

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.

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 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.

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.

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.

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...

Trust and familiarity

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.

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.

Acknowledgement

Being acknowledged confirms the value of young people's contributions.

It's important to:

- 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.

Skill development

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.

Personal mentor and admin support

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.

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;
- **Consultations:** we can design, host and deliver peer-led youth consultations;

- **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