

Better Together

A practical guide to
effective engagement
with young people



youth affairs council
OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA



Government of
South Australia

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Message from the Minister

Democracy is not dull or passive; it is lively and robust. Active democracy is a dynamic and fluid process of collaboration between the community and government.

Youth engagement goes beyond giving young people a voice. Youth engagement is about ensuring young people are valued and that their contribution is respected, considered and acted upon. Meaningful youth engagement is a partnership where together, we build a genuine sense of ownership of decision-making and vision sharing.

In February 2015, I launched It Starts with YOUth, a new strategy for young people in South Australia. One of the key strategic elements of It Starts with YOUth was the investment in the development of a new model of youth engagement.

Underpinned by the South Australian Government's *Better Together* Principles of Engagement, the youth sector; government; and young people worked collaboratively to develop *Better Together: A Practical Guide to Effective Engagement with Young People*.

I am pleased to support *Better Together: A Practical Guide to Effective Engagement with Young People*. The principles contained herein demonstrate that successful and effective engagement with young people is a partnership of mutual respect and participation.

I look forward to continuing our partnership with you.

Hon Zoe Bettison MP
Minister for Youth

1 Introduction

Welcome to *Better Together: A practical guide to effective engagement with young people*. This guide has been developed through a partnership between the Department for Communities and Social Inclusion (DCSI), the Department of the Premier and Cabinet (DPC) and the Youth Affairs Council of South Australia (YACSA).

This resource has been developed as a starting point for engagement with young people in decision making processes and includes practical tools and tips to plan and undertake successful consultations and engagement activities.

The guide is underpinned and reinforced by our collective belief that engaging young people in the decisions that affect them results in better decision making and better outcomes for young people and for South Australia.

Policy context

Better Together, the South Australian Government's community engagement initiative, underpins this youth engagement resource. *Better Together* provides government, non-government organisations, the private sector, community and other stakeholders with a framework to encourage greater engagement with young people in the work of government.

This resource is consistent with, and complements existing initiatives within the *Better Together* program. This resource will provide government with innovative tools to better engage with young people across the state.

How young people contributed to this resource

Capturing the voice of young people was integral to the development of this resource. YACSA consulted with 174 young people from across the state asking young people how they would like government to engage with them. The consultation comprised of a 12 question online and hard copy survey and three focus groups. Over 50 per cent of participants were from regional and remote locations and young people participated from as far West as Nundoorra (160 kilometres west of Ceduna) to Mount Gambier in South Australia's South East. Young people responded to the survey from all three South Australian peninsulas as well as Kangaroo Island.

Before you get started!

Young people in context

We often talk about ‘young people’ and ‘adults’ as polarised opposites. But it is important to remember that when we describe ‘young people’ in this resource, we are describing people aged 12 to 25 years of age. This means that those who are 18 to 25 are legal adults themselves but still face many of the same challenges, barriers and issues of those under 18. Therefore, your engagement process must be cognisant of the different age groups you will be working with and the differing needs of this cohort.

Child Safe Environments

Importantly, if you are engaging with young people under 18 years of age then your engagement must comply with South Australian legislation. The Children’s Protection Act (1993) is the legislative instrument for the provision of care and protection for children and young people in South Australia. In South Australia, all individuals and organisations must comply with this legislation. For a copy of the Act and the Regulations please visit www.legislation.sa.gov.au

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What is youth engagement and why is it important?

Better Together describes engagement as a process that “helps to develop strong communities and stakeholders; it gives them the confidence to participate and develops their interest in being part of the solution. This, in turn, can build the cohesiveness and capacity of the community”.

Building on this, youth engagement means ensuring young people are continuously involved in the structure and decision making processes of government. This engagement can occur in a variety of ways, and be informal or formal. To be effective, engagement should be continuous, representative and meaningful. Engaging with young people means that policy decisions, programs and services delivered to them are appropriate, relevant, supported and responsive to the needs of young people.

The principles of engagement

To ensure engagement with young people is consistent, meaningful and effective, the *Better Together* principles should be considered and form the basis of an engagement process. The principles are:



These principles are a foundation of this document and are reflected in processes, hints and tips for successful and meaningful engagement.

The right to participate

In Australian society, young people have a right to participate in and contribute to the decisions that affect them. These rights are enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNROC) (Article 12 & 13). The UNCROC makes clear that all young people are independent subjects and therefore, have rights.

Why engagement is important

Young people are best placed to suggest solutions to government about the issues that affect them and their communities. Young people have a range of experiences, thoughts, ideas and perspectives that can enrich decision making processes and lead to more relevant and whole of community decisions, projects, policies, programs, use of resources and outcomes.



“I am really enthusiastic about the idea of community consultation and am an avid supporter of citizen engagement as I believe it can have significant contributions to good public policy practices”.

Dale, 20, St Marys



The benefits of engaging with young people

There is a wealth of benefits for both young people and decision makers when young people are engaged in decision making processes. Young people are the experts in their own lives and provide unique perspectives. Meaningful engagement of young people by government may provide decision makers with information, ideas, and solutions to issues, initiatives, policies, and programs that they may not have even considered.

Benefits for young people	Benefits for government
Provides a way in which young people can feel valued by their community.	Appropriately informs decision making that takes into account all citizens.
Provides a way in which young people can express their needs and ideas.	Increases the quality of services and policy decisions impacting young people as they are informed by the needs and feedback of young people.
Increases the confidence of young people to participate in their communities and in decision making processes.	Encourages inclusive, informed and evidence-based work practice.
Increases the knowledge of young people of government and non-government processes and the ways in which they can influence the decision making processes that impact on them.	Builds trust and transparency and encourages greater involvement and participation from young people

Engaging young people will increase the quality and appropriateness of service delivery, events and activities and policy development. In short, engaging young people means programs, services and policy development will be more relevant, appropriate, and responsive to their needs.

A partnership approach

In order to undertake a successful and meaningful engagement process with young people it is vital that government takes a 'partnership approach'.

When we take a partnership approach to working with young people it means treating them as equal stakeholders, working with them and along-side of them, and valuing their knowledge, experience, expertise and input.

A partnership approach encourages young people to gain a sense of ownership in the process and feel empowered and motivated to engage with government in the future.



3 Types of engagement

There is more than one way to engage!

Young people are not one neat homogenous group. Like adults, young people come from different backgrounds, have different interests and like to communicate and engage in different ways. The ways in which government may engage with one group of young people may not necessarily work with another. This is why it is important that engagement is not simply offered in one format and that a suite of mechanisms and processes is employed to reach as many young people as possible.

No one engagement process is more effective or valuable than another. Engagement approaches should be considered with respect to audience and the information sought from participants.

Tools for youth engagement

There are a range of methods of engagement that can be employed to encourage young people to participate fully. These methods vary in representativeness; costs and time frames needed and levels of real participation. A description of a range of tools most suited for youth engagement is presented in the appendices.



“I think that many young people need the opportunity to feel as if they are a needed part of a community, holding meetings and other events where we can talk to the government could make this happen.”

Josh, 17, Port Lincoln

4 What helps and what gets in the way?

Tips for successful engagement with young people

Be clear	Success is likely when activities have a clear purpose, are things that matter to young people (not just 'youth specific'), are what young people want to do, and is something they believe in.
Be genuine	Ensure that you are engaging with young people for the right reasons and at the heart of your engagement is a partnership approach and an adherence to the values and contributions of young people.
Be meaningful	The content of the consultation should be something that matters to young people, something they can believe in and a process that they can actually influence and see an outcome from.
Provide young people with skills	Ensuring young people have the skills to undertake the activity or will be trained in the required skills is crucial; otherwise they may feel overwhelmed and disconnected.
Relationships	Developing good relationships between young people and adults is vital and there should be opportunities to get to know each other in both formal and informal ways. Factor in time for a bit of fun too.
Resources	Any engagement should have the resources required to complete the activity; this includes financial resources, people, and in kind support. Young people are more likely to participate if they are not out of pocket and have access to transport, child care, etc. You will also need to factor in training and meeting costs.
Timing and Location	To ensure young people participate in the engagement process the location of the (physical) engagement is crucial. While some consultations will work better in school hours it might also be necessary to undertake the engagement after hours or on the weekend.
Accessibility	Ensure that for physical engagement (such as workshops, focus groups and forums) that the venue is accessible to young people. The venue should be close to public transport and be wheelchair accessible.
Out-of-pocket expenses	If possible, ensure young people are reimbursed for any out-of-pocket expenses to attend engagement processes. Some young people may have either a low income or no income and may only be able to engage if suitably compensated. Consider offering an honorarium to participants to cover expenses.

Be accountable

Ensure that you keep participants informed about the process including what happens subsequent to the engagement. Young people will be more likely to engage in the future if they know that their contribution has made a difference and led to tangible change.

Be supportive

Lack of support can lead to a lack of connection to the activity, this can occur at different levels – if young people are not supported as individuals and members of the group they will be less likely to connect to the activity or spend time investing in follow-up activities. If young people are not supported to undertake activities they may not be enabled to participate. It is also important to support facilitators to undertake youth engagement activities, to ensure activities are appropriate and successful.

Language

Avoid jargon and acronyms (unless you provide a list of what they mean). Good communication includes checking that you understand and that you have been understood by your participants.

Assumptions

Assumptions can have a negative impact on participation and on the relationships within it. It is best to avoid making assumptions about how much time young people have to commit or that they are heterosexual or have a mum and a dad or live with their parents. They may be caring for adults or siblings or have their own children or be working three jobs and attending TAFE part time. It is better to get to know young people and find out who they are and what's important to them.

Adults taking over

Support and welcome the initiatives and contributions of young people. Accept that mistakes might be made and engagement may bring mixed results. We need to ensure that to inspire leadership, ownership and participation by young people; we support, train, and assist them to understand the process, their level of influence and their responsibilities. If this is not in place the process may lead to frustration, confusion, possible failure, and humiliation.

Adultism

Adultism is prejudice and discrimination against someone simply because they are young. Society often paints children and young people as 'adults in the making' and that they are somehow less capable, less intelligent, less insightful, less valuable and less able to participate in decisions that impact upon them. Recognising and valuing the contributions of young people as members of our community is integral in developing respectful and insightful engagement with young people.



"If a young person or group of young people put forward an idea or proposal, it would be a lot more encouraging to hear back from the government about what was done with it, if anything was acted upon or wasn't for a particular reason. Any feedback would be great"

Emma, 18, Woodcroft

5 How do we know if we are doing it right?

Models of youth engagement

So how do we ensure the way in which we have chosen to engage with young people is appropriate and meaningful? Best practice models of engagement are a handy way to check if the consultation you have planned is meaningful and values your intended participants.

IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum

The International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) is a widely utilised model that provides a framework on how government can effectively engage the community in decision-making processes. The model is presented as a ‘spectrum’ designed to assist the user in identifying and selecting the level of engagement based upon the role of the community in your engagement process.

More importantly, the IAP2 Spectrum sets out the commitment by government to the public at each level of the spectrum and assists in transparency and accountability.

INCREASING IMPACT ON THE DECISION 					
	INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION GOAL	To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision-making in the hands of the public.
PROMISE TO THE PUBLIC	We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision. We will seek your feedback on drafts & proposals.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will work together with you to formulate solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.

Source: developed from the Foundations of Public Participation, International Association for Public Participation Australasia.

Before you begin, select which level on the IAP2 Spectrum you would like your engagement to fulfil. This enables you to be very clear to the public and stakeholders about the level of influence they will have over the process and what objectives you wish to achieve. Then, based upon the level you have selected, choose the engagement tools that will be most appropriate to engage with the community at that level.

Importantly, time, resources and other pressures may limit your ability to undertake a deep level of engagement in every engagement initiative and this will influence the level of influence that the public and stakeholders will have over the process and the decision. However, despite these pressures you should always be able to reach 'Inform' on the spectrum.

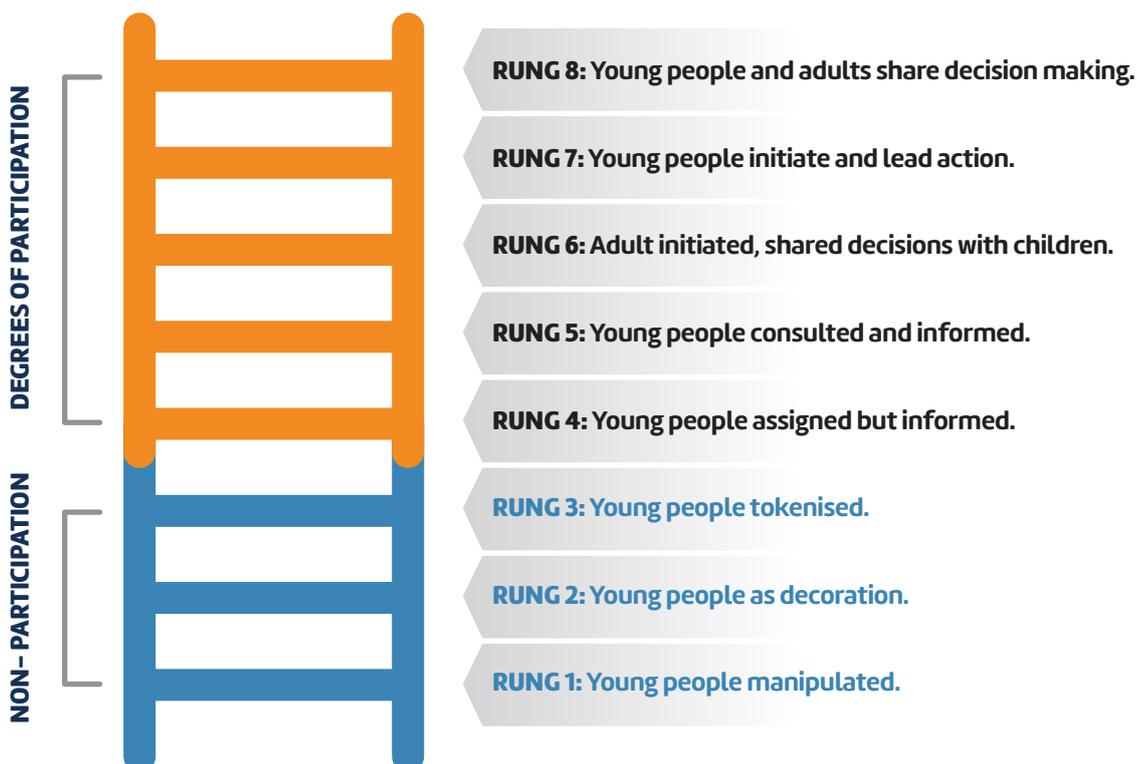
The ways in which the IAP2 Spectrum guides effective engagement and forms the foundation of *Better Together* can be found online at www.bettertogether.sa.gov.au

Hart's Ladder

While the IAP2 Spectrum is an important tool to define the role of the broader public in engagement processes, Hart's Ladder further focuses our attention on the levels of influence for young people participating in engagement processes.

Hart's Ladder is a model that sets out the various ways in which you can engage with audiences ordered by the levels (or rungs) of real participation. Hart borrowed the ladder from Sherry Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation (1969) which provided some clarity to the debate about how the economically disadvantaged, who were excluded from political and economic processes, could be deliberately included. In short, it provided a discourse on the redistribution of power and social reform in a democratic political system.

Hart is explicit about youth participation being a fundamental right of citizenship. In his report, Hart said, 'to struggle against discrimination and repression and to fight for equal rights in solidarity with other [young people] is itself a fundamental democratic right.'



Hart's degrees of participation definitions

- 8** **Young people initiated shared decisions with adults** is when young people develop initiatives and invite adults to be involved in decision making to share their skills and experience.
- 7** **Young people initiated and directed** is when young people develop and implement an activity or initiative without adults taking a directive role.
- 6** **Adult initiated shared decisions with young people** is when adults have the initial idea but young people are involved in every step of the planning and implementation. Their views are not only considered but they are also involved in making decisions.
- 5** **Consulted and informed** is when a project is designed and run by adults but young people understand the process and their opinions are treated seriously.
- 4** **Assigned but informed** is when young people understand the intentions of the project, know who made the decisions about their involvement and why, have a meaningful role and volunteer for the project after the scope and purpose of the project has been made clear to them.
- 3** **Tokenism** describes instances where young people are apparently given a voice but have little or no choice about the subject or the style of communicating it and little or no opportunity to formulate their own opinions.
- 2** **Decoration** is when young people are used to 'perform' at an adult event related to an issue that they have little or no idea about – it's different from manipulation because the adults don't pretend that the cause is inspired by young people.
- 1** **Manipulation** is present when young people do or say what adults suggest they do, but have no real understanding of the issues. Or young people are asked what they think and adults use some of the ideas but do not tell them what influence they have on the final decision.

Models of engagement provide a framework with which to focus your initiative, decide on the level of participation that young people will have in the decision-making process and what commitments government will make to the young people who participate in decision making processes.



"We want to know that we are actually going to be listened to and we aren't there just to tick a box".

Leah, 17, Brooklyn Park

6 Tips for engaging with young people from diverse backgrounds

How do you engage with young people from diverse backgrounds?

Crucially, there is no 'one size fits all' engagement tool that will work with all young people. Like adults, young people come from a variety of backgrounds, have a variety of interests and engage and interact with their communities in different ways. As such, one form of engagement may attract the interest of some young people whilst others may need to be targeted using different engagement tools.

Working with young people from diverse backgrounds is often different to the general population and may involve an acknowledgement and adherence to sensitivities, both cultural and historical, and may require the involvement of families, representatives and communities as part of decision making. For example, approach and support from cultural 'elders' may need to be part of engagement practices for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations and part of your engagement timeline may need to be building trust with in the community of interest. Similarly, people with a disability or those that are same sex attracted, gender diverse or gender fluid may face specific barriers engaging in consultations. For best practice advice on engaging with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex or Queer (LGBTIQ) people from all walks of life see the DCSI resource 'Including You'.

Potential barriers to engaging with young people from diverse backgrounds

Barriers to young people from diverse backgrounds engaging with government can include:

- An historical distrust of government
- Limited literacy skills or knowledge of English
- Suspicion of the motives of the organisers
- Limited knowledge of Australia's political and decision making structures
- Difficulty getting parental permission to participate
- Fear of being 'outed' to their parents, peers or community
- Avoidance of potential discrimination such as racism and homophobia.

Tips for breaking down potential barriers to engagement

In order to reach greater numbers of young people from diverse backgrounds, considerations should include the following:

- Use of multiple forms of communication (in a variety of languages) to reach the widest possible audience. This could include culturally specific radio, television, social media, local and state newspapers and through promotion to community groups, cultural spaces and organisations frequented by young people and those that deliver services to young people of diverse backgrounds.
- Consider the use of interpreters in the lead up to the process and while the engagement is undertaken.
- Use inclusive and appropriate language for your target group.
- Engagement should be culturally sensitive, flexible and be delivered in a variety of ways that are tailored to the cultural and other social circumstances of young people from diverse backgrounds.
- Integrate into your engagement the mediums that young people value, such as online tools and music or videos and don't forget creativity and 'doing' opportunities.

Refer also to the tips contained in section 4 (What helps and what gets in the way?), such as ensuring you are clear and focused with your engagement, be genuine, build trust, be transparent and be accountable. Ensure participants are well informed and follow up with progress on the process.



“What worked in the consultation that I participated in is that young people from different backgrounds were able to come together and share their ideas”.

Adam, 19, Hindmarsh



7 Checklist to ensure your engagement align's with best practice

There are some simple things you can do to make sure that your engagement with young people is successful and follows best practice. The following checklist includes the *Better Together* Principles as well as a range of best practice elements and considerations.

Checklist

		TICK
Better Together Principles	1: We know why we are engaging	<input type="checkbox"/>
	2: We know who to engage	<input type="checkbox"/>
	3: We know the history	<input type="checkbox"/>
	4: We start together	<input type="checkbox"/>
	5: We are genuine	<input type="checkbox"/>
	6: We are creative and engaging	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other best practice elements & considerations

Resourcing	Are your activities adequately resourced with sufficient time, space, funding, information, etc.? (include this during your budget processes).	<input type="checkbox"/>
Informed choice, ownership, relevance and influence	Have young people influenced the form, structure and process of the engagement and the outcomes that should be achieved?	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Have young people been adequately informed about the process and their role and do they have the ability to decline involvement?	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Does the engagement address issues and topics relevant to and of interest to young people?	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Do activities provide young people with a sense of belonging and ownership?	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Do young people clearly know what will happen with their contribution/input?	<input type="checkbox"/>

		TICK
Education, development & support	Do activities raise participant's awareness of social, political, economic, cultural and personal aspects of the issues affecting them?	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Do activities provide young people with opportunities for informal and formal development of skills?	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Will young people receive necessary support to promote success and to handle failures?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Respect, value and recognition	Do young people feel valued and their contributions respected by government?	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Will young people be offered tangible roles and real opportunities to contribute that are not tokenistic in nature?	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Is your engagement process sensitive to the inherent difference in experience, status, power, control, knowledge of resources and language?	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Have you considered the issues of confidentiality and anonymity (where applicable)?	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Have you presumed what young people can or cannot do or what they do and do not know already or understand?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Goal setting, process, relationships and accountability	Have young people had the opportunity to identify and define challenges, exploring options and alternative strategies?	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Have you included mechanisms for monitoring, accountability and feedback for activities?	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Do your activities provide opportunities for building active and supportive working relationships between young people and other members of the community?	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Do your activities include ongoing critical analysis of experiences, actions taken and outcomes?	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Have you been clear about the expectations you have and the expectations that the young people can have as well, including time frames and continuity?	<input type="checkbox"/>
Access and diversity	Have you considered that young people are not a homogenous group and that more than one engagement tool is likely to be needed to capture the broad views of young people?	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Have you considered other options for participation that are sensitive to differing value systems, availability, commitments, language, skills, culture, financial resources, access to transport, etc.?	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Have you considered mechanisms to address any issues of power balance between individuals or groups within your audience?	<input type="checkbox"/>

8

Scenarios

Exploring scenarios help us to demonstrate best practice and understand experience from the perspective of others. The following scenarios were developed with young people and are representative of real world experiences of community engagement processes and events. The positive and negative aspects of the engagement process have been examined and suggestions have been offered by young people to inform what government can do to ensure meaningful youth engagement opportunities in the future.

Scenario 1

I got an invitation through the mail at my parents' house for a community forum by our local MP. He wanted to know what we thought about an upgrade to a road that could affect business and houses in the local area. I'm interested in what might happen with this road as I live on that road and it is where I catch the bus for school.

The forum was set for a week after we received the flyer. The forum was held in an unfamiliar hall that I had trouble finding, and had to catch two buses just to get there. I was also only one of about five or six young people present.

The MP attended the forum and gave a speech about how the road upgrade would help business and traffic flow and would assist in safety with pedestrian barriers and crossings. Many people were angry about how they would manage the noise, dust and access to business and houses during construction. After the speeches, people were able to ask questions by raising their hands. I was a little put-off and felt that the facilitator prioritised the adult's voices over young people and didn't ensure that everyone had the opportunity to say something.

The forum lasted for about an hour and a half and after the question and answer session we were all thanked for our time and the forum was over. I left frustrated that I was not able to get my point across, especially as I had given up a shift at work to attend. I wished that the organisers had been aware that the loudest voices were the only ones that were heard. I don't think I will attend another forum like this.

What worked?

Venue being local - The venue was in my local area, albeit it was hard to find.

Timing - The forum was held on a weekday after school hours so I was able to attend.

What would make it better next time?

Advanced notice about the event - at least two weeks. A venue that is easy to find and accessible by young people, including making sure that venue is on a public transport route.

Organised activities or groups to talk about the issues - including small group work would have helped young people share their opinions.

Social media - Use social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc) as an opportunity for people to ask questions or provide feedback. There should be a number of methods to gather information.

Time to ask more questions - It would have been useful if the MP and his staff stayed after the event so people could approach him and ask questions/follow up conversations.

Follow up information - while the changes to the road went ahead, I didn't see any updates after the forum or any other ways to contribute. The MP should have made sure that everyone was able to participate in ways other than the forum and to be kept informed.

Scenario 2

I saw a post on Facebook advertising a forum on LGBTIQ health in South Australia. This is an issue that I am interested in and I wanted to contribute to. I was particularly interested as there would be a federal politician sitting on a discussion panel and there was also a representative who is young and active in the LGBTIQ space and in student politics at university.

The forum was split into two halves; presentations and information from the five panellists first up and then a workshop unpacking a list of priorities that the organisers had for activism work in the future. The forum was held on a Saturday and was in the beer garden of a pub just outside of the city.

The invitation to the forum that was posted on social media made it clear to me why I was going and what would happen on the day. I was looking forward to hearing from the federal senator and I had a lot of good ideas on how to make the health system more inclusive of the LGBTIQ community/ies.

The first part of the forum included the panel setting the scene and presenting information about the issues facing LGBTIQ people in the health system. This information really helped us with the workshop part later in the forum.

The second part of the forum was a workshop. There were five tables set up, each with a specific health issue and you could choose to sit at any table that interested you. A facilitator at each table helped discussions remain focussed, when required. Feedback and opinions were recorded by the table facilitator and fed back to the room as part of the reporting session at the end, this information also contributed to shaping the priorities for LGBTIQ health in SA.

What worked?

Utilising social media – It is useful to post invitations to forums and other consultations via sites such as Facebook and Twitter. It was also great to see photos and follow up on Facebook of the forum as a way to keep track of what happens next.

The forum was advertised well in advance - I was able to make sure that I didn't double book myself and it was on a Saturday so I could more easily attend around my work and study commitments.

Good facilitator - The forum worked for me as they had a good facilitator who was relaxed and easy to relate to. Although the forum ran over time, I didn't mind as the organisers and the crowd were happy to be flexible and devote more time to make sure they had heard from everyone and the final outcome is what the group wanted.

I felt like I was being listened to - We were able to voice our opinions and suggestions and these were taken into account and formed the basis of the priorities for the organisers. The fact that we were in small groups made it easier for everyone to say something and not just those with the loudest voices.

Ongoing contact - The organisers have kept us in the loop about what is happening next.

Catering - Food was provided so I was able to have my lunch while I was there.

What would make it better next time?

The opportunity to set the priorities. The issues that participants discussed at each table were already set and I felt that I couldn't influence what priorities were going to be endorsed by the group. It would have been better if some time had been allocated for the group to decide this together.

A more inclusive venue that was easily accessible via public transport- The forum was held at a pub in the Western suburbs, which may have stopped some young people from attending- especially those under the age of 18.

9 Engagement tools suitable for young people

Arts programs

COST = High TIME = High

Young people are given the opportunity to express themselves through art. This can include visual arts, writing, musical performances and dramatic performances etc. This can be undertaken individually or as part of a group collaboration.

Advantages

- Young people can feel free to express themselves artistically
- Can assist in engaging young people with language or literacy issues
- Can provide opportunities for skill or career development.

Disadvantages

- Substantial planning and resources needed.

Suggestions

- Can be effective when used with other means of engagement such as written explanations of the art and how it relates to the issues explored
- Young people can take charge of the process and assume a variety of roles.

Citizens' Juries

COST = High TIME = High

Citizens' Juries usually consist of a medium to large group of randomly selected citizens (over the age of 18) who come together over a pre-determined time frame to explore and develop recommendations for a particular issue.

Advantages

- Can allow a greater cross section of the population to engage in active decision making (not just the usual suspects).

Disadvantages

- Substantial planning and cost
- Whether participants can adequately represent the views of the whole community
- Young people under the age of 18 excluded from the process.

Suggestions

- Should not be used as the only method of consultation
- Young people under the age of 18 should be invited to participate.

Focus groups

COST = Medium TIME = Medium

A group of young people (small to medium) explore and respond to an issue in a structured and facilitated way.

Advantages

- Useful for a detailed analysis of a particular issue
- Can involve training and the use of peer facilitators
- Can trigger further discussion and group interaction.

Disadvantages

- May not be representative of all young people
- May not be a suitable forum for young people to discuss personal issues.

Suggestions

- Focus groups should be used as a part of a larger engagement process to analyse and comment on particular issues
- To increase representativeness, peak, community sector organisations and schools can run focus groups.

Forums

COST = High TIME = High

Often large groups of people come together to explore and share ideas about a topic or an issue. Forums are facilitated and usually involve the development of solutions and decisions.

Advantages	Disadvantages	Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can involve a large representative sample of young people • Allows young people the opportunity to interact with other young people and take part in group activities • Can develop the communication skills of young people • Can be empowering for young people if they are able to influence the forum's agenda and contribute to the outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not be a suitable forum for young people to discuss personal issues. • Forums may need substantial planning and resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure young people are adequately prepared to discuss the issues • Creative presentations can be part of the forum and inspire discussions.

Internet discussion/feedback page

COST = Medium TIME = Medium

Using an internet site as a medium to post a survey or ask for feedback or input on a topic or issue.

Advantages	Disadvantages	Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows for anonymity • Useful to include people who are geographically isolated • Can be completed at the convenience of the participant • Answers are more easily collated and analysed • Can be effective as an ongoing feedback mechanism for government. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is dependent on young people having internet access • May exclude young people with language or literacy issues • May not be representative of all young people • No group interaction or ability to talk or brainstorm ideas with other young people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should not be used as the only method of consultation

Interviews

COST = Medium TIME = High

Provides young people with the opportunity to have a face-to-face discussion regarding a particular topic or issue. The interview can be informal and unstructured or formal and structured.

Advantages	Disadvantages	Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can provide participants with opportunities to talk about issues that may be difficult in large groups • Can be a comfortable and relaxed process that inspires a rapport with the interviewer and participant. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not be representative of all young people • Can be intimidating to some young people who have little to no experience with being interviewed or have limited English skills. • No group interaction or ability to talk or brainstorm ideas with other young people • Unsuitable if a large sample is needed • Unsuitable if the participant or government has limited time or if the participant is isolated geographically. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should not be used as the only method of consultation • Interpreters can be used • Provide some skill development for the participant particularly if they have never been interviewed before.

SMS/text consultation

COST = Medium TIME = Low

Send out SMS's, usually by an automated system, to an existing list of mobile phone numbers asking for comment or feedback about an issue or question.

Advantages	Disadvantages	Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can target a large group of young people • Quick and easy to undertake. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people without mobile phones are excluded • May not be representative of all young people • Potential difficulties in gathering mobile phone numbers • There is no personal contact with young people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To ensure participation, obtain consent from young people to participate in the SMS consultation.

Surveys

COST = Low TIME = Low

Surveys are a formal process in which young people respond to a set list of questions. Surveys can be physical (on paper or by telephone) or electronic via an email link or posted on a website.

Advantages	Disadvantages	Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A useful and quick method of gaining the views of a large cross section of young people. • Can be physical or can be electronic • Can allow for anonymity • Useful to include people who are geographically isolated • Surveys can often be completed at the convenience of the participant • Answers are more easily collated and analysed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to determine the seriousness of responses • Literacy abilities and clarity of instructions will determine the quality and accuracy of responses • Those young people who are from CALD backgrounds or in the case of electronic surveys, may not find surveys accessible. • No group interaction or ability to talk or brainstorm ideas with other young people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure surveys are short • Ensure clarity of instructions and expectations • Ensure clarity of purpose.

Youth peer consultation

COST = High TIME = High

Involves young people consulting their peers through interviews, surveys and peer led focus groups.

Advantages	Disadvantages	Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can be useful to engage young people who feel more comfortable engaging with their peers • Can involve skill development such as communication skills, research, facilitation and interviewing skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time may be needed to train and support peer consultants. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer consultants can either be employed for the consultation or reimbursed in other ways (out of pocket expenses etc.).

Youth reference committee

COST = Medium TIME = Medium

A group of young people regularly meet to provide feedback and support to government and provides the views of young people directly into government policies and programs.

Advantages	Disadvantages	Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enables government to have an easy and ongoing access to a group of young people Can be a starting point for other engagement processes for government Effectively enables young people to provide direct feedback and input to government policies and programs on a regular basis A forum in which young people can develop skills, experience and confidence. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Requires time and resources to support the committee The formal committee approach may exclude some young people May not be representative of all young people. Can discourage participation from marginalised and diverse groups or those who may not have been involved with committees previously. Requires resources to support the group Requires a regular, ongoing commitment by young people to the committee (this may be difficult for participants with other commitments). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The group may be more effective and young people will feel greater ownership if they assist in establishing the group including the terms or reference and purpose Should not be used as the only method of engagement.

Vox pop

COST = Low TIME = Low

Approach people in public and ask them to speak briefly about an issue – can be recorded on audio or film equipment) or by telephone or electronic via an email link or posted on a website.

Advantages	Disadvantages	Suggestions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the potential to personally access large numbers of young people in a short amount of time Limited planning required. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited ability to follow up with young people unless they agree to forward contact details Limited scope for in-depth conversations/consultation May not be representative of all young people Equipment to document vox pops will usually be necessary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep questions short and clear Can be used as part of a larger consultation.

Sources: developed from the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition's 'Where are you going with that? Maximising Young People's Impact On Organisational & Public Policy', the Department for Education and Child Development's 'Involve Us' resource and the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria's 'Consulting young people about their ideas and opinions: a handbook for organisations working with young people'.

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Stakeholders working with young people in South Australia

Government agencies interested in undertaking a youth engagement activity have a number of options for accessing young people or organisations that can provide advice or support including those that may be contracted to plan, implement, and evaluate your engagement. The following list is not exhaustive but is a good starting point.

Peak Body

The Youth Affairs Council of South Australia (YACSA) Inc. is the peak body representing young people aged 12-25 and organisations and networks throughout the non-government youth sector.

YACSA has a broad membership and extensive experience in youth participation and sector knowledge who can put you in touch with an organisation or program that can help you. www.yacsa.com.au.

Young people

There are a number of ways to connect with young people through existing groups and activities. You may be able to consult directly, seek advice/input or recruit participants for your engagement activity or promote your planned activity or event. The following agencies or organisations are a good starting point.

Local Government

A number of local councils support Youth Advisory Committees or YACs. YACs vary in focus and the way they work but they meet regularly and may be interested in partnering, contributing to, or participating in an engagement activity. A list of South Australian councils is available at www.lga.sa.gov.au/councils. Youth programs and contacts can usually be located in the “community” section of council websites.

Universities

University student associations support a number of clubs and societies and are a good place to start if you wish to connect with students.

University of South Australia www.unisa.edu.au/Student-Life/USASA/

The University of Adelaide www.aau.org.au/

Flinders University <http://fusa.edu.au/>

Non-government organisations

Non-government organisations often support a youth advisory committee, reference group or leadership team. Groups of this type usually participate in service or policy development, implementation and evaluation and plan and host their own events and activities. Participants have access to formal and informal skill development, networking, and peer support through such groups and sometimes move into mentoring roles or paid positions within or outside the organisation or wider community.

A couple of good examples are:

HYPYA Youth Leadership Team

www.hypa.net.au/get-involved/hypa-youth-leadership-team

headspace Youth Reference Group

www.headspace.org.au/headspace-centres/adelaide/

Advice and support

Non-government organisations that deliver programs, undertake research or plan or support advocacy and campaigns with or on behalf of their client groups are also a good source of information, advice or support for your engagement activity. They have expertise working with specific populations and may provide assistance with your engagement activity.

For example:

CREATE Foundation is the national peak consumer body representing the voices of children and young people with an out-of-home care experience (including kinship care, foster care and residential care). www.create.org.au

JFA Purple Orange is a non-government, social profit organisation that conducts research and engages in dialogue with people with lived experience of disability to develop policy and practice.

www.purpleorange.org.au

Multicultural Youth SA (MYSA) is a community-based, not-for-profit organisation that provides a diverse range of services and programs to support multicultural young people and young families.

www.mysa.com.au

SHine is a leading not-for-profit provider of primary care services and education for sexual and relationship wellbeing. SHine provides services and advocates for gender diversity and sexual diversity.

www.shinesa.org.au/community-information/sexual-gender-diversity

YWCA is a not for profit organisation which engages an early intervention and primary prevention approach to its policy and program priorities of advancing women's leadership, preventing and eliminating violence against women, and promoting positive self-image. www.ywca.com.au

Government

The Office for Youth, within DCSI, supports all young people in SA to reach their potential by collaborating with all levels of Government and the youth sector to deliver programs; instigating collaborative policy solutions; and supporting the delivery of the Minister for Youth's priority action areas.

www.officeforyouth.sa.gov.au

Strategic Engagement and Communications, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, works to strengthen engagement between the government and the community.

www.bettertogether.sa.gov.au

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