Surveys

Surveys are useful for getting information and opinions from young people on a range of issues and topics. You can use surveys to collect demographic information, as well as quotes from young people which may give greater insight and can be helpful to present alongside statistics.

Surveys can be conducted on the phone, in person, by mail, email or online. The most effective ways to get young people to participate are with online surveys promoted through social media.

Short surveys conducted in person in areas where young people congregate may also be successful. There are some small risks with this approach, such as young people not being there or unwilling to participate on the day.

Tips for writing survey questions:

- Create questions that align with your goals.
- When developing questions, try not to guess the answer you’ll receive as this often leads to biased results.
- Think about how you want to present your results (e.g. percentage, a graph or a pie chart), as this will help you design the questions and select response format (e.g. rankings out of 5, short answer, yes/no).

There are a number of platforms for creating and designing online surveys. When designing an online survey, make sure it is:

- short and user friendly
- accessible for young people with disability or who have low levels of English language proficiency.

See resource 7 for tips on promoting surveys through social media.

Useful tip

There are lots of online resources that can help with surveys. These include the popular SurveyMonkey platform, as well as others that allow for different kinds of input such as Doodle and Tricider.
**Interviews**

Interviews involve sitting down with a young person and discussing an issue. They can be structured or unstructured, using either set questions or a more open approach.

Some tips for good interviewing:

- Have a set of topics or questions to keep the interview on track and to help present your results.
- Be open to responses you didn’t anticipate. Sometimes this can be very useful information.
- Using a trained interviewer can help get the most out of participants.
- If you want to record the interview (audio or video), tell the young person before you start and get their permission.
- Try to use plain English and simple terms, and avoid using acronyms or jargon (unless appropriate).

**Focus groups**

Focus groups allow a group of young people to openly discuss a topic. They are a good way for young people to interact with a facilitator and each other to explore an issue. They also enable you to collect a range of opinions in a single session.

Facilitating focus groups can be challenging. It is important to make sure everyone is respected, their opinions are heard, and that no one voice dominates the group. It can be more challenging when dealing with sensitive issues.

It can also be difficult to keep everyone on track when there is an opportunity for open discussion. Using a trained facilitator can help. The Youth Affairs Council of WA may be able to help you to find a facilitator experienced in working with young people.

Focus groups can also be held online using platforms such as Tricider and All Our Ideas. However, when selecting a platform be aware that young people may not participate if they are required to have a login for the site. You could also use existing social media channels, for example, a question and answer session could be arranged for a certain time or day on your organisation’s Facebook page.

**Forums**

Forums can bring young people together with a range of stakeholders to discuss a given issue. The aim of forums is to briefly establish a shared body of knowledge on an issue (through presentations) and then resolve the issue and/or make recommendations (through discussion).

Forums require resources and planning. Using a skilled facilitator can ensure that young people have the opportunity to contribute without being intimidated by the structure, or the presence of many stakeholder groups.

The Speak Out for Change: Youth Voices on Youth Issues Summit is a recent example of a successful youth forum. More information is available from the Youth Partnership Project website under ‘publications’.
**Youth panels**

Youth panels are useful in situations where other methods will not produce the level of feedback or careful decision-making required. For example, many youth organisations in the United Kingdom engage young people on recruitment panels for youth workers.

Panel members are provided with information about the options, and are given the opportunity to ask questions and seek additional information before coming to a decision or making recommendations. It is good practice to inform the panellists whether their decision will be the final decision, or if it will be taken as a recommendation.

This process can be very empowering for young people when done correctly, and gives them valuable insight into and experience in decision making processes. While the thought of giving young people decision-making powers can be daunting, it can result in good outcomes for the organisation and young people involved. The Participation Works Partnership website has a list of resources that provide guidance on how to do this well.

**Embedding youth engagement in your organisation**

The above methods are a good starting point for engaging young people. However, the best youth consultations are often those led or designed by young people themselves. Consider creating a youth reference group to guide youth consultations. See resource 5 for more information on running reference groups.

The Panel is run by the Department of Local Government and Communities to connect young people aged 12 to 25 years to opportunities to influence decision-making. The Panel members are invited to participate in surveys, discussions and workshops focused on youth issues, and to help shape events, programs and policies for young West Australians. Organisations and government agencies can submit surveys and invitations to the Department for distribution to members of The Panel.