

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**.