working with young people on this committee?

What have been some challenges?

What might make the committee operate more effectively?

Worksheet six

Are the goals and objectives of the committee being met?

If this is a committee involving both young people and older people, what are the ways in which a partnership approach is being taken to the committee?

Are all committee members able to access the committee meetings, events or discussions?

Do committee members get all the information they need in accessible ways?

General questions relating to the whole committee

Worksheet six continued...

Have there been sufficient resources in the committee to enable it to achieve its goals and outcomes?

Are there areas in which committee members would benefit from some training or skill development?

Are committee members being adequately supported to take part?

Are all committee members being acknowledged for their contributions?



Appendices

Appendix 1 Breaking down barriers in organisational structures and individuals' attitudes

When young people and other community members come together to participate on a board or committee, both can enjoy the benefits of learning something new from each other's contributions and the experience. Particularly in cases where organisations may not have much experience in young people's participation, two key issues can present some hurdles: inflexible organisational structures and older people's misconceptions about young people. This section outlines strategies that can help overcome these hurdles.

Strategies for dealing with inflexible organisational barriers

- Having a management commitment to young people's participation from all levels of decision-making.
- Making an organisational commitment to young people's participation in making decisions and outlining this clearly in organisational policy, vision or purpose statements, or constitutions.
- Planning can help an organisation realistically consider the need for flexibility and the capacity of the board or committee to meet that need.
- Creating clear channels of communication between the board or committee that young people are participating on and other organisational structures, so as to promote understanding, an exchange of ideas and the capacity for young people's ideas to feed into decision-making processes.
- Ensuring that young people have all the information they need to fully understand the organisational structure and processes through which decisions are made.

Strategies for challenging misconceptions about young people

- Have an appreciation of the value of young people's participation being articulated from the highest levels of management.
- Make clear to everyone involved on the board or committee the reasons why they are working together and the value of young people's contribution. Misconceptions about young people's capacity are reinforced by tokenistic engagement of young people.
- Provide opportunities for older people to work alongside young people to help break down misconceptions. Consider creating a space for the committee members to spend some time together before the process of working together starts. This may help break down barriers early. Misconceptions are usually the result of inexperience.
- Recruit members of the committee with some thought. Could being a bit flexible and willing to learn something new be reasons for recruiting an older person to the committee?

Appendix 2 Legal, risk management, and insurance issues to consider relating to the participation of minors on boards and committees

There are some legal restrictions and some issues about risk management and insurance that should be considered regarding minors' (young people under the age of 18) participation on boards or committees. **This section provides information about enquiries that companies or organisations may wish to make themselves. The content of this handbook does not constitute legal advice, nor is it intended to be construed as such. It is advised that you seek independent legal advice regarding the issues below.**



Legal restrictions that apply to minors' participation on boards or committees

There are legal restrictions on the roles that young people can have in boards and committees of different types of organisations and companies. Here is an outline of some of those restrictions.

Incorporated Associations in Victoria:

Definition: An incorporated association is a body corporate formed under the *Associations Incorporation Act 1981 (Vic)*.

The *Associations Incorporation Act 1981 (Vic)* states that incorporated associations need to write up their own rules relating to membership and the appointment of members to the committee of management or board of directors.

Essentially, if these rules allow it, minors can be appointed to a committee of management or board; however, they may not be given the role as a public officer. The public officer role is one that requires them to be accountable for the association meeting its legal requirements.

Companies:

A minor cannot hold a role of legal responsibility in a company. *The Corporations Act 2001 (Cth)* states that a minor cannot be appointed as director of a company. This also applies to **Companies limited by guarantee** and **Trustee companies**.

Co-operatives:

Definition: A co-operative is an independent association of people who come together voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise. The legal requirements of co-operatives are outlined in the *Co-operatives Act 1996 (Vic)*.

The *Cooperatives Act 1996 (Vic)* states that a minor cannot hold any office in a co-operative.

Individual Trustees:

Definition: A trustee is someone who holds the legal title to properties or other material assets on behalf of another person.

Generally in Australia, someone who has the legal capacity to take and hold a property title in his or her own right can become a trustee. In Victoria there is no legislation that says minors can't do this. However, there are some practical limitations that suggest it is better for a minor not to be made a trustee. This is due to the fact that when someone turns 18 they are not necessarily bound by contracts relating to property and money repayment entered into under the age of 18.

A trustee's role also involves a high level of care and responsibility for others. Certainly there are many young people out there who are capable of fulfilling that role. However, given that young people under the age of 18 are not legally recognised as being able to manage their own affairs, the *Trustee Act 1958 (Vic)* allows for a minor to be replaced or removed as a trustee on the basis of being underage. If the trust already exists, restrictions to young people's roles may be outlined within the Trust Deed. Therefore, while it is not necessarily unlawful for a minor to be a trustee, for the reasons outlined above it would not be advisable in most cases.

Other general risk management issues to consider

It is possible that the involvement of young people under the age of 18 (minors) in an organisation or company may give rise to potential liabilities; for example, when a minor is making representations for a company, entering into agreements, or being given access to potentially sensitive information.

Seek advice

For the reasons outlined above, a company or organisation that is seeking to involve minors in the decision-making structures of the organisation should seek their own advice on:

- the legal restrictions that apply to the participation of minors in the decision-making structure of the organisation;
- how the participation of young people can best be promoted within the organisation;
- whether the way the organisation intends to involve young people might adversely affect the company's business or commercial agreements, reputation, or potential liabilities.

Insurance issues to consider

A company or organisation can have a variety of insurance arrangements. Common types of insurance include:

- director's and officer's ('D&O') insurance
- public liability insurance
- professional indemnity insurance
- property insurance

When a company or organisation (or other) has insurance, they have a duty to tell that insurer certain information. This is outlined in Section 21 of the *Insurance Contracts Act 1984* (Cth), which basically says you have an obligation to tell the insurance company any matter that you could reasonably know would be relevant to the risk the insurance company is taking in covering you. It is possible that, depending on the role a minor has in the organisational decision-making structure, an organisation or company may need to tell the insurer about those young people's participation. If it does not, and a liability arises as the result of the participation of a minor, it may not be able to claim under its insurance policy. It is also possible that an insurance policy has particular exclusions that are relevant.

Seek advice

It is therefore a good idea to review your insurance arrangements before minors participate in the organisation's decision-making structures, and seek legal advice as necessary.



Seek advice

Appendix 3 Equal Opportunity Exemptions

Under the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 1995, it is unlawful in some circumstances to discriminate against someone on the basis of their age. However, when an organisation would like to have positions on their board or committee specifically available for young people, it may be possible for an exemption from the Equal Opportunity Act to be sought. **This section provides information to outline some enquiries that companies or organisations may wish to make themselves. The content of this handbook does not constitute legal advice nor is it intended to be construed as such. It is advised that you seek independent advice from the Equal Opportunity Commission regarding the issues below.**

When is an Equal Opportunity Exemption not needed?

There are three specific reasons why an organisation may not need to seek an exemption from the Act in order to positively discriminate against young people. These are:

- when an Equal Opportunity Exemption has already been granted;
- when the organisation, group or agency is already exempt under the Equal Opportunity Act;
- when other legislation makes the discrimination lawful – for example, the *Corporations Act 2001* (Cth) states that a minor cannot be appointed as director of a company, and therefore an Equal Opportunity Exemption could not be granted to override this.

The safest way to ensure that an Equal Opportunity Exemption is not needed is to check with the Equal Opportunity Commission. Information can be found on their web site www.eoc.vic.gov.au or by contacting them directly on (03) 9281 7100.

What does applying for an Equal Opportunity Exemption involve?

If an Equal Opportunity Exemption is needed, an application needs to be made to the Registrar, Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. The application process is free and typically requires that you complete an application form and affidavit stating what exemption is needed and a detailed explanation of why. The application form can be downloaded from the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal web site on www.vcat.vic.gov.au and details of the process can be found on that web site.

Appendix 4 Tips for facilitators on a board or committee

The facilitator of a committee or board meeting is usually the chairperson, or someone nominated by the group to run the meeting. This could be a revolving position with a different person taking on the role each meeting.

Generally speaking, a good facilitator will:

- contact any new members of the committee or board to introduce him or herself and give them any information required;
- ensure that everyone has the information they need before the meeting;
- see young people's participation as valuable;
- communicate effectively with young people;
- ensure that all participants have an equal opportunity to have their say;
- make young people feel comfortable;
- treat young people with respect;
- make the process an enjoyable one for all.



Facilitate

Appendix 5 Glossary of terms

Some types of committees

Committee of Management

A committee of management is responsible for managing an organisation. It is a structure through which decision-making about the management of an organisation is shared between committee members. It is similar to a board in role; however, it is usually more concerned with issues related to the day-to-day running of an organisation, not just the broader general strategic issues focused on by a board. A committee of management may have responsibility for issues like the employment of staff, budget monitoring, media and communication issues.

Reference/Advisory Committee

A reference or advisory committee is established to provide advice and guidance to a project, group, organisation or company. The exact role of the reference committee will depend on its terms of reference; however, it will typically provide input into decision-making processes by giving advice on a matter. A Youth Reference Group is a typical example of a reference/advisory committee.

Subcommittee

A subcommittee involves some members of a committee forming a smaller committee with a special focus, usually to get a particular job done. Examples may be a fundraising subcommittee, or a promotions subcommittee.

Common roles on a board or committee

Chairperson/Chair (other possibility – facilitator)

A chairperson is appointed to a board or committee by either the committee or broader membership of a group or organisation. The role of chairperson is both a leadership and facilitation role. The chair's leadership role involves ensuring that meetings of the board are held, the legal requirements of the board are met, and meetings are run in accordance with the constitution (source: Paul Bullen Management Alternatives, www.mapl.com.au). The chair's facilitation role involves guiding the meeting through the agenda, making sure that all members have opportunities to participate in discussion and clarifying the decisions made by the board or committee.

Secretary

The secretary of a board or committee has an administrative role, involving sending out any papers or documents that members need before a meeting, taking minutes at the meeting, sending out those minutes and looking after the processing of membership for the board or committee.

Treasurer

The treasurer of a board or committee is in charge of administering the finances and budget of the organisation or group. While the board or committee would usually make decisions together about how money is going to be spent, it is the treasurer's job to keep an eye on the finances and oversee the accounts, budgeting and auditing (source: Paul Bullen Management Alternatives, www.mapl.com.au).

Tools used by boards and committees

Constitution (otherwise known as a code of honour or rules of the committee)

A constitution is a set of key, fundamental principles that sets out the basic rules of an organisation.

Mission Statement (otherwise known as a vision statement or statement of purpose)

A mission statement outlines why the organisation or group exists. It describes the core values, role and purpose of the organisation. It can change over time, and should be reviewed occasionally to make sure it is still relevant (source: Nonprofit Governance and Management Centre, www.governance.com.au).

Terms of Reference

The terms of reference of a board or committee outline in a list the purpose of the board or committee and what its role is. It makes clear what can and can't be done by the committee and helps make sure that everyone has a clear, joint understanding of why the committee was established and its roles.

Agenda

An agenda is a list of the issues that are going to be looked at during the meeting. It is used as a guide for the committee or board's discussion and to ensure that everything that needs to be talked about is discussed. The chairperson should make sure that the discussion of the group is in line with the agenda so that it doesn't get off track. An agenda might include apologies from people who cannot attend, a review of the minutes from the last meeting, and key issues that the committee needs to discuss. An agenda is usually written by the chairperson, and can be sent out prior to the meeting to ask if anyone has anything to add. It can also be useful to have a space on the agenda for any new/other business to be discussed.

Minutes (other options include a task sheet or a meeting summary)

The minutes are a record of what happened at the meeting. They outline who was at the meeting, the discussion that took place and the decisions that were made. Some committees find that minutes are not the best way for them to record the decisions made in the meeting and might prefer to use a summary of the meeting, or a task sheet instead. Minutes can be a useful reminder of what decisions were made and what was going to be done about them. To make sure the minutes are a true reflection of what happened, they are sometimes checked or reviewed at the next meeting.

Understand





Other 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, *Getting Youth People on Board: How government can engage young people through boards and committees*.

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

Zeldin, S., McDaniel, A., Topitez, D., Calvert, M., 2000. *Youth in Decision-Making: A Study on the Impacts of Youth on Adults and Organizations*, Innovation Centre for Community and Youth Development, University of Wisconsin.

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.

Wierenga, Ani, 2003, *Sharing a New Story: Young People in Decision-Making*, The Foundation for Young Australians and Australian Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne.

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.

1 Spring Street, MELBOURNE 3000

Ph: (03) 9208 3200

Fax: (03) 9208 3226

www.youth.vic.gov.au

*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.

Level 6, 1 Elizabeth St, MELBOURNE 3000

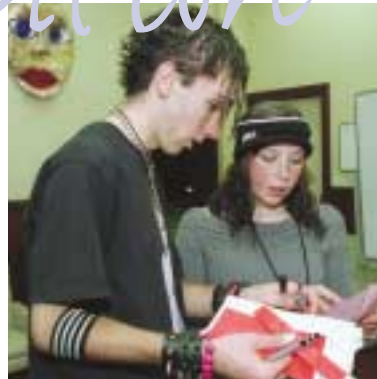
Ph: (03) 9612 8999

Fax: (03) 9620 4802

www.yacvic.org.au

youthaffairs
COUNCIL OF VICTORIA INC.

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.



www.youth.vic.gov.au
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