



Youth Participation Kit

Resource sheet
for young people

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Joining a Group or Organisation

A lot of the time, your participation in the community will be through an existing organisation. Organisations seek input and ideas from young people for their service delivery and decision-making processes. By getting involved, you get experience, make contacts and learn important business skills. It can also be a great way to really make a difference in your community.



Choosing a group

There is a wide range of organisations and groups out there, so it's important to take the time to find the right one for you. Look for organisations that are working to achieve the goals that are important to you, and who you believe to be ethical and making a real difference. You can find information on most organisations through their websites and social media channels (reading the comments section is a good idea), and by asking people who are familiar with the work they do.

When looking at different opportunities, it might be useful to ask yourself these questions:

- Are their goals the same as mine?
- Do their opportunities look practical and fun?

- Can I participate close to where I live, work or study?
- Do they seem ethical?
- Does their work seem to be making a real difference?
- Are there ways I could 'start small' with a low level of commitment and gradually become more involved when it suits me?
- Does it seem like there are opportunities to participate in decision-making?
- Will my participation give me valuable experience to use in future study or work?
- Can I offer something useful to the organisation?

Get in touch

Once you have selected an organisation, you might want to sign up online, send them an email, phone, or go into their office. Whichever approach you use, the response will tell you a lot about whether this is an organisation for you. A welcoming, professional response when you first contact them will give you some confidence in the organisation and provide you with a clear path for getting involved right away. You might like to do some initial research for organisations that have a good reputation and a supportive environment where volunteers are respected, valued and provided with worthwhile opportunities to make a difference.



Get started

Some groups require induction, training or orientation, so it is important to be prepared and spend some time learning about what they do before getting involved. It can sometimes seem a bit daunting, but this will give you further opportunity to see if the organisation suits you and whether you suit the organisation. Don't be afraid to pull out early if you are not happy—but once you have made a commitment, do your best to stick to it.

When you start out with an organisation, they should give you all of the information you will need, including:

- guide to what you will be doing
- explanation of why and how your efforts will help
- background information about the organisation and what else they do
- details of any policies, procedures or requirements you need to abide by
- who you can ask for help if you need it.

Remember, you can ask for more information if you feel like you need it.

Things to expect when you are involved with an organisation

Organisations usually have policies, procedures and structures in place that organise how they do things. This can be frustrating when you just want to get out there and help. But it's important to remember that these things exist to make sure that the organisation works safely and effectively, so even though things may take a little longer to get done, the rules are there for a reason.

Treat your volunteer commitments like you would your professional or personal commitments. If you can't be there for any reason let people know with plenty of notice.

As a volunteer you have responsibilities, but the organisation also has responsibilities to you. You are entitled to be:

- treated with respect
- provided with the information, training, supervision and other support you need
- working in a safe environment
- covered by insurance
- treated without discrimination.

There are National Standards for Volunteer Involvement which describe how organisations and volunteers should work together. You may like to look at these to help you choose an organisation.

Get more involved

Organisations will have different levels of involvement to suit different levels of commitment, skills and time availability. This can create opportunities to increase your involvement, such as:

- taking on leadership roles
- developing new initiatives for volunteer action
- representing volunteers and young people on working groups
- representing volunteers and young people on the board of the organisation.

This can lead to some of the most satisfying roles for a volunteer, where you really have a sense that your contribution is making a difference, not only through the practical work you do, but also in helping steer that organisation and ensuring its sustainability for the future.

When you're in an advisory role

Being in an advisory role in an organisation can take some getting used to. Being part of important meetings and talking to people can be very intimidating. You may feel that you do not have the knowledge and experience to make a significant contribution, but this is not the case.

You should always remember that you:

- have unique views and ideas
- were given this opportunity for a reason
- are there to share your ideas and you should be heard.

Believe in why you are there. The organisation has chosen you for a reason. Your views and ideas will be valuable for the organisation, even if you can't quite see how. As a young person, you have a lot to offer an organisation.

Getting your message across

Being assertive means making sure your voice is heard, but not in a way that could offend or upset anyone. You have a right to ask questions and to express your views and opinions. That is why you are there, so speak up. However, listening carefully, being polite and respecting the views and opinions of others will go a long way towards making others respect you, listen to your ideas and take them seriously.

If you're feeling uncomfortable in a role, find someone to talk to about it—you'll probably feel better once you let someone know, and they should be able to help you work out how to feel more at ease.

Case Study: Youth Advisory Councils

Many local governments in WA have Youth Advisory Councils (YAC). YACs are groups of young people who are regularly involved in the community and local government, provide advice to staff and councillors, and often put on events and activities for local young people. They can work on their own projects, or be consultants to make sure that youth perspectives are being included in a range of decision making at the council. This can include helping to prioritise funding for youth activities or development projects, or planning events for young people.

To find out if your local government has a YAC, check their website, visit a local youth centre, or speak to a staff member at the council. Most YACs welcome new members, so why not give it a go!

If your council doesn't have a YAC, you can talk to the youth development officer or community development officer about starting one. There may be council approval processes and people you need to win over, so you will need to be patient while you get things started.

Resource 6 and the 'Youth Participation Kit: Guide for Organisations' have useful tips, and other YACs are usually willing to provide advice as well.

YAC Bunbury

"The Youth Advisory Council gives people between the ages of 12 and 25 the opportunity to effect positive change within the Bunbury region. This change can occur through advising the City Council on youth related issues or take the form of projects and initiatives that are generated by members of the YAC. Being a part of the YAC has enriched my life immensely and it is an experience that I wholeheartedly recommend to any young people who are interested. Instead of complaining about the problems facing the young people of our city, YAC will challenge you to become part of the solution and actively work towards addressing these issues."

Karl Sullivan, Deputy Youth Mayor

The YAC is united by its vision to "be a voice not an echo"

YAC Bunbury advises Bunbury City Council on issues affecting young people as well as creating exciting projects to benefit young people in the Bunbury region. These projects include the annual SHIFT Youth Festival, the Future Possibilities Youth Conference, and TEDx Youth Bunbury where YAC members volunteer, speak and assist in the running of the event. They also run the Youth Reference Group where young people can give direct feedback about their ideas, issues and concerns about their community. The YAC also has a strong social media presence on Facebook and Instagram, which are run by member.

For more information, please contact:

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