

Fact Sheet: Engaging, Including and Consulting with Young People

How to engage young people, including young people from diverse backgrounds, through building mutual trust and respect. Includes tools and tips on running effective and engaging workshops and consultations.

“It’s important that young people can have a space to suggest how they can be involved” – Young Person, Bairnsdale

Consulting with young people involves creating conversations about their opinions and experiences. Consultation can take place in various ways – including **forums, focus groups, reference groups, workshops, surveys, interviews, and peer research**. However young people are consulted, **they need to feel safe to express themselves openly, and that their contributions are valued, respected, and acknowledged**.

Just like any other community member, **young people have opinions on all issues that affect their community, not just on ‘youth issues’**. Empowering them to participate will assist in your work, and enable them to become future community leaders.

Youth consultation in disaster recovery processes will help you:

- **gather** and understand **new and unique perspectives**;
- make **better, more informed decisions**;
- provide **more suitable services and events**; and
- **strengthen community connections**.

Planning a consultation

Successful consultations are well planned. **Involving young people right from the start** in design and delivery will make the whole consultation **more engaging, relevant and accessible**. It will also help with **attracting and engaging young people to participate**.

You’ll need to decide **who will be the best person** - or people - to carry out the consultation. Will it be someone from your organisation or someone independent? Could you **partner** with a **youth service** or **agency**? Can you **support young people** to **design and lead the consultation**? Whoever you choose, they must enjoy working with young people, **treat them with respect** and understand how to **communicate effectively with them**.

If you are running a broader community consultation, you can **use the same techniques** to ensure that **young people feel welcome** and included, and **safe and supported to speak up** and contribute their insights.

Responding to needs

To ensure the consultation is **inclusive and accessible**, take time to consider how you can **address the needs of participants** and **really support young people** to be involved.

Be aware that **young people’s previous experiences** might impact on their participation in the consultation. Will it bring up **personal or potentially distressing issues**? Will they be intimidated or feel unsafe? How will you store young people’s information? Thinking about **ethics, safeguarding and consent** will help you plan **how you’ll respond** if a participant tells you something about their wellbeing or safety that you should act on.

Consultation methods

There are different ways you can carry out consultations. The best method for you (or combination of methods) will depend on your circumstances such as time, connections and resources you have.

Individuals:

- Structured – surveys (on- and off-line), interviews, internet/social media discussions, hypothetical stories or situations
- Informal – casual conversations, comments/suggestion boxes

Groups:

- Structured – forums, reference groups, peer consultations, arts programs, contacting young people’s groups or organisations.
- Informal – group casual conversations, graffiti board, postcards, vox pops.

Consulting with groups

A facilitator should direct group conversations, and give everyone an equal opportunity to speak. Think about how you could word things so that both young people and the community will understand. To make young people feel safe and comfortable, establish clear ground-rules together, from the start – like ‘everyone should be heard and respected’ or ‘this discussion is confidential’. It’s important to build trust between the consultant and the participants, and between participants, so keep the atmosphere light and informal where possible.

If the session covers a sensitive topic, or may trigger past traumas for participants, it is a good idea to partner with a local community organisation that has the expertise to manage such conversations and appropriately support participants.

Longer consultations

Journey to recovery considers that **people respond** to disaster in **different ways and over different time frames**. Responses can range from feeling heroic and a sense of community cohesion, to disappointment, anger and frustration as clean-up and reconstruction commence. It is important to realise that **recovery actions are not necessarily linear nor sequential**, so people and communities may move through these phases at different paces, meaning they are ready for new recovery actions at different times. If consultations are held over a long period, use these strategies to keep young people engaged.

- Provide regular updates
- Celebrate efforts and gains, big or small
- Broaden young people’s roles to engage them at different levels

Incentives

Incentives can encourage young people to participate, and/or **provide recognition** for their time, effort and expertise.

Young people might have to choose between attending your consultation and paid work commitments.

You might offer to **pay** young people’s **travel expenses**, or **compensate young people** with payment or a gift voucher.

This is **especially important** when **young people** might be **contributing alongside other community members participating as part of their paid employment**, which can create a **power imbalance**.

Afterwards

Create opportunities for participants to **debrief**, especially if **personal or potentially distressing issues** have been raised. **Feed back** to young people and **acknowledge their contributions**.

Explain how the information they provided will be used. **Show them the outcomes** of the consultation. What **real impact** have they made? **Provide them with a copy of a report, or evidence that demonstrates outcomes**. A **thank you** email or letter will always be **well received!**

Avoid over-consulting with the same young people. There are **lots of young people out there**, who have **differing views and ideas!** **Your local youth service can help you** find them. **Deidentify and share** your findings with others so that **they can benefit** from what **young people have said** and use this to **develop their initiatives**.

Fact Sheet: Opportunities for Young People in Disaster Preparedness, Response and Recovery

Information and ideas to explore regarding how young people might contribute to disaster preparedness, response and recovery efforts, from participation in Community Recovery Committees, to consulting on issues of concern to young people, to leading community rebuilding projects.

There are lots of different ways you can engage and involve young people in disaster preparedness, response and recovery. These don't have to be limited to formal, structured processes. Creating a range of opportunities will help build relationships with young people and make them feel they can contribute.

Designated positions on Community Recovery Committees (CRCs)

Having a designated position/s for a young person/s on a CRC is important. Young people are not just the future, they have a lived experience of what being a local community member is right now, and bring unique ideas and perspectives.

Young people have direct access to their young peers who may not have the opportunity to contribute to community planning and recovery processes. Excluding young people from community responses can make them feel disconnected and alienated, and lead to a lack of pride and engagement in their local town or area. Finding ways to better involve young people is important for their development and wellbeing, and importantly also helps to build self-worth and civic pride.

Young people may need to be encouraged to put themselves forward, and once selected, should be supported to make sure they feel welcome and equal, and understand the CRC processes and what is expected of them.

[Find your local Community Recovery Committee here](#)

Consulting with groups

Youth Advisory Groups or consultation groups bring young people together to share their experiences, and co-design solutions to the challenges they face, in a safe and supportive environment.

Most local councils in Victoria provide youth services and facilitate a Youth Council or other youth-led and coordinated program that provides local young people with the opportunity to work with local government to meet the needs and enhance opportunities for young people. To find out what exists in your area, first contact your local council's youth services team. They can also give advice for establishing a group yourself.

Youth-led art, music, and cultural events

Hosting public activities and events to bring communities together and attract visitors back is an important step towards recovery for the whole community, especially young people. Centring young people at these events can assist in making them safe, fun and engaging. Whether it's a community BBQ or a youth photo exhibition at your local gallery, young people want to come together and connect with their community.

FReeZA is a fantastic Victorian Government program that gives young people aged 12-25 the chance to organise, lead and perform live music, dance parties and other events. [Learn more here](#)

Volunteering Programs

Junior Programs boost volunteer emergency services capacity in local communities. Many programs exist within the CFA, SES, and Ambulance. Young people receive accredited, recognised training as part of their role, ranging from first aid, general rescue, chainsaw operations, community education, media training and much more. They also gain leadership and teamwork skills, confidence and a greater knowledge and understanding of disasters. Find out more below:

- [State Emergency Service](#)
- [Country Fire Authority](#)
- [St Johns Ambulance](#)

Work Experience

Giving young people opportunities to undertake meaningful work experience adds value to the future of the local workforce and to initiatives regarding disaster preparedness, response and recovery. In these roles, young people need to be given real tasks, treated with respect, and trusted to do the job well. This will give them a taste of working life and help them learn new skills that aren't taught in the classroom, including:

- Solving real-life problems and seeing the impact of their work
- Researching market conditions and learning how they affect businesses
- Communicating with different people with different skill sets
- Learning about new technologies and how they're used in the workplace; and
- Working in different roles to see what they entail on a day-to-day basis

Design workshops and events

Working with young people to design and rebuild community spaces and facilities is key to making them accessible. Young people can have great ideas for municipal planning, footpath development, libraries, local parks and community facilities – not just skateparks! Fun and creative design workshops and events can draw on/engage young people's design skills, artistic and creative abilities.

Apprenticeships and Traineeships

Apprenticeships and traineeships provide a gateway to great jobs and real hands-on training in almost any field of employment. Young people earn an income while gaining a real experience and a qualification, and employers receive financial support for taking on new staff.

Young people in YACVic's bushfire recovery consultations have identified the need for skill development and career pathways in local industry, including local government, trades, retail, administrative services, and state government agencies. Apprenticeships and traineeships are an important way to meet this need, and the additional capacity and skills needed during disaster recovery operations provide an opportunity to think creatively about training and supporting local young people.

Young Thinkers in Residence

A Young Thinker-in-Residence is a great way to bring youth perspectives into your organisation or project. Such an initiative supports one or more young people to spend dedicated time 'thinking' about a social, resilience, recovery or preparedness topic of their choosing. It can run for 12-16 weeks, and can include offering Young Thinkers a cosy desk at your HQ, with full guidance of your team and access to extended networks.

The end goal is to support the Young Thinkers to create a piece of research and/or advocacy. This might be a report, a video, a campaign, or something else entirely – any tangible, positive outcome for their dedicated issue. Your organisation can utilise this to inform policy or practice advocacy.

For more information about this model, contact YACVic or [visit the YACVic webpage on the Young Thinker in Residence](#)

Fact Sheet: Including Young People in Committees and Governance

Good practice in identifying, including, and supporting young people to take on positions on committees and other governance bodies.

Committees and other governance bodies, such as Boards of Directors or Youth Action Committees are a great way for young people to share in decision-making and use their skills and lived experience to benefit others. Young people’s lived experience of disaster, knowledge of community and youth culture, and fresh perspectives can benefit everyone, making services, events or decisions more relevant, appropriate and effective.

Just like any other community member, **young people have opinions on all issues that affect their community, not just on ‘youth issues’**. Empowering them to participate will assist in your work, and enable them to become future community leaders.

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Planning for when young people are on committees where they are...

The majority

Usually used when young people have equal or most power in making decisions about the delivery of a youth program or service. It can be a particularly useful way for young people to learn to interact with more experienced committee or board members.

Mixed with older people

If young people will be a minority on the committee, involve at least two young people. One young person on their own might find the environment intimidating and unfamiliar. In this situation, it’s important to provide personal support such as mentoring and easy-to-digest information.

100% of committee

A youth-driven project where young people have complete decision-making power. They may still be receiving the support of other community members, depending on the role of young people in initiatives regarding disaster preparedness response and recovery. Clear communication and purpose required.

Create your own model!

There’s plenty of room for creative variations of the models above for initiatives regarding disaster preparedness, response and recovery. Any committee involving young people must find a way of working that meets their needs and purpose, reflects the type of structure they would like to be involved in, and gives them ownership over what happens.

Flexibility is good – it may be that the committee changes the way it operates over time. A committee may start with a formal structure and break that down into a more casual way of operating, or the other way around.

Tips for planning effective CRC youth engagement:

- Give young people real, valued roles so that their participation influences outcomes
- Create a vision or mission statement outlining core values and goals, that is jointly agreed and regularly referenced by the committee
- Share decision-making among younger and older members
- Negotiate common processes; don’t just expect young people to fit into ‘adult’ structures or expectations
- Empower younger members by providing resources and support for their personal and professional development
- Make it positive, optimistic and future-focused.

There are important responsibilities relating to involving young people on boards and committees. If young people’s contributions aren’t respected, a committee structure is not inclusive, or the young person is expected to regularly re-live their disaster experiences, participation can become very disempowering and/or unsafe.

Remember that young people are active, engaged members of a community – they have an interest and stake in as broad a range of issues as other community members, and have valuable contributions to make across more than just ‘youth issues’.

Ways to provide support to involve young people and maintain engagement...

<p>Trust and familiarity</p> <p>Make time for committee members to get to know each other socially before they get down to the serious stuff. Short, fun warm-up activities can help everyone relax before the serious agenda.</p> <p>Building familiarity is also useful for older committee members to resolve any external tensions, or revisit the preconceptions they may have about young people’s participation. Induction packages or processes can also help members to know what they’re expected to do and when to do it. Make sure that all the information provided is easily understood.</p>	<p>Acknowledgement</p> <p>Being acknowledged confirms the value of young people’s contributions.</p> <p>It’s important to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take time to acknowledge individual contributions. • Publicly recognise young board members or committees of young people for the work they have done, or the information they have provided. • Help young people see the outcomes they’ve affected – it’s a great motivator to their continued involvement. 	<p>Skill development</p> <p>Consider arranging some structured skill development sessions or workshops outside of meetings, to support young people (and possibly older people!) to develop new skills. Some examples could be communication skills or public speaking. Read more about how to really support young people.</p>	<p>Personal mentor and admin support</p> <p>A mentor can be a useful anchor and reference point for young people, particularly if they’re not familiar with this type of committee. A support worker or local youth service can provide admin support (e.g. arranging subsequent meetings, completing action tasks, etc.) to all the young people involved. Find out more on the Youth Mentoring Hub.</p>
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RESOURCE HINT: Yerp is a valuable toolkit to support young people to have an important role in shaping the present and future of Victoria. Head to yerp.yacvic.org.au to find out more.

Do you need some additional support to engage young people?

YACVic offers in-depth and longer-term fee-for-service support, based on your needs, including:

- **framework, policy and strategy design:** we can walk through this process with you and support you to create the documents you need to embed youth participation in your organisation;
- **Co-design:** we can support you to work alongside young people on designing and delivering solutions for your key projects;
- **Recruitment:** we can connect you with relevant young people to get involved in your initiatives. We’ll support both you and the young participants through the process.

Youth Participation Practice Network (YPPN)

YACVic coordinates the YPPN, a thriving network of Victorian professionals committed to empowering young people. This community meets regularly, and members can access the group online to share resources, knowledge and seek advice and guidance. If you’d like to join the YPPN, please get in touch with YACVic.

For more information and to discuss how we can support you to work with young people please get in touch with YACVic via our website or you can email us at: info@yacvic.org.au