



Engaging children and young people in your organisation



Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People
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reference

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We wish to pay our respects to Aboriginal elders – past, present and emerging – and acknowledge the important role of Aboriginal people and culture within the NSW community. ACYP advises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers this report may contain images of people who may have passed away.



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introduction

Involving children and young people in organisational decision making makes sense.

It makes sense because children and young people want to be recognised as persons in their own right and to have their views respected.

It makes sense because, like all people, they have a right to express their views when decisions are being made that directly affect their lives.

It makes sense because children and young people are experts in their own lives; they have a body of experience and knowledge that is unique to their situation. As a result, they can tell adults things that they don't know. They can get adults to look at things differently.

And it makes sense because we know that initiatives designed for children and young people are more likely to be effective if children and young people themselves participate in their development and implementation.

This resource has been developed to help government and non-government organisations meaningfully and effectively involve children and young people in their decision making. It highlights the importance of seeing children and young people as partners with adults in the decision making process.

In this document, 'participation' refers to children and young people's involvement in collective decision making, that is, children and young people having a say in the decisions that government and organisations make that affect them. It does not refer to children and young people's participation in personal and family decision making.

Children and young people can participate in organisational decision making in many ways, including one-off consultations, sitting on boards and committees, recruiting staff, youth councils and advisory groups and participating in and undertaking research.

We have prepared this resource for a wide audience—from people with no prior practice of involving children and young people in organisational decision making to those with extensive experience. It has been written for members of all levels of government, policy makers, non-government and community organisations, youth workers, teachers, school executives, and private organisations.



foreword

This guide has been developed to help organisations understand the value of involving children and young people in decisions that affect them, and to walk you through aspects to consider when involving children and young people in decision making processes that affect them.

Like all people, children and young people have a right to express their views when decisions are being made that affect their lives. Participation is more than just giving young people in our community a say. It is about listening to their views, taking them seriously and wherever feasible, putting their ideas and suggestions into effect. Children and young people are a great resource in our community and organisations can benefit from the qualities and insights they bring.

Children and young people are experts in their own lives. They have knowledge and experiences that are unique to them. They often look at the world differently to adults. They can be more creative and flexible in their thinking. Because of this, they can help adults to see things differently. Children and young people want to be recognised as people in their own right and to have their views respected.

The recent Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse highlights the importance of taking a rights-based approach and ensuring that children and young people are listened to, as an important tool to making institutions safer for children.


The advantages to government and non-government organisations include better and more responsive service delivery, greater engagement and increasing awareness. Programs designed for children and young people are much more likely to succeed if children and young people have been involved in planning, developing and implementing. The benefits for children and young people include greater confidence, increased connectedness and learning skills including expanding their problem solving skills.


Andrew Johnson
NSW Advocate for Children and Young People


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Other elements

 **Case studies:** These appear throughout the resource in the hope that organisations will be inspired to put ideas into practice.

 **Checklists:** Most sections end with a checklist for you to make sure your organisation has not omitted any important steps.

 **Further consideration:** Also included at the end of each section are several questions for further consideration through group discussion among organisational staff. These questions aim to assist organisations to reflect on why they are seeking children and young people's involvement, and how this can be best achieved within their specific contexts.



1. Volunteering should be in an area that you are passionate about.
2. Volunteering should be varied and exciting in order to engage young people.
3. Companies volunteering should have a close relationship with the community they are volunteering in.
4. Companies should have a clear purpose for their volunteering.
5. Companies should have a clear purpose for their volunteering.

VOLUNTEERING
OUR STANDARDS

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

- accessible transport to volunteer opportunities. For those who live in remote areas or who need access to transport.
- awareness: what activities there are for different skills and different communities through different people and different groups.
- opportunity: Provide and different communities through schools and different communities through people aware of all opportunities. So that they can find something they're interested in.

top 10 tips

for Children and Young People's Participation



1. Treat children and young people with respect

Do things **with** them, not to them or for them. By repeating back to them what you think they have said, children and young people will see that you are hearing them and that their involvement is genuine.



2. Don't talk down to children and young people

Speak to them as equals like you would any other adult. This shows that you are listening and that their contributions are valued and taken seriously.



3. Don't be a "try hard"

Children and young people are not expecting you to be COOL – be authentic.



4. Don't make assumptions about what children and young people are capable of

Don't assume that children and young people, because of age or other circumstances, will not want to be engaged or make a valuable contribution.



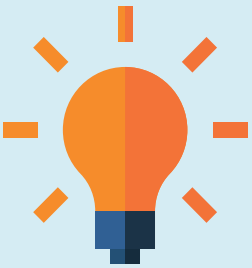
5. Remember that children and young people are as diverse as any other population group

Children and young people are not a homogenous group. They have different views, experiences, beliefs and backgrounds. Do not ask children and young people what **all** children and young people think, ask them what **they** know and experience.



6. Tell children and young people how they will be involved and always provide feedback

Be clear, realistic and honest with children and young people about what you are trying to achieve and what is involved in achieving it. Always provide feedback to them on the decision making process.



7. Be open to new ideas

One of the best things about involving children and young people is that they often have a different way of looking at things. Inform them that there are no right or wrong answers and this can create all sorts of new ideas and possibilities.



8. Give children and young people time and space to say what they mean

Be open to silence – often involving children and young people in decisions that affect them is new to them – so just give participants some time to get comfortable and think about what they want to say.



9. Give clear objectives and limits for decision making

Be clear and honest about the things that children and young people have control over or a say in, and those areas where they don't. That is, set clear boundaries with children and young people, and take time to discuss expectations – both theirs and yours.

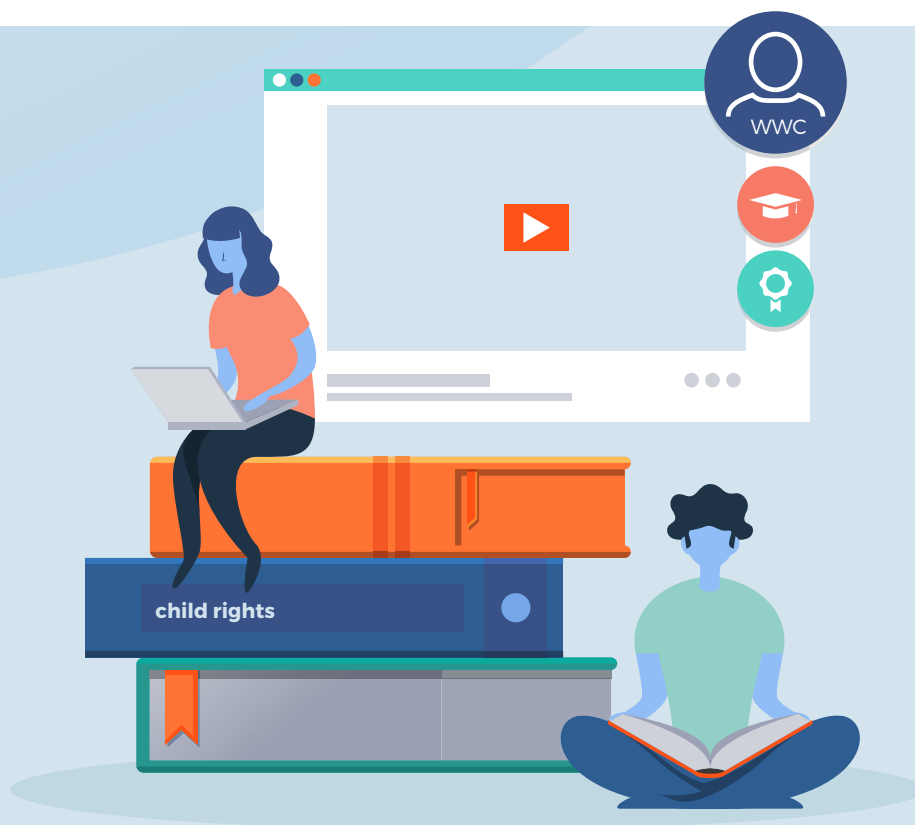


10. Steer clear of professional jargon whenever possible

If you must use jargon, take time to explain it clearly. Also, take time to explain and discuss different words and phrases related to their participation – like “represent”, “having a voice”, “consultation”.

checklist for Boards

- Have all members of my organisation engaged in child rights training?
- Does my organisation seek children and young people's input in the design, implementation and monitoring of our programs and services?
- Is my organisation prepared to change the way things are done as a result of feedback provided by children and young people?
- Does my organisation have an understanding that children and young people are diverse?
- Does my organisation have a budget to enable children and young people to participate in decision making processes?
- Is my organisation safe for children and young people; both in terms of facilities and staff? Do all staff have a Working With Children Check? Have all staff undertaken Child Safe Training?



checklist for CEOs and organisational leaders

- How do I show staff that I value children and young people's participation?
- Have all organisational staff engaged in child rights training?
- Have relevant organisational staff been trained in children and young people's participation?
- Does my organisation seek children and young people's input in the design of our programs and services?
- Is my organisation prepared to change the way things are done as a result of feedback provided by children and young people?
- Does my organisation have a budget to enable children and young people to participate in decision making processes?
- Is my organisation safe for children and young people; both in terms of facilities and staff? Do all staff have a Working With Children Check? Have all staff undertaken Child Safe Training?
- Does my organisation give all children and young people equal opportunities to participate in decision making?
- Does my organisation have an understanding that children and young people are diverse?
- Does my organisation provide feedback to young people about how their information was used?



checklist for managing contracts

- Does the organisation consult with children and young people for continuous improvement of policy and programs?
- Does the organisation amend the design, implementation and monitoring of programs as a result of consultation with children and young people?
- When the organisation conducts consultations with children and young people how do they recruit the children and young people to be involved in the process?
- Are the children and young people involved in consultations representative of the diversity and different life experiences of children and young people more generally and/or when the focus is only on target client groups, do consultations represent the diversity within the client group?
- Who facilitates the consultations with children and young people, what methods are used to consult with children and young people, how is the information recorded?
- What does the organisation have in place for supporting children and young people that may experience negative consequences as a result of their participation?



checklist for NGO frontline workers

- Do I have the appropriate training (eg. Child Safe Training) to conduct a consultation with children and young people?
- Do I have a Working With Children Check?
- Have I received or requested from my organisation training in child rights and child rights approaches?
- Have I asked my manager if the organisation is prepared to change as a result of what children and young people tell us?
- Do I make it part of my practice to always seek feedback from the children and young people I work with?
- Do I provide feedback to children and young people about what my organisation does with the input they provide even if this means explaining to them why it isn't always possible to make the changes they ask for?
- Do I raise what children and young people have said in consultations regularly in staff meetings?





why we should include children and young people in decision making

“... all children should have the right of opinion, their opinion should be taken with respect and seriousness”

- Male, 11-17 yrs

In this section:

- **Underlying assumptions and principles**
- **Benefits of involving children and young people in decision making**
- **Barriers to involving children and young people in decision making**



Introduction

There are many benefits of involving children and young people in organisational decision making therefore it is important to break down the barriers to their participation to ensure all children and young people can have the opportunity to participate.

Children and young people have the capacity to form an opinion about decisions that affect their lives, and they have the right to voice that opinion.

This section ends with a Participation Charter that was developed by 150 children and young people from across NSW that were brought together by ACYP for a one day event called Speak for Yourself.



Underlying assumptions and principles

Assumptions

The participation of children and young people in organisational decision making is based on several underlying assumptions:



**because they
can**

All children and young people have the capacity to participate

All children and young people need to be recognised as agents capable of contributing to decisions that affect their lives (Fitzgerald, Graham, Smith & Taylor, 2010).

They can participate in a range of decision making activities in government and non-government organisations. These include governance activities, sitting on selection panels, working on program and policy design, development, planning, implementation and evaluation and monitoring the level of participation within organisations.

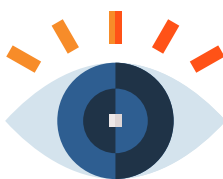


**because they
should**

All children and young people have the right to participate

Listening to children and young people is central to recognising and respecting them as human beings.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Australia is a signatory, specifies the right of children and young people to have their opinions taken into account on matters that affect their lives (Article 12, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989).



**because they
do**

All children and young people have critical and unique perspectives on their lives

Children and young people are experts in their own lives; they have experience and knowledge that is unique to their situation. As a result, they can tell adults things that adults do not know, and children and young people's perspectives can lead to more creative and relevant solutions/services.

Principles

Linked to these assumptions are the following principles for children and young people's participation:



Be voluntary and informed

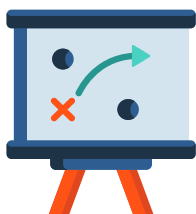
The choice of children and young people to participate or not must be their own and not overly influenced by others; they have the right not to participate.

Children and young people must also understand what information is needed from them and why the information is important. This will enable them to make an informed choice about whether they want to participate.



Bring them no harm

Organisations have a responsibility to minimise the risk of physical and psychological harm and other negative consequences of children and young people's participation. Such consequences can include distress, anxiety and embarrassment. Contingency arrangements should be available in case of upset or situations of risk or harm.



Take into account any ethical considerations at the outset

Ethical considerations could include things such as having an understanding about the organisational limitations in regards to children and young people's participation so any participatory initiatives are framed within these limitations.

However, the strategy should also be flexible enough to deal with unanticipated ethical considerations that can arise during the process.



Should include continuous reflection

Your own beliefs and values, as well as broader social and cultural attitudes towards children and young people, can affect children and young people's participation. While holding well-intentioned, child-centred values, organisations can still act on beliefs that essentially negate those values.



Recognise that children and young people are a diverse group.

Children and young people should be consulted in ways that ensure they are all properly heard, so the diversity of their views is reflected in the outcomes of the process.



Imbalances

For children and young people's participation to be meaningful, adults need to be willing to share their power with children and young people. Adults need to be open to changing decisions or making decisions in response to what children and young people tell them.

Children and young people need to clearly understand the intentions of the project and how they can influence decisions.

Peer-to-peer and peer-led participatory techniques can be another way to address power imbalances. By involving children and young people in the design, implementation, and evaluation of participation initiatives, you can place children and young people in the powerful position of being an expert in relation to their knowledge and understanding of their peer group. They can use this knowledge and understanding to inform how they work with other children and young people which can lead to the collection of a richer level of data that may not be provided to adults.



Meaningless participation

There can be situations when children and young people's participation is not meaningful or helpful such as when it is clear decision makers have already formed an opinion which they are not willing to change and want to use children and young people to validate this decision.



Capture the diversity of views and experience

When designing participation projects, organisations should consider how to support all children and young people to feel they have the capacity to participate. This includes considering how to reach children and young people who may not usually participate in these processes and deciding what approach would help to enhance their participation. If necessary, some children and young people may want assistance to build the skills and knowledge required to make their participation more effective.

It may be convenient to seek the participation of those already involved or experienced in being part of decision making processes eg: those on SRC's, Youth Councils, or other leadership groups, but this would ignore the potential contribution of those who may not have had these experiences or who may have been excluded from these processes. Ignoring such potential disempowers and further marginalises those children and young people. It can also result in failure to capture the diversity of views and experiences.

Benefits of involving children and young people in decision making

Organisational benefits

The more your organisation effectively involves children and young people in decision making, the more your organisation will be able to make accurate and relevant decisions.

Specific benefits to your organisation can include:



(Children and Young People's Participation in Wales 2010 - Welsh Assembly Government)



Benefits for children and young people in being involved

The children and young people who participate in organisational decision making can also benefit in many ways. Some of these benefits include:

being personally empowered to make a difference

Through the participation process, children and young people develop their abilities to investigate, evaluate and act on issues that are important to them. As a result, they may have increased skills to participate in other decisions that affect their lives.

becoming familiar with group and democratic processes

Through participation, children and young people can develop an understanding of different points of view and the need for compromise. They can also feel a sense of responsibility for group decisions (Smail, 2007).

acting and being recognised as citizens

Children and young people feel a sense of social inclusion when they are recognised by others as social actors with rights and the capacity for responsibilities. It also gives them a sense of social responsibility to the wider community.

acquiring and expanding their problem-solving, negotiation and communication skills

These skills are particularly developed when decision making is group-based.

developing an awareness of, and value for, their own knowledge, understanding and insights

Participating in decision making helps children and young people gain a better understanding of their own wants and needs, and how these can be expressed to adults. It also helps them to accept that their views and understandings are respected, valued and can contribute to the knowledge and understanding of others.

developing improved relationships with adults and peers

This can include an improved ability to work with others, as well as social benefits such as making new friends (Kendall & Merrill, 2008) and creating contacts in the business community.

improved wellbeing

We also know that participation can be positively associated with wellbeing benefits for young people (PARC - Anderson, D. (2018). Improving wellbeing through Student Participation at School: Phase 4 Report. Lismore: Centre for Children and Young People, Southern Cross University).



case study

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE BENEFIT FROM BEING ON THE NSW YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL (YAC)

The YAC is open to young people aged 12–24 years who live in NSW. Applications are sought from diverse locations, backgrounds and life experiences. The 12 member YAC provides a direct avenue of communication between young people and the NSW Government.

The YAC provide advice to Government and other agencies on a range of issues relevant to children and young people living in NSW.

They also plan and co-facilitate a major event for children and young people that takes place during Youth Week.

YAC members reported they had gained:

- greater understanding and perspective of all issues affecting children and young people's lives
- a better understanding of political process
- improved connection to culture and community
- improved confidence and self-esteem.



barriers to involving children and young people in decision making

“Adults need to learn that it doesn’t matter how old we are, we can still make change”

- Female, 11-17 yrs

Attitudes towards children and young people

One of the greatest barriers to the effective participation of children and young people is preconceived attitudes towards them. Some adults believe that children and young people cannot and should not be involved in decision making. It is critical that those who seek to involve children and young people in decision making identify any limited views they hold.

Organisational barriers

Organisational structures and procedures, such as lengthy meetings, formality and jargon, can be very unfriendly to children and young people. It is not easy to change traditional decision making patterns of organisations. However, new ways of reaching decisions may be needed for children and young people to feel part of the process.

Lack of training

In some organisations there is still a lack of understanding of what participation means and what it involves. Training in the specific set of skills required is critical to meaningful participation of children and young people.

(See ‘Enabling participation’ in this resource for details of training for organisational staff.)

The perception that involving children and young people is time consuming and requires extensive resourcing

Involving children and young people in decision making can require a shift in thinking or in organisational culture.

Participation can be as simple as asking children and young people what is working for them in the organisation, what is not working, and what improvements they would like to see.

It does require organisational commitment and the allocation of resources, possibly in different ways to current practice, however the outcome results in more effective and responsive policy directions or services provision far outweighs the short-term disruption caused by a change of organisational direction.

It can involve a higher level of support from workers in the initial stages to engage children and young people, especially if they have little experience in organisational decision making. They may need time to engage with the issues, to develop an understanding of what is required and to feel comfortable and confident to express their views.

Unfortunately, many staff members and individuals are stretched to the limit by work demands, so many find it difficult to see how they could provide the time required to support children and young people.

There are costs involved in children and young people’s participation, such as transport, training costs and other resources so resources need to be allocated to these things at the outset.

If the top level of an organisation supports this cultural change then it does not have to be a complicated or onerous process.

'SPEAK FOR YOURSELF' PARTICIPATION CHARTER

On 26 July 2016, ACYP and the 2016 NSW Youth Advisory Council co-hosted 'Speak for Yourself' at the Sydney Opera House. This event brought together 150 children and young people aged 12-24 years from across NSW to discuss their experiences of participating in organisational decision making and to hear their recommendations for how organisations can better engage with children and young people.

Children and young people at the event worked together to develop a 'Participation Charter' for children and young people and organisations.

'Speak for Yourself' Participation Charter

We respectfully request that adults assist us to make a meaningful contribution by:

- Providing guidance, balanced with independence
- Providing training and skill development
- Providing resources and financial support
- Understand that we have many commitments
- Encouraging us to work collaboratively
- Fully inform us of our role and our rights in the decision making process

Children and young people together formulated the following key principles for meaningful participation in decision making processes:

- Respect
- Empowerment
- Giving and receiving constructive advice
- Trust
- Providing feedback
- Interaction and entertainment
- No stereotyping of young people
- Equity
- Collaboration

Children and young people recommend that when they are engaged in decision making processes they undertake the following:

- Respect the views of others
- Be fully committed to the process
- Take accountability
- Show initiative
- Respect boundaries
- Be flexible with their time
- Meet deadlines



For further consideration:

- Why do we want to increase the participation of children and young people in our organisation?
- What are the ways our organisation could benefit from increasing the participation of children and young people?
- What could be limitations within our organisation to children and young people's participation?
- Are there groups of children and young people's views that we do not hear in our organisation? How can we ensure these groups are included?
- What are the ways in which children and young people can benefit from participating in our organisation's decision making?



enabling participation

In this section:

- **Levels of participation**
- **Capacity building for organisational staff**
- **Capacity building for children and young people**



Introduction

Children and young people can participate in organisational decision making on a variety of levels. Different levels of participation will be appropriate for different projects, depending on the purpose of the project and the time and resources available. But whatever the level of participation, organisations need to ensure that they build the capacity of their staff and of the children and young people themselves to participate.

Levels of participation

Models of participation

There are different levels of participation, and theoretical models differ in the way these levels are conceptualised. The following is an overview of some of these theoretical models.

Treseder's model of participation



From Treseder, P. (1997). Empowering Children and Young People. London: Save the Children.

Westhorpe's Continuum

Another way to conceptualise participation is as a continuum. Some strategies in the continuum will be more appropriate in some situations than in others.

The six stages of Westhorpe's (1987) Continuum

1

Ad hoc input

An environment is established which supports young people to contribute their ideas or information about their needs.

2

Structured Consultation

A deliberate strategy is developed to seek young people's opinions about what they need or what problems they face. It is a two-way flow of information and ideas.

3

Influence

Involves some formal, structured input in order to ensure at least a minimal level of influence on the organisation.

4

Delegation

Young people are provided with real responsibility for undertaking particular tasks within an organisation.

5

Negotiation

Young people and the organisation each contribute their ideas, information and perspectives. Decisions are reached by consensus and compromise.

6

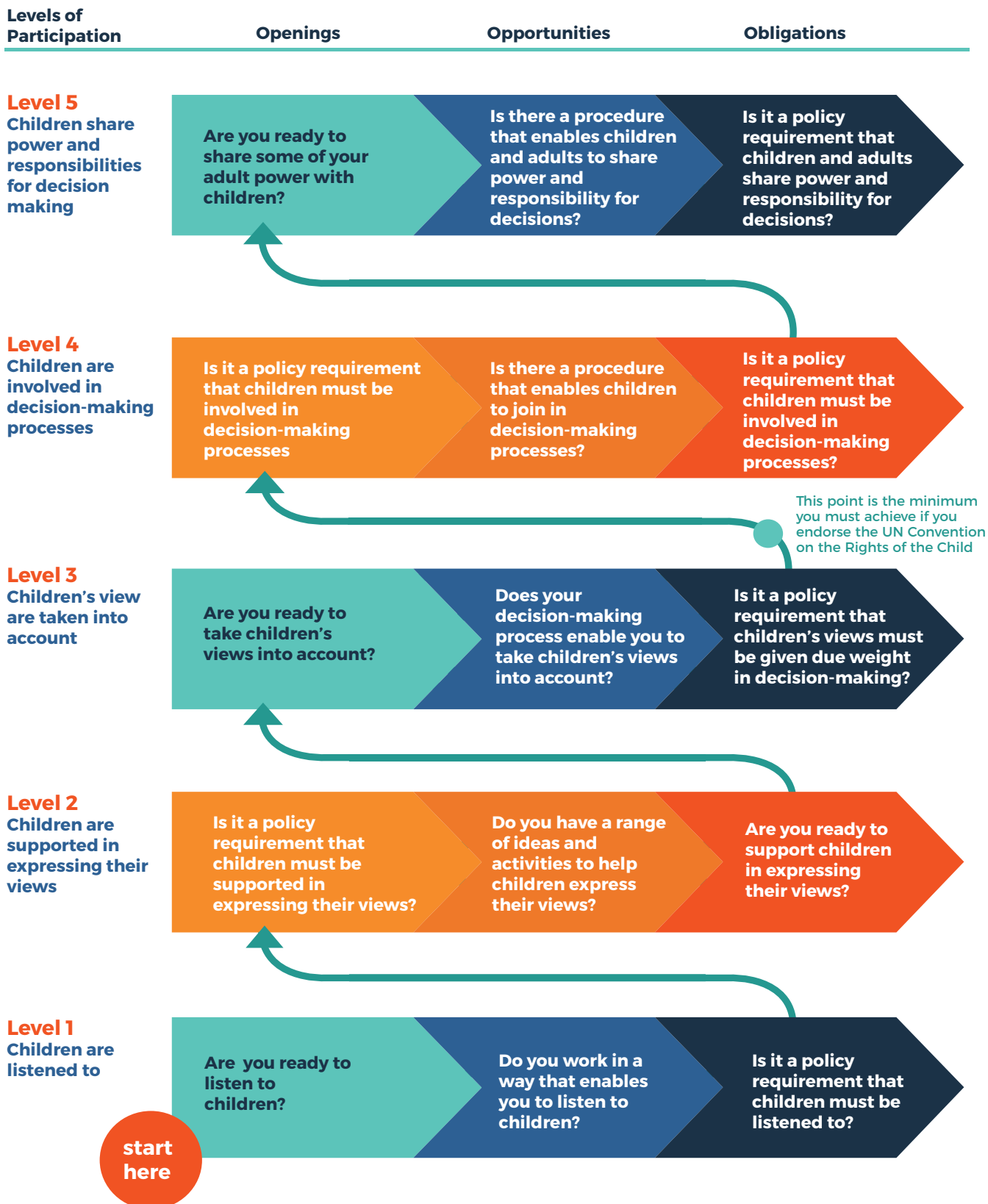
Control

Young people make all or many of the crucial decisions within the organisation, from policy and programming to financial management and hiring and firing of staff.

Shier's Pathways to Participation

Shier's model is based on five levels of participation, along with three stages of commitment at each level of participation. These stages of commitment are called 'Openings' (a willingness to participate), 'Opportunities' (support to participate) and 'Obligations' (policies that enable participation).

Shier's (2001) Pathways to Participation



From Shier, H. (2001). Pathways to participation: openings, opportunities and obligations. Children and Society, 15(2), pp.107-117.



Capacity building for participation

What is 'capacity building'?

'Capacity building' refers to the development of new skills, attitudes and ways of working to increase children and young people's participation in organisational decision making.

Capacity building can apply to both organisational managers and staff, and children and young people themselves. It involves changes in attitudes, training and other elements of support.

Capacity building for organisational staff



Champions

The leaders and the senior staff of your organisation must act as the 'champions' for participatory practices. Participation of children and young people may require a shift in the cultural thinking of the organisation. It is unlikely to be effective if leaders see it as a low priority rather than as the core business of the organisation.

Senior staff can reinforce the culture of inclusion by meeting with children and young people affected by or involved in the work of their organisation, listening to what they have to say and showing high interest in the process. When busy executives take the time to listen to their concerns, they show staff that children and young people's participation is important.



The organisational culture

Commit to making children and young people's participation part of your organisational culture. For example, include such a commitment in organisational strategic documents and integrate children and young people's participation as an ongoing activity, rather than as a one-off exercise or project.

When involving children and young people in decision making, adopt a child friendly culture in your approach to organisational processes. If meetings are long, consider having regular breaks and try to use informal, jargon-free language.



Training

Organisational staff need adequate training to facilitate children and young people's participation in decision making.

The Children and Young People's Participation Consortium for Wales outlines what should be included in such training on the following page (Horder, 2010):

- a pre-course questionnaire to gauge the organisation's current level of participation
- some background to the development of children and young people's participation, such as Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the policy context (this will be specific to the organisation) and a definition of participation
- an overview of the benefits of participation to both the organisation and the children and young people
- barriers to children and young people's participation and how to overcome them
- an overview of the different models of participation (see 'Enabling participation' in this resource)
- techniques for involving children and young people in organisational decision making (see 'Practical information for participation' in this resource)
- small group exploration of scenarios (practical examples of good practice)
- action planning – to brainstorm what the participants can do in their organisation subsequent to the training
- references, resources and support materials for participants to refer to after the training
- plan a follow up – it may be useful to follow up with the participants a few months after the training to see if they have implemented any changes.



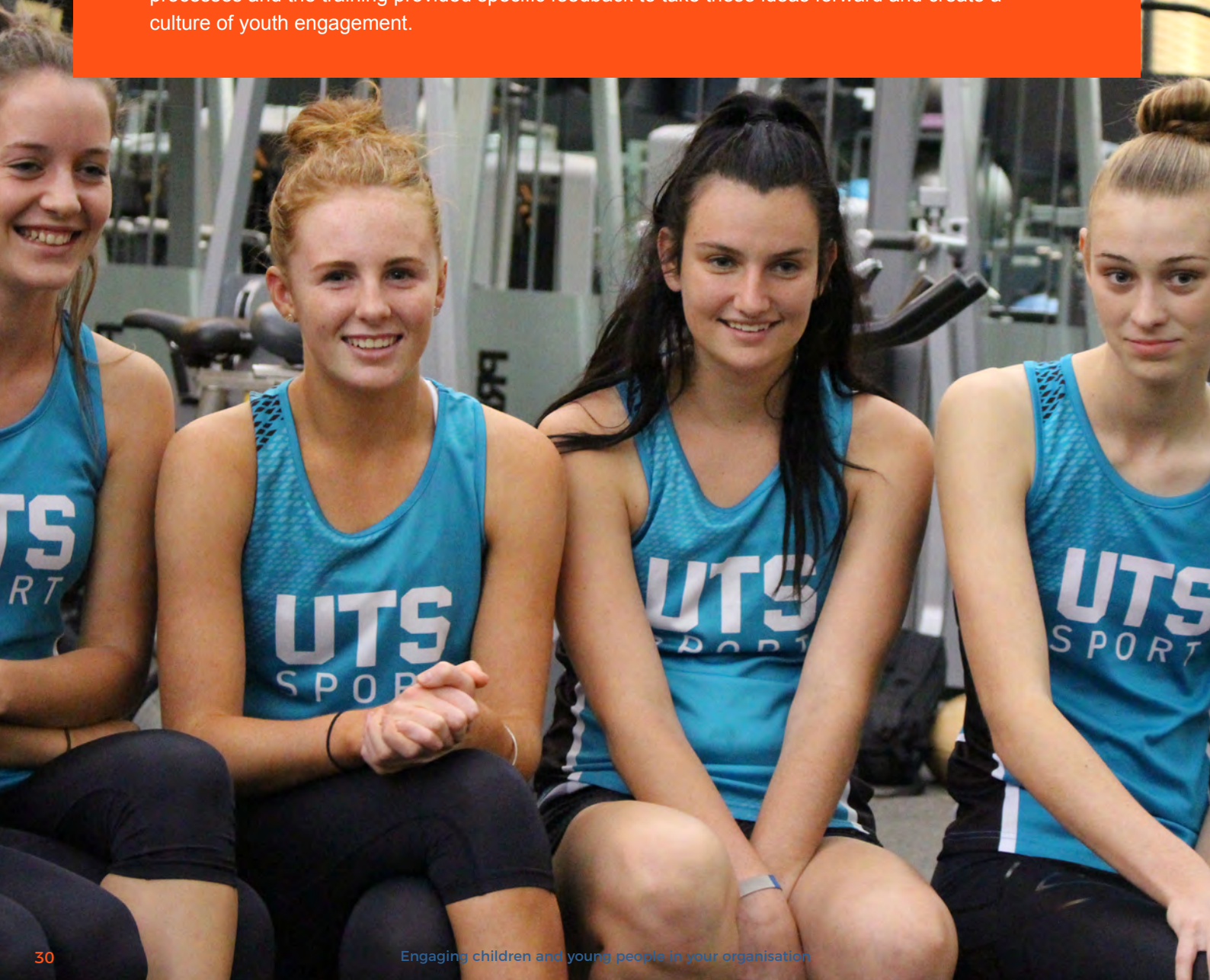
TRAINING THE NSW SPORT SECTOR

ACYP provided training to NSW Sport staff that were wanting to engage young people in their decision making processes.

The training included an overview of:

- why it is important to involve young people in organisational decision making
- benefits of participation to the young people and the organisation
- findings from ACYP consultations about what young people said they would like to have a say in relation to their sport
- specific ways to involve children and young people in decision making
- ethical considerations
- some tough questions to think through before starting the process
- how to plan and evaluate the process
- the importance of providing feedback to the young people involved.

Participants also came with ideas for how they wanted to involve young people in decision making processes and the training provided specific feedback to take these ideas forward and create a culture of youth engagement.



Capacity building for children and young people

“Children, like adults, have different levels of competence in different parts of their lives. Even small children can tell you what they like or dislike about school and why, can have ideas to make lessons more interesting, can offer help to other children. Provided they are given appropriate support, adequate information and allowed to express themselves in ways that are meaningful to them all children can participate in issues that are important to them”

(Lansdown, 2001).

Children and young people must receive appropriate support if they are to participate effectively in organisational decision making. Organisations should decide what capacity they have to support children and young people’s participation.

In their review of evaluations of children and young people’s participation in organisational and policy decision making, Kirby and Bryson (2002) identified the following types of necessary supports:



Clear objectives

It is important to provide sufficient information to children and young people so that they understand the purpose of the project they will be involved in. Prior to any consultation conducted by ACYP, children and young people participating are provided with project information and a checklist to ensure the project objective is clearly understood.



Group cohesion

When decision making is to be group based, you may need to develop children and young people’s group skills and team building. This includes learning how to negotiate shared decisions, show respect, support one another, resolve conflict and feel comfortable to express their views and feelings.



Training

Children and young people can participate in decision making regardless of whether they have received any type of training. In some cases, training can enhance participation. Some things children and young people may benefit from training in are:

- communication skills
- building confidence
- negotiation and conflict resolution
- project development and management
- research skills
- understanding organisational structures
- chairing and facilitating meetings
- giving presentations and public speaking
- staff recruitment
- writing submissions, reports and letters
- dealing with the media.



Peer training

Involving children and young people in training their peers helps the young trainers to develop organisational and facilitation skills. It also allows the new children and young people to learn from those of their own age. For example, children and young people who leave committees or advisory groups can be asked to assist with training or mentoring new members. Peer training also allows children and young people to develop skills that are transferable to other areas of their lives.



Support from staff

Ongoing support from one or more staff members is critical in building children and young people's capacity to participate. Both practical and emotional support is often needed. It may be necessary to employ a youth worker in organisations where there is no staff member with this specific skill set.

The staff member or youth worker in the support role must take the time to build up a level of trust with the children and young people, and this may take a few meetings prior to beginning the participatory task.



Adult communication and presence

The manner in which organisational staff communicate with children and young people can negatively affect their capacity to participate (e.g. asking leading questions, or using formal language or jargon). In all ACYP consultations, questions asked are open-ended so as not to put pre-conceived ideas in children and young people's minds. Also, the presence of lots of adults or well-known adults can intimidate children and young people and make them less confident to participate. For this reason, ACYP usually sends only two staff members to run consultations.



Providing feedback

How the information will be used should be determined when you first start planning the process. This can be communicated to children and young people at the time of engagement. Will a report and recommendations be written?, Who will it be presented to?, Who else will see the feedback they give?

Children and young people need to see that their contributions affect the decision making process and make a difference. Regular feedback on their suggestions and recommendations is critical for building their capacity to further participate. They may lose interest or drop out if they do not see results for their time and effort.

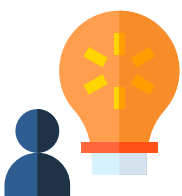
Children and young people will understand if it is not possible to act on their suggestions if the reasons why are explained to them. ACYP practice is to send back a summary of consultation findings to children and young people within a few days of their participation. A complete report with recommendations is also sent to them at the conclusion of the consultation process.



Timelines

It is important to set realistic timelines. Depending on how you are recruiting children and young people, there can be several gatekeepers that you will need to go through and this can take time. For example, schools need time to schedule in suitable dates and send consent forms to parents, which then need to be returned to the school.

Also keep in mind that children and young people often have other commitments and might have to participate around these.



Challenge age-based assumptions

An important aspect of building children and young people's capacity to participate is to challenge age-based assumptions about their competence to participate. It is often assumed that children and young people are only capable of certain forms of participation at a certain age. Instead, the assumption should be that all children have the capacity to participate in decision making. That assumption leads to the question of what support your organisation can provide to enable all children and young people to participate to the best of their ability. In addition to age, some children and young people may be uncomfortable expressing their views in a group-based discussion. Instead of assuming that there is no way to access those views, try to help them express themselves through using other techniques such as drawing and talking about pictures (Chawla, 2001).



Children and young people tell us what they need to participate

At the ACYP 'Speak For Yourself' event, children and young people spoke about the most important things they need in order to meaningfully participate in organisational decision making.

These included:

- training and development to improve knowledge, decision making and judgement
- public speaking skills
- time to think things through thoroughly
- problem-solving skills
- to be fully informed
- time management skills
- skills to work with diverse groups – training in diversity
- help to develop their ideas
- adults to work alongside children and young people as advisors
- constructive feedback
- have their ideas taken seriously
- open communication
- mutual respect
- encouragement.



COONAMBLE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS GIVEN OWNERSHIP OF THEIR SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

Coonamble High School is located in remote NSW. The staff have developed several student participation programs which have involved empowering students by giving them ownership over their school environment and the outcomes of projects.

One project involved a group of students designing and building a school gym using an empty space in the school. Students had been asking for a gym for some time and the principal engaged the VET construction students to bring the idea to fruition.

The school has found there were positive benefits for the students involved in terms of developing skills and improved school engagement.

In the words of some of the young people who participated:

“School is a lot more enjoyable when you can say ‘I built that. I helped design that.’”

“You feel good to be able to do something like that and be part of it.”

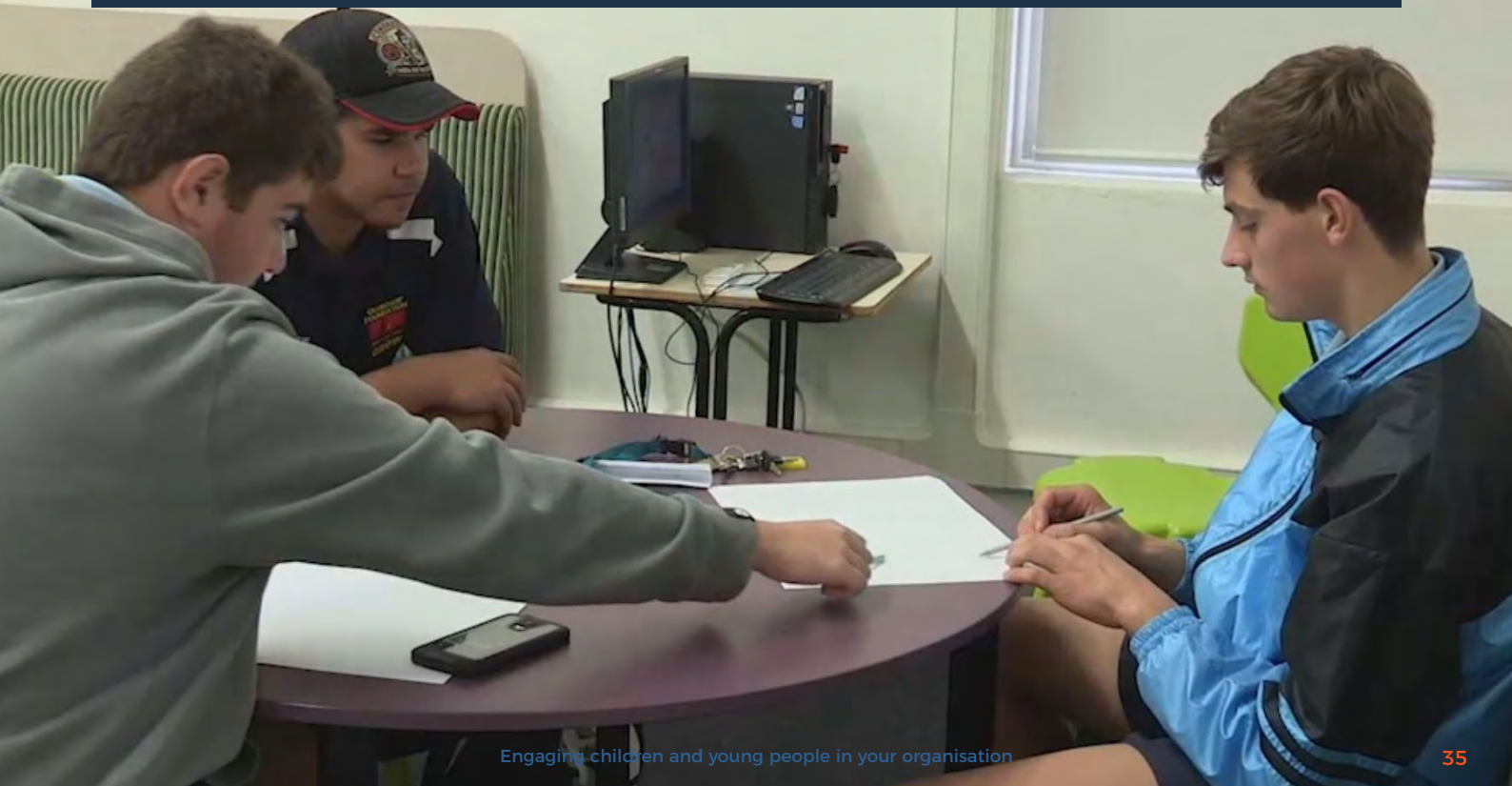
“It’s actually good...some people are listening to me.”

Coonamble High School has experienced an increase in student engagement as a result of their participation program.



For further consideration:

- what does participation mean to me and to my organisation?
- what could be the limitations to participation within our organisation?
- why do we want to involve children and young people in our decision making?
- what do we know about the children and young people we want to involve? How will we find out what we need to know?
- how will we support and resource the participation of children and young people?





practical information for participation

In this section:

- **How do you start planning the process?**
- **Who will facilitate the process?**
- **Which children and young people will take part?**
- **Where will the project take place?**
- **How do you communicate with children and young people?**
- **What methods of participation can you use?**
- **How do you provide feedback to children and young people?**



Introduction

This section provides the nuts and bolts of planning the participation process, who to involve, where the project should take place, as well as ideas for how the project should be carried out depending on the ages of the children and young people that will be involved.



How do you start planning the process?



Get commitment from your organisation

Obtaining organisational commitment and support is critical to success. It may require making presentations and attending managers and team meetings to discuss the project aims and objectives (Smail, 2007a).

Without organisational commitment at the outset, it is unlikely that children and young people's views will be taken seriously and their participation will therefore be tokenistic (Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales, 2002). There is evidence that if participation is tokenistic, many benefits of participation will be lost and possibly replaced by negative consequences for children and young people (Kirby & Bryson, 2002).



Be clear about why you want to involve children and young people in decision making

In order to ensure children and young people's meaningful participation, it is important to be clear about why you want to involve them in your organisational decision making. Some reasons are value based (i.e. it empowers children and young people; it is their right). Other reasons are based on achieving specific outcomes (e.g. wanting children and young people's views to review the effectiveness of a particular service) (Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin & Sinclair, 2003).

Also be clear about whether it is appropriate to involve children and young people. It is never appropriate to seek children and young people's views if you or your organisation are not prepared to change direction as a result of the information children and young people provide.



Have clear aims and objectives

What do you hope to achieve?

Develop a set of clear aims and objectives for the project, including whether a report will be produced and for whom, and make these clearly known to the children and young people involved. Also consider whether children and young people can be involved in setting the aims and objectives.

Objectives should be:

- simple and specific
- measurable
- achievable in the time available
- realistic, considering the budget and resources.

It is important to constantly refer back to the objectives as you move through each stage of planning and reflect on whether each decision made (e.g. who to involve, methodologies chosen etc.) will assist in meeting those objectives.



Set realistic time frames

Projects involving children and young people can take time to plan and implement successfully.

Of course, there are times when short time frames are unavoidable and it is better to allow children and young people to participate to some extent than not at all (Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales, 2002). However, remember to ensure that their views are seriously taken into account and they are provided with feedback on how their advice was used.



Work out the required resources

At the beginning of the process you need to determine:

- how many staff members will be involved and how much of their time will be needed?
- which staff and/or children and young people need prior training in participation? Does an external person or group need to be hired to conduct the training?
- if a consultation is planned, does an external person or group need to be employed to facilitate the process? Will children and young people be employed as co-facilitators?
- what are the venue hire, transport, food and administration costs?
- what are the costs in developing the materials for the project?
- will children and young people be remunerated for their participation over and above their travel costs?
- what additional resources are required (e.g. computers, audio/video recorders etc.)?

Note: It is important to give thought to the food that you will provide, especially if your program runs across mealtimes. Children and young people consider this a significant aspect of their involvement in any participatory project. You may wish to ask them in advance what refreshments they would like. It is also important to make sure that the food provided is culturally and religiously acceptable to all young participants, is healthy and caters for allergies and all dietary requirements.



Who will facilitate the process?

Firstly, you will need to decide whether the participatory process will be facilitated by children and young people themselves or adults or a combination of the two.

If staff will be involved in participatory work they will need to have a good understanding of, and commitment to, the principles of participation. They should also have the knowledge and skills required to work with children and young people.

Another option is to employ an individual or other organisation with expertise in participatory work to facilitate the process for your organisation, or work in partnership with you.

A good facilitator will enjoy working with children and young people and view their participation as valuable. They will also be able to communicate effectively with children and young people and have sufficient time to devote to the process.

Who you select as the facilitator will depend on the type of support children and young people will need, and that depends on the nature of the decision making activity. Sitting on a selection panel for hiring staff, for example, requires different support to being consulted about mental health service delivery for children and young people.

It is also worth considering employing a trained young person to be a project facilitator. Young people are often more comfortable talking with other young people.





Which children and young people will take part?

Children and young people have the right to participate in decision making.

There are groups of children and young people that are often left out of decision making processes. Some of these socially excluded children and young people include those with disabilities and mental health issues, Aboriginal children and young people, those in out-of-home care or involved in the juvenile justice system, and children and young people not in education, employment or training, young people from particular cultural backgrounds, and LGBTIQ+ children and young people.

Your organisation should try to include all children and young people in its decision making processes. They have the right to participate, and their inclusion will strengthen the process and make it more robust (Smail, 2007b).

Depending on the topic of the project, it may be important to include specific groups of children and young people, such as relevant service users or those who live in a particular community (Children and Young People's Participation in Wales 2010 - Welsh Assembly Government).



Recruiting children and young people

There are a variety of ways in which your organisation can recruit children and young people to its projects.

Existing youth organisations, government and non-government services, groups and clubs are a good way to reach specific groups of children and young people.

Schools are another avenue, but bear in mind you will need to go through the approval process of the relevant education system (i.e. Government, Independent, Catholic), which can take time.

Other ways to reach children and young people are through advertising (posters, websites, newspapers, magazines etc.) and using existing youth email lists. Snowballing techniques can be useful. This is where you start with a small group of children and young people and ask each of them to bring along friends.

Digital recruitment can also be very effective. Children and young people regularly access social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat. There are also online communities for children and young people that can be useful for recruiting children and young people to take part in surveys and polling.





ACYP CONSULTATIONS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

During the development of the NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People, ACYP consulted with over 4,000 children and young people. When asked about their main priorities, homelessness consistently ranked in the top ten issues that young people wanted to see addressed.

As a result, ACYP subsequently undertook 10 consultations with 60 children and young people aged 13-24 years to discuss their experiences of homelessness. All of the information provided was de-identified and consultations were not video or audio-recorded.

Young people answered questions around what was and was not working well for them in general, and also specifically in relation to the Link2Home information and referral telephone service.

Young people put forward several recommendations for what was needed for children and young people experiencing homelessness. One of their recommendations was around the need to increase general community awareness and understanding of the lived experiences for children and young people, and break the common stereotypes and myths that are associated with youth homelessness.

To address this recommendation, ACYP collaborated with the Australian Theatre for Young People to develop a play based on the lived experiences of children and young people experiencing or at risk of youth homelessness.





How do you communicate with children and young people?

Children and young people are often very busy with school, university, family commitments, work and other activities so may not be able to respond to emails or phone calls instantly. When organising meetings, we have found that communicating via text message can be helpful.

Social media messaging options are also useful eg; WhatsApp or Facebook messenger groups as these can be accessed over WiFi networks if children and young people do not have credit on their phones.

When communicating about meetings or consultations, both the adults and the children and young people should make their expectations of involvement clear to each other at the outset. This will prevent problems from developing down the track.

When talking with children and young people, always show you are actually listening to what they have to say. Take notes or record them when appropriate to show that you value their contribution. Also feedback to them what you will do with the information they give you.

It is also important to recognise and make adjustments for children and young people's different learning and communication styles. For example, you will need to limit the amount of written material for young children and for children and young people with reading difficulties. Where English is a second language, you may need to employ a translator.





What methods of participation can you use?

Children and young people are not a homogeneous group. They differ in their personal circumstances and in their changing interests and capacities as they grow older (Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin & Sinclair, 2003). Different methods for seeking their participation will be appropriate for different age groups and other characteristics.

It is difficult to attach specific methodologies to fixed ages. Children and young people's cognitive capacities and maturity levels will differ within each age group.

Methods can include a variety of techniques such as more structured interviewing and focus groups; digital engagement; or creative and game based activities. You should decide which method(s) will work best depending on how much time you have for the consultation, the nature of the children and young people you are working with, and your plan regarding what you will do with the information you collect.

Note: The methods described below will be most relevant for organisations seeking children and young people's participation through consultation or research activities.

Working with young children requires a specific skill set and it may be worthwhile for organisations to engage a partner with expertise in this area when seeking young children's participation.

Individual or group-based interviews or focus groups can work well if you have a short timeframe (see Kellett, 2011, for a detailed discussion). Some children may prefer these methods to creative or game-based ones, feeling their contribution is given more validation as they see themselves as being and treated as adults.

Surveys can be used too. However, limit the amount of open-ended questions as most children and young people will not want to engage in lengthy writing activities. Online surveys and forums may also be appropriate at times, particularly when distance or geographic location is an issue (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2014 - www.yerp.org.au).

Other factors

Other important factors to consider that will depend on the ages and stages of the children and young people are:

- how long will each participation session run?
- will you have any breaks? How many?
- what is the best day and time to meet with the children and young people?
- what is the best way to record their information?

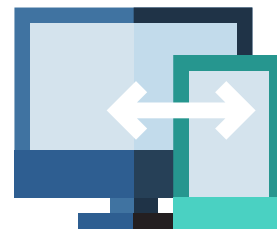
Methodologies employed by ACYP to involve children and young people in decision making

Since its commencement in 2015, ACYP has employed a range of methodologies to engage children and young people in decision making. These include face-to-face focus groups facilitated by ACYP staff; teacher facilitated focus groups; peer-led focus groups; surveys and polling; in-depth individual; interviews and *Citizens' Juries*.



Focus Groups

- Most useful when you have a short timeframe such as one school period or if you need to undertake a series of consultations quickly eg: ACYP school consultations, (ACYP) Nations of Origins consultations
- Already have access to decision makers and therefore need to provide concise, clear recommendations i.e. decision makers have asked for feedback such as ACYP Youth Week Forum or NSW Strategic Plan.



Digital Methods

- Digital surveying eg. Preloaded surveys on iPads which ACYP uses at events, SurveyMonkey etc.
- Data collection methods such as Zeetings which can be used in structured consultations to collate data but also allows children and young people to see what others are saying in real time
- Kahoots, game-based learning platform that can be used to test what children and young people have understood during the workshop
- Apps and Virtual Reality platforms which enable children and young people to express their opinions creatively such as (ACYP) Our Voices and My Metropolis.



Creative Methods

- Useful when training children and young people to feel comfortable expressing their opinions eg. storytelling exercises
- When trying to capture attention of decision makers through techniques such as producing a short video, vox pops or performances eg: (ACYP) Voices of Young People in Juvenile Detention video or (ACYP & ATYP) Homelessness performance
- Showcasing aspects of children and young people's experiences eg: Real NSW Photography Competition, Children's Week Design Competition.

There are also a variety of effective methods for engaging with very young children from about two years of age (See Kellett, 2011, for a review). For example:

- play-based approaches allow children to express how they feel about something through role play and pretend play
- storytelling and puppetry also allow them to express their views
- games and physical activities
- art and craft activities
- one-to-one or peer interviewing (depending on the cognitive capacity of the particular child) (Smail, 2007c).

The Mosaic Approach

Clark and Moss (2001; 2005) developed the Mosaic Approach for gathering the views of young children where every method or tool used with the children provides a piece of the mosaic. The pieces of the mosaic, or tools used, include the following:



Observation

Observations of how young children spend their time can be fed into discussions with the children to help gather information. Observations can be particularly important for pre-verbal children. By watching body language, facial expressions, movements, and listening to different cries and noises, you can build up an impression of what an experience is like for very young children. It is, however, important to remember that observation only gives an adult perspective on children's lives and so it needs to be used in conjunction with more participatory methods.



Cameras and videos

Cameras and videos provide a fun participatory tool through which young children can communicate. Children can be asked to take photographs of important things or places, or their favourite things. These photographs can form the basis of interviews with the children. Cameras also offer children the opportunity to produce a finished product in which they can take pride.



Child conferencing or interviewing

Interviews about children's experiences can be conducted 'on the move', with children actually taking the interviewer to the places they are talking about. Children should always be given the opportunity to add other information they think the interviewer should know.



Interviews with practitioners and parents

These interviews can build up a more detailed understanding of young children's experiences and raise areas of consensus and disagreement, which can then form the basis of more listening to the children to understand how they interpret the world.



Tours and map making

Tours are led by the children who take the interviewer on a 'sightseeing trip of his/her daily life'. Power imbalances between children and adults are reversed as children are in control of the content of the tour and how it is recorded. Mapping is one way of recording information provided by children during tours. The children can also add photographs, drawings and writing to the maps.

UNITING INCORPORATING THE VOICES OF VERY YOUNG CHILDREN IN THEIR PRACTICES

Uniting have successfully incorporated the voices of some of the youngest members of their community in every day practices and processes at their childcare centres, highlighting that even our youngest citizens have valuable ideas and suggestions to make their lives and the lives of others better.

One childcare centre director overheard a child asking their parent while signing them in why they did not get to sign in too. The director reflected on this and as a result created a sign in sheet for children as well as their carers. Building on this, the centre now asks their young clients to review the menu, included them in the development of their quality improvement plan and the children have also developed their own safety checklist that they check each day. The checklist is written in their own words – they take ownership of it daily and make sure they have a safe space for them to play and learn in.

The centre director believes that allowing such opportunities for children to speak and be heard and include them in decision making rather than making decisions on their behalf has also supported the development of the staff as educators.



INCLUDING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSIVE PLAY SPACES

The Touched by Olivia Foundation was founded following the tragic loss of John and Justine Perkins' eight-month old daughter Olivia. With a strategy aimed at creating healthier and happier lives for children, the foundation's core focus centres on creating inclusive play spaces across Australia.

Touched by Olivia sought to create a special place in Olivia's community where she could be remembered. A playground was chosen as the place and the Foundation sought to include children in its design, given that they are the primary users. As a result, children's input was sought prior to engaging paid professionals and according to the Foundation CEO, resulted in a better outcome.

Children involved benefited from the experience of having their opinions taken seriously:

"My favourite part of the design process is just coming up with these crazy ideas and seeing if we can put them into reality."

"It just means that I enjoy it more and a lot of other people enjoy it more, cause its thought about from their perspective."

This playground, known as Livvi's Place, is seen all over Australia as a first child-built playground for all abilities.



CITIZENS' JURIES TO ADDRESS CHILDHOOD OBESITY

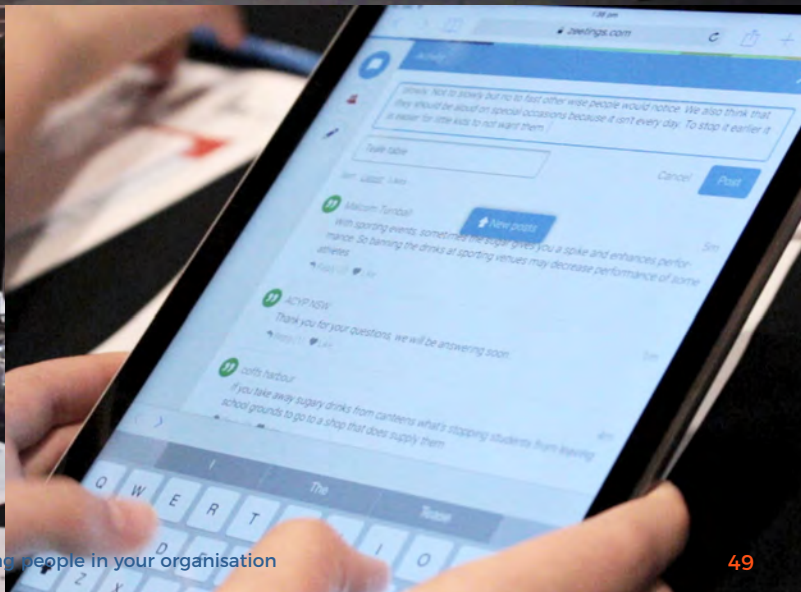
As part of 2016 NSW Children's Week, ACYP together with the NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet and NSW Health held a series of Young Citizens' Juries throughout NSW. In line with the Premier's Priority and one of the Wellbeing indicators in the NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People to reduce overweight and obesity rates of children by 5% over ten years, the issue for discussion at the young citizens' juries was childhood obesity. Children and young people specifically discussed whether the sale of sugary drinks should be banned in schools and at sporting venues.

Over 130 children and young people aged between 10 and 17 years from 40 schools across NSW took part. Juries were held in Broken Hill, Wollongong, Albury, Gosford, Coffs Harbour, Dubbo, Raymond Terrace and Sydney. Through webcasting, students listened to two experts in the area of childhood obesity and a representative of the Australian Beverage Council, discussed the issue with their jury colleagues and presented their recommendations to the Advocate and other government representatives.

59% of juries voted in favour of banning the sales of sugary drinks at schools and sporting venues and 43% of juries voted against the ban.

"Soft drinks increase the risk of heart disease and diabetes and other medical health problems. We can't ignore it." (Central Coast Jury)

"We cannot ban these drinks from children; we need to teach them to make their own decisions for good health." (Coffs Harbour Jury)



ACYP learnings from running consultations with children and young people

Over the past several years of conducting consultations with children and young people, ACYP is able to share learnings of what has worked in a variety of settings:

- we have found that our most successful consultations have been those that were large enough to divide students into groups for discussion prior to giving their responses. This gives children and young people time to think and discuss their ideas with each other
- we ask open-ended questions one at a time and provide groups with a blank sheet of butcher's paper to record their responses. The blank sheet is important as it shows children and young people we have no pre-conceived ideas; we only want to hear their views and opinions
- children and young people lead the discussion, write answers themselves and feedback themselves. The only time that adults intervene is when they asked questions or when there are any issues
- we have also found that consultations have also worked better with children and young people when teachers or youth workers ask children and young people to express their opinions freely. They demonstrate their trust in the children and young people by not interacting with them and allowing them to be focused on their own group of children and young people participating in the consultation. This results in children and young people being less inhibited. In addition, this means that their ideas are truly their own and not influenced by teachers' or youth workers' opinions
- when staff do remain in the room, it is important to ask them not to pass on their ideas to children and young people
- when consultation topics have been of a sensitive nature, we have made additional arrangements with organisations to support children and young people. For example, in the lead up to ACYP school-based consultations around bullying and violence, we asked schools to make sure their counsellor or welfare staff member was on site should any student become distressed during or after the consultation. We provided a list of services they could phone or contact online if they needed to and asked the school to check in with students a few days after the consultation
- when appropriate, ACYP produces a video of children and young people providing feedback during face to face consultations to play directly to decision makers. This has proven to be extremely powerful as it gives decision makers the opportunity to see and hear the voices of children and young people directly, as opposed to reading the findings through a report alone.





How do you provide feedback to children and young people?

Feedback is a crucial element of effective participation as it demonstrates that children and young people's views are being heard and respected. Children and young people need to see that their contributions affect the decision making process and make a difference.

At the start of the consultation children and young people should be told what you will do with the information you collect. They should receive regular feedback on their suggestions and recommendations (Children in Scotland, 2017).

This does not mean that every suggestion or recommendation made by children and young people needs to be implemented. Children and young people often just need to see that their views are being taken seriously—they can accept an unfavourable outcome if they feel that the process taken to arrive at that outcome was fair. This means telling them as soon as possible what has happened as a result of listening to their views.

Each time ACYP consults with a group of children and young people, the results are collated, summarised and sent back to the group within a few days of the consultation. This gives children and young people an opportunity to check that we have accurately recorded their opinions and recommendations. Once the full report has been written, this is also sent back to all children and young people so they can see what ACYP has recommended as a result of listening to children and young people.





CREATING THE ACYP BRAND

Involving children and young people was central to the development and design of the ACYP brand. Groups of children and young people were consulted with throughout the entire brand development process.

What children and young people said was important

- create a space for children and young people
- highlight that ACYP works in the best interests of young people
- show that ACYP is inclusive of young people from diverse backgrounds
- create a space where EVERY child and young person is listened to.

What children and young people said we should do

- target the brand towards young people
- show images of young people participating in society
- keep it simple, don't try too hard to connect
- use round lower case font.

What children and young people said we shouldn't do

- do not use bright primary colours or pastels
- no images of skate ramps or graffiti writing
- avoid childish font.

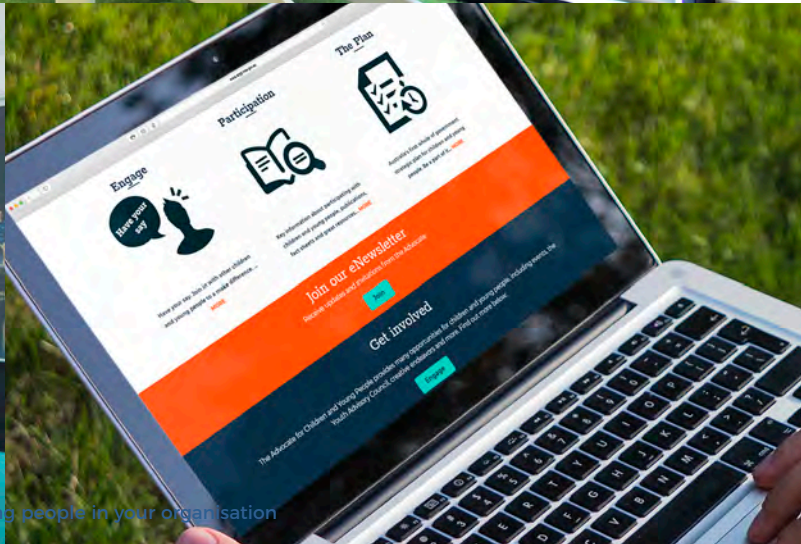
Implementing the brand: ACYP website and office

Children and young people wanted the website to:

- be uncomplicated and easy to navigate
- use images of real children and young people
- use video to communicate our messages.

Features requested by young people for the ACYP office included:

- colourful use of the ACYP brand
- photos of young people
- flexible meeting spaces
- break-out areas with deck chairs and fake grass.



checklist

- At what stage of the project will children and young people become involved? Will they be involved in the development of project objectives?
- Have you obtained organisational support for the project?
- Have you written clear, specific and realistic objectives for the project?
- Have you set realistic timelines to achieve the project objectives?
- Have you considered all of the resources required for the project? Number of staff required? Equipment? Budget?
- Have you chosen an appropriate person to facilitate the project?
- Have you decided which children and young people will take part in the project? How many? What ages? Diversity?
- Have you decided how children and young people will be recruited to the project?
- Have you chosen an appropriate and accessible venue?
- Have you decided on the methods you will use? Are they appropriate for the group of children and young people that will be involved?
- Is the planned length of each session appropriate? Are there enough breaks to maintain children and young people's interest?
- Have you decided how you will record the information the children and young people give and what will be done with the information?
- Have you planned a strategy to provide feedback and outcomes to the children and young people who participate?



For further consideration:

- What do we imagine might change as a result of involving children and young people in our decision making?
- How will the children and young people hear about the changes that occur as a result of their participation?



ethical considerations

In this section:

- **Duty of care and minimising harm**
- **Addressing power imbalances**
- **Respecting privacy, anonymity and confidentiality**
- **Providing remuneration to children and young people**
- **Working with 'hard to reach' children and young people**
- **Mandatory reporting**



Introduction

Ethical considerations are essentially about avoiding any harm to children and young people as a result of their participation in your organisation's decision making.



Duty of care and minimising harm

Individuals and organisations seeking to involve children and young people in decision making have a responsibility to minimise the risk that children and young people will be harmed physically or psychologically as a result of the participation process.

There are at least two ways in which children and young people can be at risk of harm in the participation process. They can be at risk:

1. as a direct result of their experience (e.g. a child or young person may share personal information that causes them distress or anxiety)
2. from the adults facilitating the process

It is therefore critical that your organisation carefully consider the possible negative impacts of involving children and young people, and has procedures in place to minimise risk. One example would be to develop a procedure for notifying a parent, carer or counsellor if a child or young person becomes distressed as a result of their participation.

When recruiting children and young people through schools and youth groups, it may be a requirement that you provide them with a risk assessment document; that outlines all possible risks of children and young people's participation and how you will mitigate those risks.

ACYP has developed a Consultation Policy and Procedure Risk Management Guidelines which outline steps to minimise any risk and which are sent to schools and organisations that we visit.

It is also important to be familiar with legal guidelines that exist to protect children and young people from harm and abuse. For example, in NSW the Working With Children Check is one way that unsuitable individuals are prevented from working in roles where they have direct, unsupervised contact with children and young people. The Office of the Children's Guardian has developed the Principles for Child-Safe Organisations to help organisations create safer environments for children they are involved with.

The principles are designed to be flexible enough for organisations to implement child-safe strategies that address their organisation's own particular environment risks.

While policies and procedures are beneficial, the principles also remind us of the importance of organisational culture and the attitudes, values and beliefs of an organisation in keeping children safe (Principles for Child-Safe Organisations 2017).



Addressing power imbalances

Children and young people's views are often sought within the context of adult processes that children and young people may not understand. If this adult-child power imbalance is not recognised and addressed, children and young people may respond with what they think organisations want to hear.

There are several ways for your organisation to address this imbalance:

- involve children and young people in shaping every aspect of the consultation or project
- form an advisory group made up of children and young people to assist with the consultation or project
- make the process appealing to children and young people. Include food they request, fun activities, incentives and age-appropriate language and spaces
- be open to feedback and suggestions from children and young people
- give children and young people the capacity to contribute effectively (see 'Enabling participation' in this resource).

Respecting privacy, anonymity and confidentiality

Issues of respecting privacy, anonymity and confidentiality are more relevant for consultations and research than for other organisational decision making processes such as planning days, sitting on boards and committees and selection panels.

Children and young people have the same rights to privacy and confidentiality throughout the participation process as adults do. There may be times when children and young people waive this right. For example, a child may feel uncomfortable being interviewed alone by a stranger, so would prefer having someone they know present over privacy.





Confidentiality

Children and young people should not be identified in the project outcomes (e.g. reports and presentations).

Pseudonyms can be used to avoid identification of children and young people. This can, however, raise further ethical dilemmas when the children and young people prefer to have their own names used (Powell, 2012). One way around this is to ask the children and young people to select their own pseudonyms.

The information provided by the children and young people should also be kept confidential. For example, even a parent asking to see what their child has answered on a survey could have ethical implications. Children and young people may be harmed physically or emotionally if their confidentiality is breached, their trust in adults and particular organisations may be broken and the validity of their responses could be compromised (Spriggs, 2010).

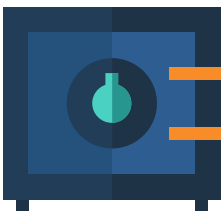
Also consider confidentiality issues among children and young people. When a group of children and young people participate together,

establish ground rules at the outset that include their responsibilities to each other regarding confidentiality.

In certain circumstances, however, confidentiality may need to be breached. Such circumstances include when:

- a child or young person reveals they are in a situation where they could be seriously harmed
- a child or young person discloses physical, sexual or emotional abuse or neglect
- it is necessary to report to another person to assess a particular situation (e.g. medical condition).

It is important that this limit on confidentiality is made clear to children and young people at the outset of the project.



Storage and use of information

Carefully consider how you store the information collected. Ideally, you should:

- ✓ store it in a secure place
- ✓ protect electronic information with a password
- ✓ back up data and keep the backup stored separately from computers.

Privacy laws govern the collection, use and storage of personal information. In NSW, the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998* deals with the collection, storage, access and accuracy, use and disclosure of personal information. The following information highlights key issues about the Act and how they relate to children and young people's participation in decision making. It is not legal advice. If you require further information, see the Privacy Commissioner's website at: www.ipc.nsw.gov.au/privacy

- only personal information needed for the purpose of the project should be collected
- children and young people must be informed that the information is being collected, why it is being collected and how it will be used and stored
- information must be stored securely, not kept any longer than necessary and disposed of appropriately
- children and young people must be able to access the personal information they have provided
- children and young people must be able to correct or update the personal information they have provided
- information can only be used for the purpose it was collected, a directly related purpose or a purpose to which the children and young people have given their consent.



Acknowledging children and young people's participation

It is important to acknowledge children and young people for giving up their time and sharing their expertise.

At the very least, children and young people should be reimbursed for all costs related to their participation (e.g. travel costs). However if any further compensation is offered, children and young people may feel compelled to say or do what they think the payer wants them to say or do.

ACYP sometimes provides children and young people with small gifts of appreciation for taking part in consultations. We have asked the NSW Youth Advisory Council to suggest small gifts that are popular with children and young people. They have suggested wrist bands, fidget spinners, water bottles and earphones.





Working with socially excluded children and young people

Certain groups of children and young people are often under-represented in organisational decision making for a variety of reasons, such as language and communication difficulties, vulnerability, cultural or geographical reasons (Smail, 2007b). Some of these socially excluded groups may include Aboriginal children and young people, those in out-of-home care, in juvenile justice facilities, children and young people with a disability, mental health issue, children and young people not in education, employment or training or LGBTIQ+ children and young people.

Your organisation will need to ask the children and young people and their carers what their additional individual support needs are for getting involved.

Socially excluded children and young people may require special arrangements and particular sensitivity when participating. For example, it may be important to provide cultural awareness training to staff before they consult with Aboriginal children and young people or children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Ethical guidelines

Organisations seeking the participation of diverse groups of children and young people also need to be aware of specific ethical guidelines and laws that exist for the relevant groups. For example, the NSW Department of Juvenile Justice requires confidentiality of children and young people in custody to be maintained in accordance with the *Children (Detention Centres) Act 1987*. Breaches of confidentiality are punishable and treated very seriously.

There are also additional ethical considerations when consulting with Aboriginal children and young people. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies (2012) documents these considerations and can be found at: www.aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research/guidelines-ethical-research-australian-indigenous-studies





Mandatory reporting

Organisations and individuals should be aware of their potential responsibility as mandatory reporters in NSW. Mandatory reporters are defined in NSW legislation as those who deliver services to children aged under 16 in the course of their paid employment or professional work in the following fields:

- **health care – including doctors, nurses, dentists and other health workers**
- **welfare – including psychologists, social workers and youth workers**
- **education – including teachers**
- **children’s services – including child care workers, family day carers and home based carers**
- **residential services – including refuge workers and community housing providers**
- **law enforcement – including police.**

A mandatory reporter, whether in a government or private organisation, is required by NSW law to make a report to the Child Protection Helpline on **132 111** if they have reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is at risk of significant harm from abuse or neglect. To assist them to make a decision about reporting, reporters should access the online Mandatory Reporter Guide: www.reporter.childstory.nsw.gov.au/s/mrg. This interactive tool allows reporters to enter their concerns and guides them towards whether a report to the Helpline is required.



INTERVIEWING YOUNG OFFENDERS

The Department of Juvenile Justice interviewed young offenders who came into custody for breach of bail. The aim was to understand the factors that affect a young person's ability to comply with their bail conditions.

The project was carried out internally for the purpose of improved service delivery, and so no ethical approval was required. Young offenders were interviewed at a Children's Court.

The participants were:

- given an explanation of the study in plain English
- told that they were free to ask questions before and during the interview, and that they did not have to answer any questions they did not want to
- told that there would be no adverse impacts from declining or discontinuing their involvement in the study
- given a significant amount of time to ensure they were aware of the consent and confidentiality conditions that accompanied the study

- told that all information they gave would not be disclosed to anyone unless there was indication of risk to them or others, and that results would be displayed at aggregate level with no identifying details
- offered no remuneration or incentive for their participation.

The young people were asked for witnessed verbal consent as they were unable to sign due to being interviewed in a non contact setting¹.

The participants were also given an information sheet outlining all the information discussed with them and providing contact details of the researchers.

The project provided a greater understanding of the factors impacting on a young person's compliance with their bail conditions. While the court location was appropriate for participant recruitment, a less restrictive setting may have improved rapport with the young people and subsequent responses.

¹ A non contact setting is a purpose built cubicle where the young person sits on one side of glass and the visitor on the other. This was not done due to any safety reasons, but to ensure the interviews were as least onerous on Juvenile Justice Court Staff as possible. In a contact setting (normal room with table and chairs) a staff member would be required to be in the room. With a non contact setting the staff member can be monitoring a number of interviews at once. From an ethical point of view, in a non contact setting the young person is able to freely disclose information to the interviewer without concerns of the staff hearing.



checklist

- Do you have a procedure in place for supporting any children and young people who experience distress or any other negative consequence as a direct result of their participation?
- Have all the adults working on this project been assessed for their suitability to have direct, unsupervised contact with children and young people? I.e. Do they have current Working With Children Checks?
- Have you considered all Child Safety standards?
- Is the location for the consultations suitable for children and young people?
- Do you know how you will protect the privacy, anonymity and confidentiality of the children and young people who participate?
- Have you informed children and young people of the limits to confidentiality and when it may be breached?
- Have you consulted the relevant privacy laws in your State or Territory?
- Will you provide compensation to children and young people over and above reimbursement? If so, what, how and when?
- Have you considered additional ethical considerations when seeking the participation of socially excluded children and young people?



For further consideration:

- Are there ways for us to help address the power difference that exists between our organisational staff and children and young people?
- How will we ensure that all children and young people have equal opportunity to participate despite age, gender, ethnicity, disability and literacy level?



obtaining consent

In this section:

- **Core principles**
- **When to obtain parental consent**
- **Active versus passive parental consent**
- **What to include in information sheets and consent forms**
- **Obtaining consent when working with socially excluded children and young people**



Introduction

It is essential to obtain the consent of children and young people to participate in organisational decision making at any level.

Core principles

Valid consent rests on the following core principles.



Consent must be informed

Children and young people must have the capacity to understand the situation and the consequences of taking part. They should be provided with comprehensive information about the project that is clear and understandable.

Consent from children and young people should always be sought. For children and young people under 18 years parental/guardian consent must be obtained. Children and young people's consent should always override parental consent (i.e. if the child does not want to take part even though the parents says they can they should not have to).



Consent must be voluntary

This can be difficult to achieve given the nature of power relations between children and adults. Organisations that seek to recruit children and young people through schools should be particularly mindful of this, given that it is typically compulsory for students to comply with adult requests in the school environment. A child or young person's refusal to participate should always be respected.



Consent must be current and renegotiable

Consent must be checked regularly throughout a project since a child or young person's relevant circumstances or views may change over time.

Children and young people should know that they are free to withdraw from a project at any time.





When to obtain parental consent

People have the legal capacity to provide consent if they have the mental ability and maturity to understand the nature and effect of what they are consenting to. Age is a relevant but not a decisive factor in assessing this.

Often the age where consent is required will vary according to the particular young person and the nature and environment of the particular project. However, when seeking to involve the participation of children and young people under the age of 18 years, your organisation should obtain the permission of an adult who has legal responsibility for the child or young person, such as a parent, carer or government official.

For example, organisations recruiting children and young people through schools will need to obtain parental consent in addition to children and young people's consent regardless of the age of the children and young people.

If parental consent is sought, children and young people should be informed and consulted about participation in a way that facilitates them making a choice separate from that made by their parents or carers.

There are some circumstances when it is difficult to obtain consent e.g. LGBTIQ+ youth consulting on LGBTIQ+ affairs who may not have come out to parents.

There are limited circumstances when it is difficult to obtain consent e.g. a person's lifestyle, experiences, political views etc. may be different to the adult and therefore not possible to gain consent.



Active versus passive parental consent

Passive consent refers to when parents are informed of the project and are required to respond only if they do not want their child to participate. A non-response is taken to mean that they consent to their child participating. This can be contentious as a non-response could also be the consequence of an oversight, not intentional consent (Powell, 2012).

An active parental consent procedure requires parents to give consent if they do want their child to participate. A non-response is assumed to be a refusal of consent. The disadvantage of this approach is that parents can forget or fail to return the consent form even if they are happy for their child to participate, thus denying the child the right to participate in the making of decisions that affect their lives (Powell, 2012).

It is recommended that organisations seek active parental consent for most participatory activities, as this reduces the potential for difficult situations to arise.



THE PROCESS OF OBTAINING CONSENT

Uniting (formerly UnitingCare Burnside) conducted a child-led project to teach children (aged 10-14 years) how to conduct their own research. The nature of the project evolved over time and so it was important to regularly revisit and reconfirm the children's consent to participate throughout the project.

Initially, an information evening was held for children and their parents. For those children who wished to participate, written signed consent was obtained from both the children and a parent. Separate consent forms were prepared for children and for parents. The children's consent was given priority so that if a parent gave consent for their child to participate but the child did not consent, this was deemed as no consent and the child would not participate in the project.

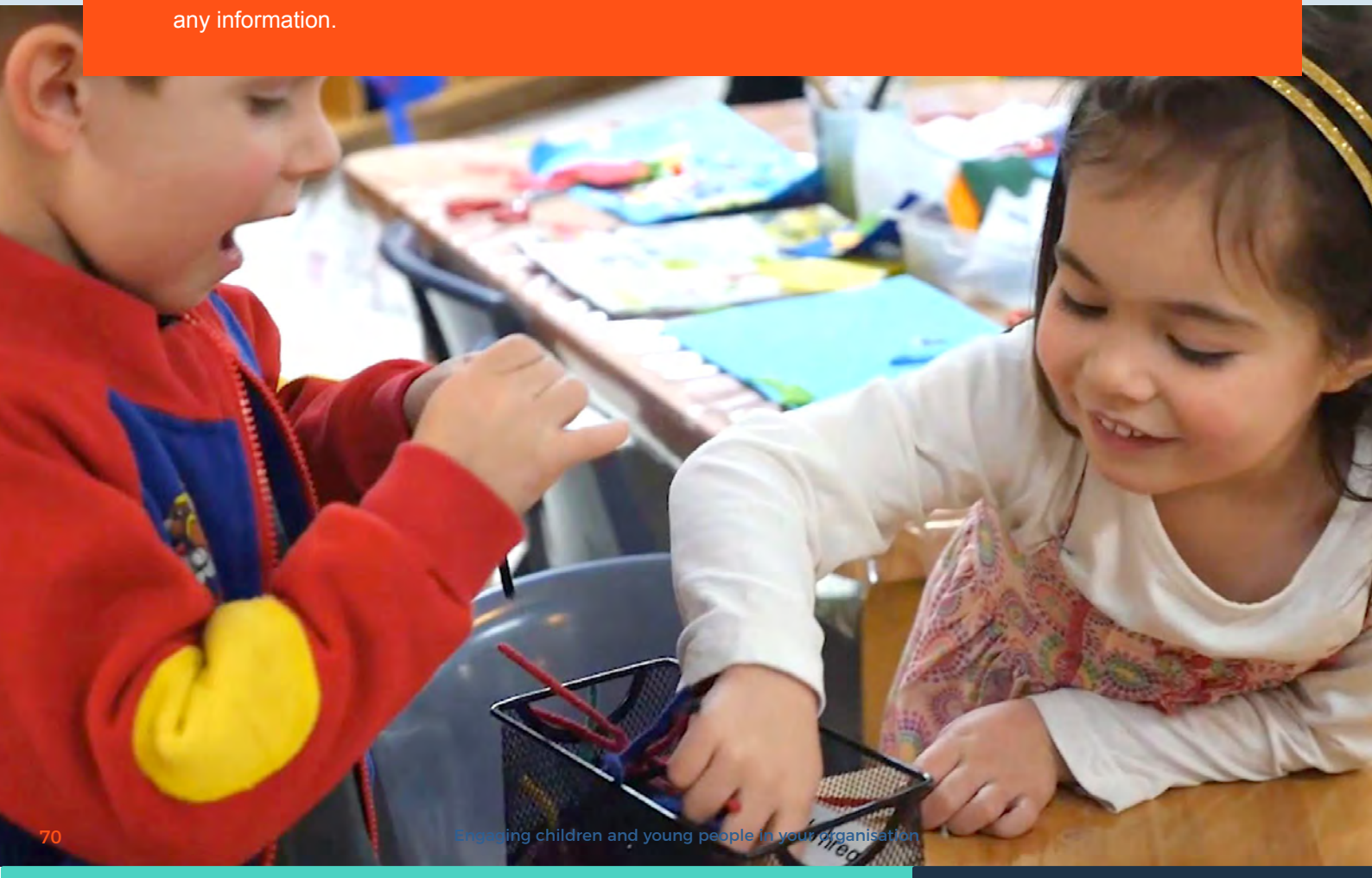
Through the consent forms the children agreed to being documented in written, audio and video formats. However, as the project was conducted over an extended period of time, project staff made sure to request the children's consent again prior to the release of any information.

Each time the staff would video record the children's sessions, the children's verbal consent was again sought. On some occasions, the children did not wish to be recorded and so the camera was put away.

At every new stage of the project, and each time it changed direction, parents were asked again for written consent for their child to participate and the children were asked for verbal consent.

Some of the children who participated were in out-of-home-care, which raised additional consent issues. Written consent was obtained from these children and their foster parents. Family and Community Services had additional requirements that needed to be met. For example, children in care:

- were allowed to be photographed but only their first names used
- were not allowed to be identified as being in care, and
- could not appear in any media reports.





What to include in information sheets and consent forms



Information sheets for parents or carers

These should be a one or two page summary of the project, and include what will be involved if parents or carers give consent for their child to take part. The information should include:

- ✓ the exact nature of the project, including its purpose and who is conducting it
- ✓ the project aim and objectives
- ✓ what the child or young person is required to do, including time commitments and methods used
- ✓ that participation is voluntary – they can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time – even when consent has been provided by an adult
- ✓ privacy, anonymity and confidentiality protection and limitations
- ✓ any potential risks and anticipated benefits from participating
- ✓ how information will be collected, used and stored
- ✓ how the project findings will be disseminated, including back to the children and young people themselves
- ✓ what the parent or carer needs to do to give consent
- ✓ contact details for further information.

You should also include contact details of a caseworker or counsellor if there is any possibility that the information discussed during the project could be distressing to children and young people.



Consent form for parents or carers

The accompanying parent/carer consent form should include:

- ✓ the name of the adult and child/young person
- ✓ an outline of the key aspects of the project as specified in the information sheet
- ✓ a signature as evidence that the adult has read and understood the information about the project and what is involved, and gives consent for their child to take part
- ✓ a space for the parent or guardian to add their contact details in case you need to contact them in the future
- ✓ the date your organisation needs the form returned by.



Information sheet for children and young people

According to the principal of informed consent, an information sheet should be prepared for children and young people too. However, it will need to be presented in different ways depending on their age, competencies and circumstances.

In general, the information sheet for children and young people should also be a one or two page summary of the project and what their participation will involve. It should contain the same information as the one for parents or carers but should be worded and presented in a child-friendly format.





Consent form for children and young people

The consent form should also include the same information as the form for adults but should use appropriate language for the age of the child or young person and be presented in a child-friendly format. For example, with young children it may be appropriate to include a series of statements with checkboxes that the child can tick once they understand the information.



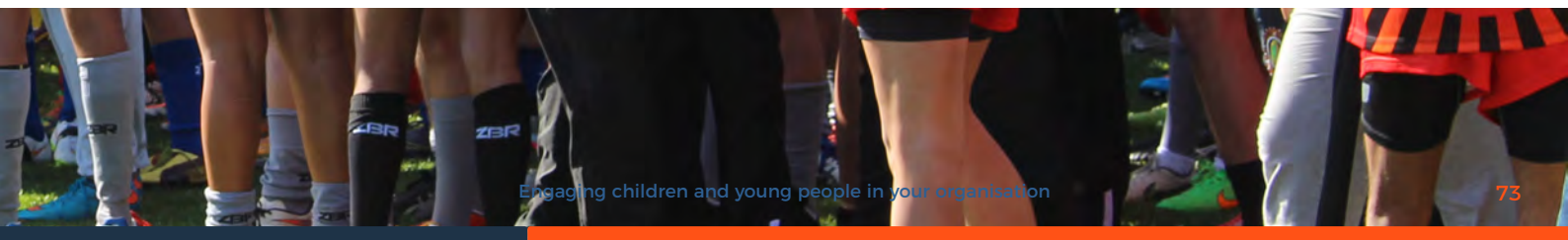
Video/audio recordings

Consent for video/audio recordings and/or photography of children and young people should be included in the information sheets and consent forms for the parents or carers and for the children and young people. They should also include:

- ✓ what the recordings will be used for
- ✓ how long they will be used
- ✓ who will have access to them
- ✓ what will happen to the originals
- ✓ when they will be destroyed.

Separate, signed consent forms should be obtained for video/audio recordings and photography.

There are some reasons why children and young people may not be able to have their photo taken or be video-recorded even if they provide their consent. For example, there are rules relating to publishing photos of children in out-of-home care. Be sure to familiarise yourself with the relevant laws in your State or Territory.





Obtaining consent when working with socially excluded children and young people

There are additional rules and procedures you need to research and consider if seeking the participation of specific groups of children and young people.

For example, Juvenile Justice Centres in each State and Territory will have their own rules regarding when parental consent for consultation is needed. The NSW Department of Juvenile Justice does not permit video-recordings or photography of children and young people.

There are also specific procedures around consent when seeking the participation of children and young people in out-of-home care. In the first instance, the child or young person's caseworker

should be consulted to determine whether consent from the person with parental responsibility is required. In NSW, for example, consent is required from the person with parental responsibility for a child in out-of-home care, if the public appearance of the child will result in the disclosure of the child's out-of-home care status and identity.

Special consideration also needs to be given when preparing information sheets and consent forms for certain groups of children and young people. For example, children and young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may require the use of interpreting and translating services.

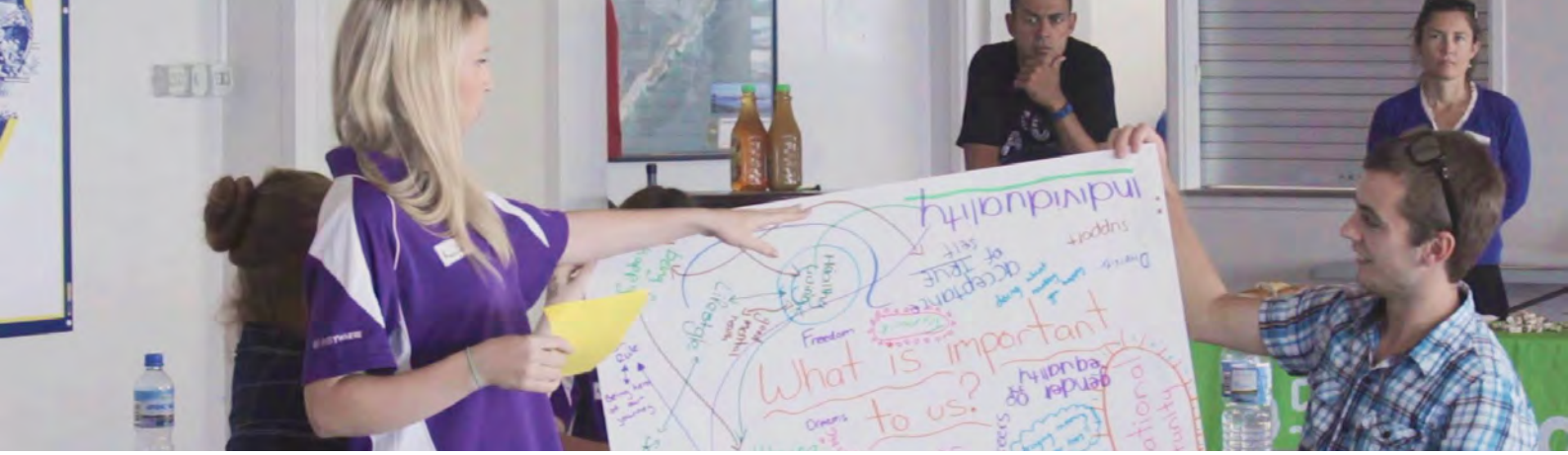
checklist

- Have you obtained consent of children and young people?
- Do you need to obtain parental consent in addition to the consent of the children and young people themselves?
- If obtaining parental consent, will you use active or passive consent procedures?
- Have you included all the necessary information in the information sheets and consent forms?
- Are the information sheets and consent forms for children and young people written in a way that is appropriate for their age, competencies and circumstances?
- Have you made it clear that children and young people can refuse to participate or withdraw their consent to participate at any time?
- If photos, video, or audio recordings are to be taken of children and young people, have you obtained separate written consent from both the children and young people and their parents or carers?
- If you are seeking the participation of particular groups of children and young people, have you consulted the relevant guidelines and rules relating to these groups of children and young people?
- Have you arranged for psychosocial support to be available to children and young people during and after their participation, should anything that arises cause them to feel distressed?



For further consideration:

- How will we ensure children and young people understand what consent is?
- How will we ensure children and young people understand that they are able to withdraw consent at any time?



evaluating the participation process

In this section:

- **What is evaluation?**
- **Types of evaluation**
- **Methods of evaluation**
- **Stages of the evaluation process**
- **Links to evaluation resources**



Introduction

An evaluation measures the extent to which the project has successfully achieved its goals and objectives. It also seeks to find out how the process was for children and young people, whether they were satisfied with their participation and what impact it has had on them.



What is evaluation?

Evaluation is the regular and routine process of collecting, analysing and reviewing information on the results and outcomes of a project or parts of a project. This information is then used to determine whether a project or objective has achieved what it set out to achieve (Oaktree & Australian Council for International Development, 2016).

Evaluation is also about finding out why something worked or didn't work, and identifying anything unexpected that helped it work or caused a problem. Evaluation is not just about demonstrating success, but also about identifying and learning from mistakes to improve in the future.

It is often helpful to begin evaluating a project from the beginning rather than leaving it until the end. This helps everyone to be clear about what information to collect in order to know if the project is meeting its aims. It is useful to see evaluation as an ongoing process, rather than just an 'event', that should take place for every stage of a project.



Types of evaluation

Formative evaluation

Formative evaluation checks the progress of the project as it unfolds. This type of evaluation allows for continuous improvement of the project design.

Keep the following in mind when creating a formative evaluation:

- ✓ are the project aims being met?
- ✓ are the timelines and resources adequate?
- ✓ are we using an appropriate consultation method?
- ✓ have we targeted the relevant children and young people?
- ✓ are children and young people receiving adequate support?
- ✓ are children and young people getting an equal opportunity to take part?
- ✓ are children and young people enjoying the experience?
- ✓ are children and young people engaging with the process?
- ✓ are there any problems or barriers evident?
- ✓ how can these problems or barriers be overcome?

Both the project staff and participants can answer these questions.



Summative evaluation

Summative evaluation judges the merits and effectiveness of a project at the end of the project activities. The focus is on the outcome.

The following are examples of questions for project staff:

- what were the project aims and was a clear consultation process developed?
- was there enough time and adequate resources to undertake the project?
- was the consultation a positive experience for the children and young people?
- were children and young people engaged in the process?
- were the project aims and objectives met?
- how were the results reported?
- were participants informed about the results?
- how could the project be improved in the future?



The following are examples of questions for participants during a summative evaluation:

- how did you hear about the project?
- were you involved in planning the project? If so, was it an effective process? Why or why not?
- did you understand the purpose of the project and their participation?
- did you enjoy being involved in the project? Why or why not?
- did you feel they had the opportunity to voice their opinions? Why or why not?
- were you interested in what the project was about? Why or why not?
- were there unraised issues that you would have liked to discuss?
- did you learn anything new or develop new skills by being involved?
- were you satisfied with how their contribution was acknowledged?
- do you know how the information from the project was used?
- were you told what the project outcomes were?
- how could the project be improved in the future?
- would you take part in other similar projects?

It is ideal to do both formative and summative evaluations of a project. If you wait until the end of a project to evaluate, you may find that something that didn't work could have been changed at an earlier point.



Methods of evaluation



Quantitative evaluation

Quantitative evaluation involves counting things, such as how many children and young people attended a consultation. It answers questions like: Who? How many? How often?

Surveys are the most common quantitative research method. They can be paper based, online, face-to-face or over the telephone.

The benefit of quantitative evaluation is that you can reach large numbers of respondents with questionnaires. It can, however, limit the collection of detailed information about people's individual views or feelings about something, or how they experienced something.



Qualitative evaluation

Qualitative evaluation gathers descriptive information. It focuses on feelings, experiences and behaviour change. It answers questions such as: Why? What happened? What difference did it make? Have you noticed any changes?

Qualitative evaluation allows you to establish context and detailed understanding of why and how changes have taken place, who has been affected and how those people feel about it.

Interviews, focus groups, observations and open-ended feedback questionnaires are examples of qualitative evaluation methods.

The benefit of qualitative evaluation is that it allows individuals to express themselves freely, allowing for the collection of more in-depth and quality information. The limitation of this method is that it requires more time to collect and analyse the information than quantitative methods.



Mixed methods

Given the strengths and weaknesses of quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods, it is often useful to adopt a mixed-methods approach to any evaluation. For example, you may like to start with a quantitative questionnaire and use the results to inform further evaluation into areas of interest using qualitative methods.

Stages of the evaluation process



Planning and design

1. Use your project aims to set some targets (both quantitative and qualitative) to measure whether your aims were achieved.
2. Decide on which methods you will use to evaluate (e.g. surveys, interviews, observations, focus groups). Remember, it is often most effective to use these methods in combination.
3. Decide when you will collect information. Will you collect it regularly (monitoring), or will there be a one-off collection at the end of the project?
4. Decide who you will collect information from. If it is not possible to collect information from everyone who took part, decide how you will select your sample of participants.
5. Decide how the children and young people can be involved in the evaluation.



Data collection and analysis

If you choose to collect information regularly, keep a chart of what kind of information is collected and what it can be used for. Make sure that at least some of the information collected involves children and young people giving their views and opinions.

Part of your evaluation may involve analysing data collected from questionnaires using statistics. Or you may need to read through interview transcripts and search for key themes, issues or ideas.



Interpretation

After data analysis is complete, you will need to review the information you have collected and think about what it is telling you. This will involve looking at the evaluation findings together with the original project aims. You may also want to discuss the evaluation findings with the children and young people who took part.

You should also use your evaluation findings to consider what changes you would make to any future project plans.



Reporting

You may wish to share your evaluation findings with a range of people, such as key stakeholders, project funders and organisational staff. You should also give feedback to the children and young people and adults who participated in the project and its evaluation. This will show that you value their time and input.

You may need to report your findings differently for different audiences. Some may require a formal report; others may prefer a visual presentation. You should try to think of creative and fun ways to tell children and young people about the findings, for example, a collage or video.

checklist

- How will children and young people be involved in your evaluation?
- Will you use an external agency to conduct your evaluation?
- What type of evaluation will you conduct? Will it be formative, summative or a combination of both?
- What methods will you use to evaluate your project? Quantitative, qualitative or a combination of both?
- Have you planned how the evaluation will be conducted? Who will you collect information from? Will children and young people be involved?
- What questions will you ask participants? If you are only collecting information from a sample of participants, how will you choose the sample?
- Have you decided how you will analyse the information or data that you collect?
- Once you analyse the data, have you reflected on your findings in light of your original project aims?
- Have you used your evaluation findings to think about what changes you might make to future projects?
- Who will you report your evaluation findings to?
- How will you report your evaluation findings? Will you do this differently for different audiences?
- Have you reported your evaluation findings?



For further consideration:

- What do we imagine might change as a result of involving children and young people in our decision making?
- How will the children and young people hear about the changes that occur as a result of their participation?





where to get further information

In this section:

- **Consultation and participation resources**
- **References**

Consultation and participation resources

Australian

Carter, J., Pitt, J. and Birac, P. (2010). *DIY Reality: Recipes to transform and inspire*. Sydney: Youth Action & Policy Association NSW.

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