Planning for Youth Participation

Like any new initiative, involving young people in your organisation requires planning. This resource provides a step-by-step guide to the planning process, and outlines a number of key factors to consider.

Set your goals
What does your organisation hope to get out of involving young people? As a first step, identify the type of involvement you need from young people, and then develop strategies to get them involved. The type and depth of involvement required, and the resources available, will shape youth participation in your organisation.

Young people can be involved to:
• help develop ideas from scratch
• provide feedback on a project that is partially or well developed
• provide input into the organisation’s work or projects on a more regular basis.

The engagement of young people may consist of:
• one-off consultations with young people for a particular project, for example focus groups, surveys or forums
• ongoing involvement of young people in the organisation’s planning, for example through advisory committees and boards.

Working with young people provides organisations with an opportunity to get creative and try new ways of doing things—particularly when developing a new idea or a new project. For ideas on engagement models and techniques, see resources 4, 5 and 6.

Plan ahead
There are a number of things to consider when planning the involvement of young people.

Costs
The costs will vary depending on the engagement approach, and may include:
• food
• transport
• hiring venues and/or equipment
• training for staff and young people
• staff hours to manage the initiative
• recruiting a facilitator
• funds for gifts, incentives, prizes or celebrations as thank yous for participation.
Young people are giving up their time, so make sure the experience is enjoyable. Providing food, compensation for travel and out of hours participation (especially school hours), and offering access to developmental opportunities are good incentives, and show young people that their contribution is valued.

Feedback
Showing young people that their participation is valued may be critical to the success of your initiative. Plan to provide them with ongoing feedback throughout their involvement and formally recognise their work. Inform them of the outcomes of their participation, how their contribution will be used, and the outcome. This will also encourage them to keep contributing and to provide ideas for other projects.

Evaluation
Before approaching young people to become involved, develop a project evaluation plan that will include the engagement strategy used. This will help you to seek feedback on what was done well and what needs improvement. For example:

- Were the set goals achieved?
- Did the engagement strategy provide you with the information you were after?
- Did the young people enjoy their experience and would they do it again?

Make sure that the evaluation is done from the organisation’s and the young peoples’ point of view. Where youth participation is ongoing, regular evaluations can demonstrate how young people are making a difference over time and highlight any areas that need attention. The My-Peer Toolkit website may be helpful when developing an evaluation tool.

Recruiting young people
Once your organisation has set its goals and decided to engage young people, the next step is to invite young people to get involved. Below are some of the things you may need to consider.

Finding young people
There are many ways to recruit young people:

- Tap into your organisation’s existing networks, such as clients and partner organisations, and young people who are already committed to your organisation.
- Contact other organisations that regularly engage with young people, such as the Department of Local Government and Communities ‘The Panel’ and the Youth Affairs Council of WA (YACWA).
- Contact organisations that work with and support young people. Your local government’s community or youth development officers may be able to inform you about local youth organisations.
- Advertise through online databases such as Volunteering WA, GoVolunteer and Seek Volunteer.
- Advertise through local schools, training organisations and universities. Some universities have dedicated volunteering support offices.
- Promote through community and youth newsletters and papers.
- Establish an online and social media presence, and ensure that webpages are appealing to young people.

Also consider the ‘reward’ for young people who participate, and include this in your promotional materials. Rewards may be material (e.g. free pizza, chance to win a GoPro camera); however non-material rewards can also be effective. These include the opportunity to make a difference, develop new skills, meet new people and help the community.
Diversity

When it comes to youth participation, encouraging diversity is important as young people are not a homogenous group. The kind and number of young people your organisation engages with will depend on its objectives or the project. Try to provide opportunities for the participation of as many young people as possible.

Some groups of young people miss out on opportunities to be involved, including:

- young people with disability, including mental and physical health issues
- young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people
- young people who are carers
- young people in care
- young people who are homeless or experience housing stress
- young people who live in regional and rural areas
- young people who identify as being of diverse sexuality or gender
- other disadvantaged young people.

Engaging with local organisations that provide services for disengaged groups may help you to reach these young people.

Ethical considerations

When planning for youth participation, effective strategies to address ethical considerations such as harm, privacy and consent, need to be in place. The list below, while not comprehensive, can help you get started.

Harm

Young people must be protected from risks of physical and emotional harm. This includes:

- providing a safe location and safe transport to and from the location
- ensuring all staff working with young people have been appropriately screened (they may be required to hold Working with Children Checks by law)
- taking special care when talking to young people about sensitive issues.

If you are dealing with issues that may cause emotional harm, use trained staff and consider offering free access to counsellors.

Privacy

When conducting a consultation, you may collect information that can identify the young people involved, or which may be considered sensitive (such as ethnicity, religion or political views). It is the organisation’s responsibility to protect this information, and to inform the participants why the information is needed, what will happen with it and how it will be protected.

Consent

It is the right of all participants to be able to access the information at any time, and ask to have it removed. Establishing a privacy policy, and making sure that all the participants have read and understood it is a good starting point.

It is important that all young people give their informed consent before they get involved. Informed consent means that the young person knows their role, their rights and what will happen to the information they provide. Consent is usually obtained by asking participants to fill out and sign a form. Sometimes this is not practical. For example, it is reasonable to assume that registering interest or completing a survey is indicative of consent. If this is the case, ensure that this is clearly stated and that the participants have the information they need.

When working with children and young people under 18 years of age, consent should be obtained from their parent, guardian or carer. If you have any concerns, refer to the Commissioner for Children and Young People Western Australia’s webpage on child safe organisations.
Case Study: GOZYAC

The City of Gosnells Youth Advisory Council, GOZYAC is a group of young people who represent their peers and actively participate in community activities. The group is supported and facilitated by the City of Gosnells Youth Services team, whose goal for the group is to give young people the space and tools to set their own goals for community events, activities and advocacy.

GOZYAC was formed in the late 1990s and is one of the oldest YAC groups in WA. The group is conscious of having a wide range of young people represented, and actively seeks diversity by promoting membership through other youth services in Gosnells, other young people’s groups, and by engaging with school councillors at local schools.

The group runs an annual leadership camp which is open to all young people in the area and acts as a great recruitment tool.

“You have to make sure you recruit a good cross section of young people, who can come together to get things done. We aim to support the group to set achievable goals—small goals and small successes keep the group motivated.”

Chris Woods, City of Gosnells Youth Services Coordinator

The group starts each year with an annual planning session. Its annual schedule includes running events, helping with other community events (including fundraising stalls) and leading projects. Past projects have included consulting with local schools and creating a local youth services directory.

At the end of each year GOZYAC reflects on its activities through a group evaluation session, creates an annual report which can be shared with the Gosnells Council and other groups, and holds a dinner to celebrate the group’s achievements.