MINISTRY OF YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
TE MANATU WHAKAHIATO TAIOHI
Administered by the Ministry of Social Development

KEEPIN' IT REAL

A RESOURCE FOR INVOLVING YOUNG PEOPLE IN DECISION-MAKING

This resource is a revised edition of 2003 Keepin' It Real. We would like to thank all the young people, local councils, community organisations and government departments who provided their feedback, experiences and ideas.

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“If organisations really knew the good stuff that can happen when you involve young people in decision-making, everyone would be in on it.”

FORMER YOUTH BOARD MEMBER, 17 YEARS

Introduction

Youth participation is a central feature of successful youth programming and effective policy-making. It is an important part of the development of citizenship and youth development. Young people bring with them new ways of thinking and acting that add value to the work of organisations.

We can contribute to the positive development of young people by creating opportunities for them to influence, inform, shape, design and contribute to an idea or activity. Including young people in the development of policies, services and programmes for them will ensure that their needs are met. Adults as well as young people can gain new skills and experience through youth participation.

The years from age 12 to 24 are important for the development of young people as they move from childhood to adulthood. Learning by doing, and being involved in decision-making, is part of young people's contribution to changes in society. Providing opportunities for young people to be involved in real issues in partnership with adults shows young people that their skills, ideas and views are valued.

This participation guide has been developed in response to requests from organisations and agencies about how they can increase youth participation in their policy development, programmes, services and organisations.

Your organisation, whatever its focus, will benefit from youth participation.

Along with this guide, we encourage you to use the resources available in communities, including people who are working with young people. Talk with organisations already involving young people in decision-making and with young people themselves about the methods of participation that work for them.

“Wouldn’t it be great if youth participation was everywhere – like young people were part of decisions from school to their community and the government too?”

YOUTH ADVISORY GROUP MEMBER FROM A RURAL COMMUNITY ORGANISATION, 16 YEARS

What is youth participation?

Effective youth participation is creating opportunities for young people to be involved in influencing, shaping, designing and contributing to policy and the development of services and programmes.

Effective youth participation is based on the principles of young people:

- being informed
- having an effect on outcomes
- organising themselves
- making decisions or being involved in decision-making
- being involved in follow-up.

It provides real opportunities for young people to be actively involved in decisions that affect their lives and communities.

Having access to effective youth participation in our communities is important for young people's wellbeing and their sense of belonging, identity and citizenship.

Reasons for youth participation

Youth participation means better decisions and increased efficiency

Government and non-government agencies are increasingly involving consumers and citizens in decision-making. Evidence shows that policies and programmes designed after consultation with users are more likely to be effective.

By utilising youth participation principles you are more likely to get it right the first time and avoid wasting time and money on services young people don't want to use.

Youth participation promotes active citizenship and strengthens community capacity

> "[A benefit of youth participation] is a strengthening of representative democracy by giving a voice to those unable to vote."
>
> City Council

It is democratic to have young people involved in decision-making. Giving young people a place in decision-making builds a broader base of citizen involvement and creates stronger, more inclusive communities. Young people and communities benefit when young people are active partners in community projects.

Youth participation is necessary in the development of active citizenship because it balances young people's social rights with their responsibilities.

Youth participation contributes to positive youth development

> "When I started out in the group, I was, like, really shy. I had never been in something like that before. I want to work in [health] now, I have learnt so much and want to help other young people out."
>
> Youth advisory group member, 16 years

Youth development is about young people growing up and developing the skills and attitudes they need. Positive youth development occurs when young people have the opportunity and support to contribute to society in a way that is valued and respected. Meaningful involvement helps young people develop ways to increase their control of what happens to them and around them.

Research shows that young people who are supported to participate in decision-making are more likely to:

- have increased confidence and self-belief
- develop group skills
- exercise positive career choices
- gain practical skills
- exercise active involvement and greater responsibility in the future.

Youth participation improves credibility and reputation

> "A lot of people started coming to the youth centre after our [youth advisory] group was set up. The youth centre started listening to what young people wanted so, of course, young people started coming!"
>
> Youth advisory group member, 16 years

Organisations committed to effective youth participation can boost their profile and credibility with stakeholders, funders and the community. Encouraging youth participation contributes to the

positive image of your organisation, making it easier to attract young people, their friends and families, and to promote your organisation to them.

Youth participation enhances your organisation's relationship with young people

> "I never knew about all the things he had to think about when he [the principal] makes decisions. Decisions just seemed to be made and sometimes we would think 'dumb', but now I get it more, why things are decided, and can get students to understand how our voices are heard and this is why this [decision] happened."
>
> Student trustee on Board of Trustees, 17 years

Youth participation challenges negative stereotypes of young people and helps to break down barriers between adults. It can also improve attitudes and understanding about young people and create a greater awareness of youth issues in an organisation.

Improving the relationship between the organisation and young people contributes to attracting increasing numbers of young people to an organisation's programmes.

Youth participation is a right

New Zealand became a part of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC) in 1993. UNCROC states that all young people under the age of 18 have the right to participate in decision-making. It recognises their rights to express their opinions, to have their opinions considered in decisions that affect them and to receive and give information and ideas.

What might make youth participation easier?

> "Most of my friends thought it was going to be a waste of time – that nothing they said would be listened to, so why even go?"
>
> Youth forum participant, 16 years

Supporting youth participation

It is important to have structures and processes that help your organisation become one that:

- is a youth-appropriate organisation
- provides training and support for young people
- respects young people.

It doesn't matter whether young people are participating in a one-off project, on-going policy development, or anything in between – it is important to show commitment to youth participation.

The following questions can help when deciding about involving young people in your organisation.

Are you committed to youth participation?

> "Good youth participation is about partnerships between adults and young people."
>
> Youth advisory group member, 17 years

It is important to value young people, believe in their right to have a say and create opportunities for involvement. Young people will lose interest if they think their participation is a token gesture or their views are being sought only on trivial issues. Commitment to youth participation includes:

- being clear about your reasons for involving young people
- formalising youth participation by including it in constitutions, mission statements and strategic plans
- providing training for staff members about its importance
- involving young people in planning the types of participation your organisation will commit to
- being committed to addressing the views of young people.

EXAMPLE

A non-government organisation shows its commitment to young members in its constitution. The constitution states that all of the organisation's decision-making bodies must have a minimum of 25 per cent of members under 25 years of age.

Are you a youth-appropriate organisation?

If young people in your organisation are to be actively involved, they must feel comfortable with the set-up and able to participate in ways that are right for them. Being youth-appropriate includes:

- making meetings at times that suit young people
- providing transport (or funding) to meetings
- providing food at meetings
- sharing information in the way they want
- ensuring they know how to participate in a formal meeting
- knowing when young people may be busy (e.g. exams, sport commitments)

- ensuring your organisation is accessible and comfortable for a diverse range of young people
- talking with young people about what you can do to make your organisation more youth-appropriate
- listening to what they have to say and acting on it.

Do you provide training and support for young people?

Finding ways to support and train young people benefits not only them but your whole organisation.

Consider:

- organising a mentor or buddy system
- providing orientation for young people new to youth participation
- providing a consistent staff member as a key contact for young people.

EXAMPLE

A government agency set up a new youth advisory group to provide advice on a range of issues. A weekend of training was organised for the new members to meet staff from the agency. They also spent time getting to know how the organisation worked and discussed how they wanted to function as a group.

Are you respectful of young people?

Respecting young people and treating them equally and honestly is just as important as it is with adults. Young people need to know what is expected of them and what they will achieve through their involvement.

A respectful relationship with young people is about:

- being open about how they can participate, how much effect their opinions will have and how their input will be included
- not restricting what they can be involved in
- clearly explaining decision-making processes
- giving feedback about decisions made and acknowledging their part in the process.

Breaking down barriers

Barriers may exist for both the organisation and young people that can have an effect on the level of participation achieved.

Youth participation barriers identified by organisations include:

- youth participation not seen as a priority
- not knowing how to go about it
- not knowing how to involve and support young people
- not having connections with young people or knowing where to find them
- not having the time, energy or resources
- not knowing how to discuss issues with young people
- thinking that young people won't want to be involved
- language and cultural barriers.

Key Questions

What are the barriers to young people participating?

What can we do to overcome these barriers?

Youth participation barriers identified by young people include:

- no awareness about how to participate
- scepticism about existing ways to participate
- discrimination against young people
- unfriendly and formal environments
- high demands on young people's time
- complicated or unnecessary processes
- financial barriers, e.g. competition with work and/or expenses involved in participation
- academic or bureaucratic language
- unclear expectations.

"[Meeting] things like how a meeting goes and the different things that can happen in a meeting felt alien then – I didn't even know what minutes were. Something basic with all that written on it in the first meeting would have been good."

FORMER YOUTH COUNCILLOR, 16 YEARS

Principles of youth participation

Before involving young people in any decision-making, there are a number of steps that will help to ensure good youth participation practice. The following principles[1] are tools to support you in involving young people meaningfully and effectively in decision-making.

Step.1

Organisational commitment

- **Support staff doing youth participation**
  Do a presentation to staff/ management about the benefits of youth participation for your organisation.
- **Allocate adequate resources**
  Consider the unusual budget requirements you might need.
- **Offer real roles and relevant issues to young people**
  How you can involve young people who have experience and interest in the issue /decision?
- **Value young people's contribution**
  What are the different ways young people's contributions can be recognised and their participation celebrated?
- **Involve young people from the beginning to the end of the process**
  Think about involving young people in developing the objectives and evaluating the project.

1 Based on principles developed by the National Children's and Youth Law Centre (1995) *Promoting Youth Participation: A Rights Perspective,* University of New South Wales, Australia and the International Save the Children Alliance Ltd (2005) *Practice Standards in Children's Participation,* London, United Kingdom, with additional principles added by the Ministry of Youth Development, Wellington, New Zealand.

START PARTICIPATION

Step.2

Create space for young people's involvement

- **Acknowledge young people's cultural beliefs and values**
  How can you interest and retain young people from different cultural backgrounds?
- **Invite a diverse range of young people to participate**
  Talk to youth workers/youth organisations in your community for advice on how to connect with young people who would not normally get involved.
- **Ensure participation opportunities are accessible**
  What would be a youth-friendly time and place to hold a consultation for young people in your community?
- **Inform young people about opportunities and that they are under no obligation to participate**
  Do you have good information for young people about the commitments and expectations of being involved in a youth advisory group?
- **Recognise participation is beneficial to young people**
  What will young people get out of their involvement in the youth participation opportunity?

Step.3

Create a youth friendly environment

- **Build positive relationships between your organisation and young people**
  What opportunities could young people have to meet face-to-face with key decision makers in your organisation?
- **Develop a sense of belonging and security for young people**
  What kinds of things could your organisation do to develop trust with a new youth advisory group?
- **Create youth participation that is fun and challenging**
  What kinds of icebreakers and energisers could you use in a focus group activity?
- **Provide young people with information about the issue and decision-making process**
  Consider what kind of information, orientation and training you need to provide to help young people develop informed opinions and encourage their full participation.
- **Provide young people with timely feedback about the decision-making process and how their input was used.**
  How will you keep young people updated and informed about the decision-making process?

“When we started, we were like beginners learning to play an instrument – it sounded terrible at times! We have both learnt heaps and it’s like we can play in tune with each other now...”

YOUTH ADVISORY GROUP MEMBER, 17 YEARS

Youth participation models

There are many models of youth participation. Hart's Ladder and Shier's Pathways to Participation are two models that can be useful when developing and reviewing youth participation projects. Both models can help you decide the most suitable level of youth participation for your project.

Hart's Ladder[2]

Hart's Ladder provides an easy way to evaluate the quality of youth participation in any project. It does not intend to suggest youth participation projects should aim for the top level. Instead, it encourages people to climb off the lower levels of non-participation and think of ways to genuinely engage young people in the higher levels of participation.

Using Hart's Ladder can help organisations identify and get rid of non-participation practices. Projects can fall into non-participation practices when adults are genuine about youth participation, but have not planned how to make sure it is effective. Using youth participation principles will help you avoid non-participation practices.

Youth participation that falls within the top levels of the ladder can be considered good and appropriate practice, depending on the context of the decision-making, the environment and the reasons for involving young people.

2 Adapted from Hart, R (1992) *Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship*. UNICEF: Florence, Italy.

Hart's Ladder

Key Questions

Which level of Hart's Ladder is our project on?

Which level of Hart's Ladder should our project be on?

What do we need to do to move to the right level on the ladder for our project?

NON-PARTICIPATION

It is important to remember that tokenism, decoration and manipulation are not examples of youth participation. You do have the choice to move away from these methods towards more meaningful participation.

QUALITY OF PARTICIPATION

- Young people and adults share decision-making
- Young people lead and initiate action
- Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people
- Young people are consulted and informed
- Young people assigned but informed
- Tokenism
- Decoration
- Manipulation

	EXAMPLES
Young people have the ideas, set up the project and invite adults to join them in making decisions throughout the project. They are equal partners.	Young people decide they need a one-stop shop in their community. They partner with adults in different youth organisations and together lobby the government for resources.
Young people have the initial idea and decide how the project is to be carried out. Adults are available and trust in the leadership of young people.	A group of students get permission from their principal to run an environmental day. The students make the decisions, and the school provides support.
Adults have the initial idea, and young people are involved in making decisions, planning and implementing the project.	A community co-ordinator asks young people for event ideas for Youth Week. The young people suggest having a skating event. The co-ordinator and young people work together to make decisions and apply for funding.
Adults design and facilitate the project, and young people's opinions are given weight in decision-making. Young people receive feedback about their opinions.	A local council runs several consultations to get young people's input about a recreation park. Young people tell the council about features in the park they want changed. The council provides feedback to the young people about how their views affected decision-making.
Adults decide on the project and young people volunteer for it. Young people understand the project and adults respect their views.	A conference creates positions for two young people on a panel of speakers. Young people decide how to select their representatives and work with adults to understand their role.
Young people are given a limited voice and little choice about what they can say and how they can communicate.	A young person is asked by adults to be on a panel and represent 'youth'. The young person is not given the opportunity to consult with peers or understand the role.
Young people take part in an event in a very limited capacity and have no role in decision-making.	A group of young people are given a script by adults about 'youth problems' to present to adults attending a youth conference.
Adults have complete and unchallenged authority and abuse their power. They use young people's ideas and voices for their own gain.	A publication uses young people's cartoons; however, the publication is written by adults.

Shier's Pathways to Participation

Shier's Pathways to Participation[3]

Youth participation is a process rather than a specific event or project. Shier's Pathways to Participation model is useful in assessing organisational readiness and commitment to youth participation beyond individual projects.

The model offers a set of questions to help organisations work out where they currently stand and identify the areas they need to improve, to develop more effective youth participation practice.

3 **Adapted from:** Shier, H (2001) **Pathways to Participation:** Openings, Opportunities and Obligations, *Young People and Society*, Vol. 15, John Wiley and Sons Ltd: United States of America, pp. 107–117.

Shier's Pathways to Participation (2001)

LEVELS OF PARTICIPATION

Level 5

Young people share power and responsibility in decision-making.

Level 4

Young people are involved in decision-making processes.

Shier states that level 3 of his model is the minimum

Level 3

Young people's views are taken into account.

Level 2

Young people are supported in expressing their views.

Level 1

Young people are listened to.

START HERE

OPENINGS	OPPORTUNITIES	OBLIGATIONS
Are you ready to share some of your adult power with young people?	Is there a procedure that enables young people and adults to share power and responsibility for decisions?	Is it a policy requirement that young people and adults share power and responsibility for decisions?
Are you ready to let young people join in your decision-making processes?	Is there a procedure that enables young people to join in decision-making processes?	Is it a policy requirement that young people must be involved in decision-making processes?

practice needed to meet the requirements of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Are you ready to take young people's views into account?	Does your decision-making process enable you to take young people's views into account?	Is it a policy requirement that young people's views must be given weight in decision-making?
Are you ready to support young people in expressing their views?	Do you have a range of ideas and activities to help young people express their views?	Is it a policy requirement that young people must be supported in expressing their views?
Are you ready to listen to young people?	Do you work in a way that enables you to listen to young people?	Is it a policy requirement that young people must be listened to?

“I just knew I wanted to have a say. I didn’t know what that actually meant. It was important to get some info to help me work out [the issue] in my head and to think about [all the things] I needed to know to make a good case to the board.”

STUDENT COUNCILLOR, 17 YEARS

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KEEPIN' IT REAL CHECKLIST

Use this Keepin' It Real checklist to get an idea about how well your organisation is doing in the area of youth participation. You can also find out how to build on your strengths and improve the effectiveness of young people's involvement. The focus of this checklist is the three steps involved in the principles of youth participation.

PULL OUT

Step One: Organisational commitment

OUR ORGANISATION	NOT SURE	NOT AT ALL ..... ABSOLUTELY				
...is clear about reasons for involving young people in this decision-making opportunity	0	1	2	3	4	5
...has a policy outlining how young people will be involved and supported in decision-making opportunities	0	1	2	3	4	5
...provides the appropriate staff with training and resources on facilitating youth participation as needed	0	1	2	3	4	5
...is open and transparent about how much weight young people's opinions have in youth participation opportunities	0	1	2	3	4	5
...ensures that young people who will be affected by a decision are given the chance to contribute to the decision-making process	0	1	2	3	4	5

Step Two: Create space for young people's involvement

OUR ORGANISATION	NOT SURE	NOT AT ALL ..... ABSOLUTELY				
...is clear about how young people can participate in the decision-making process	0	1	2	3	4	5
...makes sure young people know how to participate – they do not have to participate if they do not wish to	0	1	2	3	4	5

Step Two: Create space for young people's involvement continued						
OUR ORGANISATION	NOT SURE	NOT AT ALL ..... ABSOLUTELY				
...is committed to making opportunities accessible to young people with diverse life, family, educational and other experiences	0	1	2	3	4	5
...helps young people to attend meetings and arranges meetings at times that suit them	0	1	2	3	4	5
...is flexible and understands that young people have different schedules compared to adults	0	1	2	3	4	5
...involves young people from different cultural backgrounds and ethnic minorities in youth participation	0	1	2	3	4	5

Step Three: Create a youth-friendly environment						
OUR ORGANISATION	NOT SURE	NOT AT ALL ..... ABSOLUTELY				
...provides training and/or information to young people to help them participate fully in decision-making	0	1	2	3	4	5
...brings key decision-makers in our organisation to talk directly with young people	0	1	2	3	4	5
...ensures young people are informed on the decision-making process, including how and what decisions are made	0	1	2	3	4	5
...provides food and social opportunity at meetings	0	1	2	3	4	5
...makes sure youth-friendly and appropriate facilitators undertake face-to-face meetings	0	1	2	3	4	5
...acknowledges the contribution of young people in the decision-making process	0	1	2	3	4	5
Total						

KEEPIN' IT REAL CHECKLIST

Rating

We scored 50 OR LESS

Your organisation has a huge opportunity to build a solid foundation for involving young people in decision-making processes. Acknowledge that you're starting from scratch or close to it. Setting up good youth participation processes, whether you are running a consultation or establishing a youth advisory group, can often feel like hard work. It doesn't need to be overly complicated, and there are lots of things that can help the process run smoothly.

Our advice is to :

- take stock of where your organisation does involve young people in decision-making
- consider where your organisation is on Shier's Pathways to Participation model and where you think it should be
- check out the participation and non-participation parts of Hart's Ladder and how they relate to your organisation
- go over the principles of youth participation and how you can turn these into practice in your organisation
- network with other organisations that have undertaken something similar to what you are thinking
- connect with young people who are stakeholders in your organisation and see what they think you should be doing
- set some realistic objectives in consultation with others in your organisation
- address the relevant points of the checklist for your particular project
- find out if the Ministry of Youth Development is running any youth participation workshops you could attend
- tap into the Ministry of Youth Development's website for online youth participation information and resources www.myd.govt.nz
- grab a copy of the Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa to incorporate into any youth participation policies
- contact the youth participation advisors at the Ministry of Youth Development for advice and support email: mydinfo@govt.nz, phone: 64 4 916 3300.

PULL OUT

We scored between 50 AND 76

You're off to a good start! Your organisation has great strengths to build on and some areas in which to improve. **Our advice is to:**

- highlight areas where you scored 4 or more to identify your organisation's strengths
- highlight areas where you scored 3 or less to identify opportunities for improvement
- develop an action plan to strengthen the youth participation work you are undertaking
- share your organisation's experiences and best practices with others
- find out if the Ministry of Youth Development is running any youth participation workshops you could attend
- go through the principles of youth participation and look at how you can strengthen these in your organisation
- consider where your organisation is and where you want to be on Shier's Pathways to Participation model
- if you are working on a particular youth participation project, check where your project is on Hart's Ladder model
- tap into the Ministry of Youth Development's website for youth participation information and resources www.myd.govt.nz.

We scored between 76 AND 95

Fabulous! You have a good foundation in youth participation. Be proud of what you have achieved.

Our suggestions:

- take opportunities to share your organisation's experiences, lessons and best practices
- present your youth participation processes at appropriate conferences to spread great examples of youth participation in action
- contact the Ministry of Youth Development to talk about showcasing your organisation's youth participation activities email: mydinfo@govt.nz, phone: 64 4 916 3300
- map where your organisation is on Shier's Pathways to Participation model and share your journey through the levels with other organisations
- if you are working on a particular youth participation project, check where your project is on Hart's Ladder. Share project success examples that correlate with participation levels on Hart's Ladder with others
- use this checklist to identify areas for continual improvement.

“The main thing is that the organisation really really wants and believes in [youth participation].”

YOUNG PERSON ON A COMMUNITY COMMITTEE, 18 YEARS

Youth participation methods

Different methods of participation will suit different projects or different stages of the same project. Working with young people will help you find the participation methods that best suit them, your organisation and the particular community you are working in.

Using multiple youth participation methods gives your organisation a stronger source of expertise from a wider range of young people.

You can include young people in decision-making by:

- **consulting them**
- **forming on-going groups**
- **sharing decision-making**
- **supporting youth-initiated and youth-led initiatives.**

Consulting young people

> "If you want to get the opinions of young people about how to make the downtown area better, go down there and ask young people who hang out there."
>
> Youth advisory group member, 17 years

Consultation is a tool that can be used to gather young people's opinions, ideas and thoughts on a particular topic or issue. It is important that the young people involved in the consultation process receive feedback about how their input is used and the impact it has on any outcomes.

Consultation alone does not involve young people in decision-making and, to ensure meaningful and effective participation, should be used alongside other methods.

Consultations can involve:

- meeting directly with young people to gather their ideas and opinions through activities such as:
  - hui, fono, workshops
  - focus groups with specific youth populations
  - interviews
  - focused conversations
  - community youth forums

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- asking young people to give their input through methods such as:
  - postcards
  - written, text or online surveys
  - email/internet submissions
  - chatting through online social networking tools.

Be clear about the objectives of the consultation and consider the following:

- How does this topic/issue affect young people?
- Why should young people be interested in taking part in this consultation?
- How will the information provided by young people be used?

When finalising your consultation activities, consider the following:

- Does the timing of the consultation clash with busy times for young people, e.g. exam times?
- What is the most appropriate location, and what are the needs of the group for meetings?
- Is a facilitator required to meet the needs of the group, e.g. Māori facilitator for a Māori group?
- What is the most youth-appropriate format and style for written material?
- What is the best way to provide feedback on how their advice has been used?
- If you are planning to consult with young people regularly, what strategies do you need to put in place to ensure different young people have the opportunity to participate rather than the same group?

EXAMPLE

A government agency decided to consult with young people about a policy they were developing because it would affect young people nationwide. They employed a range of methods to gain feedback.

They went to specific youth organisations and, with the help of youth workers, conducted focus groups with young people who would not normally go to a consultation meeting. Young people could also provide written feedback online or on a written form. Everyone who provided feedback was sent a letter about how that information would be used in the development of the policy. This information was also made available on the agency's website.

On-going participation

Young people can be involved in regular decision-making through groups such as youth councils, student councils or youth advisory groups. Young people involved in these types of groups are usually consulted or provide feedback throughout a project.

These groups often attract young people interested in leadership and governance. To be inclusive of other young people who bring different life experience, opinions and advice, make sure you also use other methods of engagement, e.g youth forums, surveys, focus groups.

> "We were totally one kind of young people in the group. We needed to be supported more to be able to get the views of other young people so it wasn't just one group's views on things."
>
> Youth advisory group member, 16 years

Ways of involving young people on a regular basis can include:

- organising a youth advisory group for your project or organisation
- using an on-going internet-based forum for young people
- working with on-going youth participation groups already established in your community.

Key Questions

Is your organisation committed to ensuring meaningful participation of the group?

How will you encourage a diverse group of young people to be involved?

How will you make sure the selection of members is fair and transparent?

What do you need to include in a terms of reference?

Will the young people in the group be expected to represent the views of other young people, and how will this be supported?

Will the young people need any training to understand what they will be commenting or working on?

EXAMPLE

A local council has a youth council made up of young people selected through an application process. The youth councillors consult with other young people to ensure they're representing their views to council. The youth council is involved in setting the annual plan and taking youth issues directly to council.

Sharing decision-making with young people

Young people can fully participate in decision-making by being members of governance boards, committees or project teams. In these roles, they are often seen as representative of young people as a whole, so it is important to provide support for networking with other young people and to ensure that the diversity of this broad group is understood.

Avoid tokenism by having more than one young person involved. A single young person in a group of adults is likely to feel overpowered and may not have an equal say in decision-making. Sometimes, it might be appropriate to also have a separate group of young people who work alongside your board/committee.

> "I am normally a pretty confident guy, but in the boardroom, as the only young person there, I felt terrible – I was nervous as and couldn't speak up! It wasn't until they gave me another board member as a mentor and [another young person] also joined as another member of the committee that I began to loosen up."
>
> Young person on management committee, 18 years

The confidence and skills required to undertake these roles means high-achieving young people with a strong sense of self-assurance are commonly those who take up these positions. It is important to address how the input from young people from other backgrounds with different types of expertise and experience can be gained.

Key Questions

How will you ensure that organisational practices will not act as barriers to youth participation?

How will training and support be provided to give the necessary skills for equal contribution to decision-making?

How will adults in the group be encouraged to take young people's views seriously?

Would having adult mentors for youth participants and youth mentors for adult participants be helpful for your group?

EXAMPLE

A community group running a conference on youth development had equal numbers of young people and adults as members on the organising committee. All decisions were made by the organising committee as a whole.

Supporting youth-initiated and youth-led initiatives

Young people can participate by running their own projects and organisations.

Adults and organisations can provide support and encouragement to youth ownership of initiatives.

Your organisation could:

- offer financial support, advice and access to resources
- provide access to meeting spaces and technology
- encourage adults to respect young people and their decisions and treat them as equals
- advertise young people's successes
- ensure advice and resources do not lead to adult domination of youth-led and youth-initiated projects.

Key Questions

What kind of support can you offer young people?

How will you encourage adults to support the project and the young people involved?

How will you develop an equal, respectful relationship with the young people involved?

EXAMPLE

A funding body was asked by their local youth council to consider developing a youth-for-youth funding model.

They now have a separate youth committee where young people allocate funding to young people's projects within their community. The youth committee is allocated a set amount of money every year and decides how the money will be spent. The youth committee is provided with meeting rooms and access to administration resources and training.

"It was good feeling like things were changing for young people in [our community]. Like we had a voice... we were there every meeting, we were a reminder all the time about the young people."

YOUNG PERSON ON A COMMUNITY COMMITTEE, 16 YEARS

Where to start and how to keep going

Moving towards youth participation

Clarify the reasons for youth participation with everyone involved, before involving young people in decision-making.

Key Questions

Why should young people be involved?

What role will they have in decision-making?

How will we make sure their voices are heard?

How will we support them?

What impact will their involvement have?

Getting young people onboard

Young people are not all the same, so you will need to identify the groups of young people you want to involve. It is important that young people are invited to participate in issues that are real to them. You will also need to choose the right levels and methods of participation.

Those who are sometimes overlooked include:

- young people from different ethnic groups
- young people not involved in work or education
- rural young people
- young people with disabilities.

Avoid tokenism by having a range of young people involved. This is best achieved by providing a number of different ways young people can participate.

How can you encourage young people to get involved and participate?

- Cover their transport costs.
- Provide training on practical youth participation skills, e.g. writing a submission.
- Have safe, accessible and comfortable youth appropriate venues.
- Make meetings at youth-friendly times of the day and year (thinking about young people's educational and work commitments).
- Make opportunities available for them to present at and/or attend conferences.
- Run an orientation camp for team-building and training.
- Give them titles, e.g. youth advocate, youth advisor, youth voice leader.

- Support them to develop a group identity by coming up with a name and then promote that name.
- Have good food at your meetings.

> "At the first forum, there were loads of interested young people but it was in this, like, formal place and the facilitator was a business guy who we couldn't really understand. Lots of people didn't come back.
> [The organisation] learned, though, and the next forum was at the youth centre with [a youth facilitator] and policy people who talked and listened well with young people."
>
> Youth forum participant, 16 years

Promoting participation

When you have identified the range of young people you would like to participate, you will need to promote your project to them. You can do this by:

- working with other groups in your community, e.g. look for organisations that already work with young people and use their networks with specific groups of young people
- promoting your project in a way that will appeal to the young people you are looking for, e.g. talk with some young people to find out what forms of advertising/ promotion works for them
- getting the word out early, e.g. make sure you advertise well in advance and never underestimate the power of 'word of mouth'
- choosing language that is appropriate to your audience, e.g. the content and style of your message and the language used – attracting a diverse range of young people may mean using their languages.

Working with young people

Providing adults with the skills and understanding to work appropriately with young people affects how comfortable they feel in your organisation and how effectively they can participate.

Adults working with young people should:

- Address imbalances of power between themselves and young people.
- Understand and be committed to youth participation.
- Be honest with young people about the forms participation can take and the amount of influence young people will have in the decision-making process.

- Listen with an open mind and recognise the value of young people's perspectives.
- Respect young people and encourage honest and open participation so young people and adults can learn from each other's experiences.

Keeping young people involved

> "It was good feeling like things were changing for young people in [our community]. Like we had a voice… we were there every meeting, we were a reminder all the time about the young people."
>
> Young person on a community management committee, 16 years

It is important to recognise the time and input of young people involved in on-going youth participation projects as well as those who are part of activities such as one-off focus groups or youth forums.

Here are some ideas to recognise young people's contributions in a youth participation process.

- Ask the young people involved for ideas. What do they think would be an appropriate way to be recognised?
- Make sure the young people involved get reimbursed for any 'out of pocket' expenses: Did they have to take a bus? Did they use their cell phone to contact you? Did they have to pay for parking?

How will you appreciate and acknowledge young people's contribution and work?

You could:

- send out 'thank you' letters signed by the CEO
- give them lots of positive verbal feedback
- pass on feedback you have received from other people about them
- with their consent, publish photos and articles about their participation on websites and in publications
- quote them in media releases
- have a professional certificate made up for them
- provide them with a written reference letter for their CV.

What kinds of tangible rewards could you give young people?

You could:

- take them out for dinner as a group
- give them vouchers for books, CDs, movies
- give them freebies (t-shirts, pens, bags)
- make time for fun and socialising.

How will you reimburse them for costs incurred because they are participating in your project?

You could:

- provide petrol vouchers
- provide prepaid phone cards.

Informing young people

> "If your youth planning stuff takes ages to come out, let young people know it will be ages and where everything is at. If you don't hear, then it is easy to assume the council has forgotten you."
>
> Former youth councillor, 19 years

It is always important to keep stakeholders informed, and this includes young people. Remember, you will need to keep them informed even if you already have young people involved in your organisation.

You might use:

- newsletters and pamphlets
- magazines
- email/internet communication
- information posted on online social networking sites
- meetings/events
- radio
- television.

Key Questions

What are your aims in informing young people?

Are there specific groups of young people you wish to reach?

What style of language should be used? Do you need to communicate in different languages?

EXAMPLE

A local council sends a monthly email to a large number of young people and youth organisations. In this email, they provide information about what's happening within council, how they can provide feedback and how they can be involved in decision-making. The council also provide a contact person the young people can speak to and information on their website.

Specific groups of young people

There are many groups within the broad category of 'young people' in Aotearoa-New Zealand. Various processes might be needed for involving specific groups of young people in ways that feel comfortable, such as using a particular style or facilitator.

Some of the specific groups and issues to consider are listed below. It is also important to work with people in your community who can help you identify ways to achieve full participation.

Rangatahi

The Treaty of Waitangi has implications for a large number of organisations. Government agencies, in particular, are required to work in partnership with Māori and to ensure balanced decision-making. Some important issues to consider are:

- possible cultural differences between iwi groups
- that some rangatahi (especially in urban areas) may not affiliate with an iwi
- the importance whānau can play in the lives of rangatahi
- the rights of rangatahi to participate in a culturally appropriate way.

Some ways you can support rangatahi participation include:

- working with established Māori networks and organisations
- choosing facilitators who are acceptable to rangatahi
- providing for whānau and support people to be present, if appropriate
- recognising that some rangatahi may prefer to work in te reo Māori.

Pacific young people

The Pacific population in New Zealand is made up of people from a number of Pacific nations, with diversity found not only between nations but also within nations. It is important to consider:

- the diversity of Pacific cultures
- any differences between Pacific-born and New Zealand-born Pacific young people
- the importance family, church and community can play in their lives.

Some ways you can support Pacific young people's participation include:

- working with established Pacific people's networks and organisations
- choosing facilitators who are well known and acceptable to Pacific young people

- acknowledging that separate groups for people of different ethnicities or genders may sometimes be appropriate
- using appropriate methods and learning styles
- recognising that some Pacific young people may prefer to work in their own language.

Young people from ethnic groups

The term 'ethnic' usually refers to people whose culture and traditions distinguish them from the majority of people in New Zealand. This may include migrants, refugees and people born in New Zealand who identify with their ethnic heritage. Things to consider include:

- possible marginalisation because of culture or language
- possible differences between New Zealand-born and recent migrants
- acknowledging that, in some cultures, it is not usual to seek the views of young people.

Some ways you can support ethnic young people's participation include:

- working with established ethnic people's networks and organisations
- recognising that there may be cultural taboos and consent issues around their participation that need to be addressed with their community
- acknowledging that separate groups for people of different ethnicities or genders may sometimes be appropriate
- recognising that some ethnic young people may prefer to work in their own language.

Young people with disabilities

As well as the barriers that all young people face, those with disabilities often face extra physical and other barriers to participation. Consider the:

- range of disabilities – physical, mental or emotional
- variety of backgrounds they come from
- need for caregivers to provide support, care or interpretation.

Some ways you can support young people with disabilities include:

- involving them in decision-making on the same range of topics as other young people
- ensuring any physical barriers are identified and removed or minimised
- providing information well in advance, in appropriate ways
- recognising that some may need to use alternative methods of communication.

Young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and transgender people

Young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and transgender may be marginalised, and there is often a lack of societal awareness and understanding about their issues. Issues to consider include:

- confidentiality
- that young people may or may not choose to identify themselves in terms of their sexuality.

Some ways you can support young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and transgender people include:

- working with established networks and organisations
- choosing facilitators who are acceptable to the young people
- ensuring privacy and confidentiality, and clarifying this.

Rural young people

Recognise the difficulties of access to activities and programmes for many rural young people. Consider:

- accessibility
- transport issues
- their possible sense of isolation.

Some ways you can support rural young people include:

- creating accessible programmes/ services
- facilitating internet connections/ access
- addressing transport issues.

Vulnerable young people

Vulnerable young people include those who are (or have been) in care or protection, or in the youth justice system. Some important issues to consider include that:

- there may be additional barriers to vulnerable young people participating
- organisations may need to get consent from other agencies to work with this group.

Some ways you can support vulnerable young people include:

- ensuring the setting provides a sense of physical and emotional security
- choosing facilitators who are acceptable to the young people involved
- ensuring privacy and confidentiality, and clarifying this.

Practical considerations

Consent

You may need to seek consent from parents, caregivers, whānau or community members for young people to be involved. You will need to look at:

- their age
- ways in which young people are participating
- information they may be providing
- their family or community background.

Confidentiality and ethics

Organisational and professional ethical and safety standards should be followed in all dealings with young people. Before they participate, it is very important for young people to know:

- they will have their confidentiality respected
- how the information they contribute will be used.

Process and timeframe

The process of involving young people should be open, honest, clear and youth-appropriate. Young people should have the time they need to make informed decisions and to discuss issues with other young people. Agreeing on the process and timeframe can be the beginning of young people's participation.

Venues and meeting style

Young people are much more likely to be fully involved in the decision-making process if the venue is youth-appropriate. Informality may sometimes be helpful to encourage participation, but in some circumstances, this may be seen as disrespectful. Where formalities are used (such as a formal meeting structure), it is important to ensure that all those involved understand the process for contributing.

Resources

You need to plan for the financial (and people) resources needed for youth participation. This may include monetary payments, gifts and koha. If participating adults are being paid or receiving an honorarium, the same should be given to young people who participate in similar ways. There may be transport, food and other support items, as well as the extra needs of special groups, e.g. translator, special transport. Paying for incidental expenses in advance avoids the risk of excluding any young people who are unable to pay 'up front' prior to reimbursement.

Facilitators and supporters

Working with young people requires special training and skills. If there is no one in your organisation who is skilled in working with young people, consider engaging a facilitator, and include a member of your organisation as a liaison and support person for young people. Group facilitators will need to have experience and appropriate cultural awareness. Youth-appropriate facilitators are very important, particularly for new groups and specific groups of young people. Depending on the young people involved, interpreters and specialist support staff may also be required.

Sensitive topics

When discussing particularly sensitive issues, it is important that young people's physical, mental and emotional safety is the first consideration. It is not always suitable to involve young people in decision-making when dealing with such issues, although general discussion around an issue may be appropriate with a trained facilitator.

Age range

Sometimes you may want to set upper or lower age limits, or to have different methods of participation available to young people of different ages. In relation to age, consider:

- topics
- level of participation
- method of participation
- safety, e.g. where young people may need to travel away from home.

Feedback and evaluation

Young people involved in decision-making want feedback on how their contributions were used. Feedback and evaluation are very important to participating young people and to the success of your project.

Feedback

Providing feedback helps organisations and young people to develop stronger relationships with one another.

You could provide feedback by:

- using the internet or email to keep people informed
- ensuring meeting minutes are easy to read, sent out promptly and followed up at the next meeting
- having follow-up meetings
- regularly telephoning people to update
- providing opportunities for respondents to reply in their own languages.

Evaluation

Regular evaluation of how young people feel about the participation process ensures that their concerns can be addressed. It also ensures that you and your organisation are gaining value from the participation process.

You could evaluate the participation process by:

- using written evaluation methods (such as surveys and feedback forms)
- allowing young people to meet alone to evaluate the process as a group
- providing a comfortable environment for young people to give verbal or written feedback at the end of meetings.

Remember to consider the specific communication needs of your particular group of young people.

Project plan outline

These checklist headings may help guide you in your youth participation project.

Project name

Brief description of the project

(a whole organisation approach, a policy project, research, a new or existing youth programme, service or event, a youth-focused resource)

Describe the purpose and objective for involving young people

(reasons why young people are being involved)

Describe the methods to be used to involve young people

(including regular on-going involvement with a core group and/or consultation with a wider group or a consultation event to set up a regular group)

Consider youth participation methods (regular involvement in a meaningful way throughout the process) including:

- same process as adult involvement
- separate parallel process
- a combination of the above.

Consider consultation methods (usually one-off events seeking views at specific points), including:

- face-to-face methods – focus groups, hui, fono, talk-back radio
- written methods – surveys, submissions, web-based or email feedback.

Describe the range of young people to be involved in the method(s) to be used and how they will be recruited

Consider:

- target group of the project
- the diversity of young people
- how you are going to recruit.

Describe the practicalities of involving young people

Consider:

- the process and timeframe
- where (youth-appropriate venue), when and how often
- the resources required – people and financial
- who will facilitate meetings and how
- who will be the main contact with the young people
- how young people will be supported to make the most of their involvement and develop their skills
- the content of what is to be discussed or consulted on
- whether specific youth-appropriate consultation resources are needed.

Describe how information received will be recorded, analysed and fed back to young people

Describe how the youth participation and consultation processes will be evaluated

(including how young people will be involved in evaluation)

Contact us

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