Planning Engagement with Children

The ideas and techniques throughout this kit can be used effectively when involving children. However, when children are involved, there are some important things to remember.

Things to consider

- If the involvement of children is to be ongoing, you may need Working with Children Checks for staff and volunteers.
- You have a duty of care to the children you are working with. Have emergency contact numbers for parents, guardians and carers.
- Children require the same information and feedback as young people when they are involved in your organisation.
- Use pictures and diagrams to communicate ideas. Use simple words, pictures and lots of colours to produce child friendly agendas, minutes and reports for children.
- Children will understand complex ideas better through the use of pictures and communicate more confidently. This also helps when working with children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who may have a limited understanding of English.
- Give children the opportunity to be involved in planning and running activities. Giving them some control will make it more fun, give them a sense of accomplishment and encourage them to participate more.
- Have your meetings in a secure, safe and child friendly location. If you are having regular meetings, changing venues can make it fun.
- Build trust with children by making sure they interact with the same staff members each time. Start each session with fun activities to break the ice.
- Have more frequent breaks to relieve boredom, and to allow them to go to the toilet and get a drink. You can use meal breaks too.
- Make sessions shorter, and make them fun. Try incorporating games and physical activities to break sessions up, recapture their attention and make sure children enjoy the experience.
- Be prepared to be flexible and adapt to suggestions made by children, and to cope with changes in their energy and mood. You can plan activities for these situations. Prioritise what you want to achieve so you can change your schedule easily and still meet your goals.
Activities that work well with children

Good, bad and funny
Have children write down things that are good, bad and funny about an idea, and put them in a hat. These can then be read out to the group for discussion. This is a good evaluation technique for child participation.

Getting creative
Children can draw or paint a picture, or make something that reflects their idea. They can explain their idea using their artwork to the group.

Brainstorm
Have an open discussion on a topic, and have someone—this could be a child—write all the ideas on a piece of paper or board.

Cardstorm
Similar to a brainstorm, have children write or draw ideas on pieces of paper and stick them on a wall. Get them to sort the ideas and group ideas that are similar.

Democratic decision making
Write a list of ideas on a large piece of paper—these could be taken from a brainstorm. Children can stick a smiley face or sad face next to ideas they like or don’t like.
Create a matrix by listing ideas vertically, and the things you want children to consider about each idea horizontally. Children can put stickers in the squares they agree with.

Case study
The Commissioner for Children and Young People’s Consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children
In 2014, the Commissioner for Children and Young People embarked on a project to consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children across WA. Through the project, 1,271 children provided feedback about what was important to them, what they hoped to do in the future, and what help they needed to get there.
The Commissioner partnered with 17 community organisations across the state to facilitate consultations. This encouraged more children to be involved as the consultations were held in familiar settings and with familiar adults. A variety of fun and innovative consultation activities were used, including making videos, creating art, and singing and writing songs together. Young people were also asked “if you were the boss of your town, what would you change?” to facilitate discussions.
For more information visit the Commissioner’s website.

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