

Citizen Me!



**Engaging children and young
people in your organisation**

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Commissioner's foreword

The participation of children and young people in decisions that affect them is a core principle of the NSW Commission for Children and Young People.

All people, including our younger citizens, have the right to express their views, especially when decisions are being made that directly affect their lives. Children benefit from participating in organisations they are involved in or served by, and organisations benefit from their participation.

Citizen Me! Engaging children and young people in your organisation aims to help you support children to have a say in ways that are good for them, and good for your organisation.

Those of us older than 18 have an important right that children do not: the right to vote. This right gives us a clear opportunity to have our say about what is important to us. All the more reason, then, to reinforce children's right to make their views known, and for those views to be taken seriously.

Children and young people are experts regarding their own lives. They have a body of experience and knowledge that is unique to their situation which we will not properly understand unless we listen to them and encourage them to participate in decisions that affect them.

Well-supported and encouraged children and young people can be powerful advocates for themselves, for each other, and for your organisation.

A great deal of knowledge and experience in empowering and listening to children and young people already exists within the many organisations working in children's interests. *Citizen Me!* aims to bring that knowledge and experience together, with practical examples and useful tools and resources, all with a strong base in evidence and research.

Citizen Me! will be updated and expanded over time to reflect new developments in research and practice in the participation of children and young people. We will also add new case studies to showcase good, practical examples of involving children and young people.

As Commissioner for Children and Young People, I congratulate you on your commitment to our younger citizens. I trust that *Citizen Me!* will prove a useful resource as you meaningfully and effectively engage children and young people in making decisions and the day-to-day running of your organisation.



Megan Mitchell

Commissioner
September 2012



Tell us what you think

Please help us improve and build on this participation resource by completing our online user survey for *Citizen Me!* at www.surveymonkey.com/s/citizenme

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.

Citizen Me! has been developed to help organisations, including government departments, 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.

Throughout *Citizen Me!*, 'decision making' refers to the full range of decisions that government and organisations can make. Such decision making can range from policy,

legislation and parliamentary enquiries, through to school-related decisions including budgets and curriculum, along with community services, facilities and after school activities.

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 *Citizen Me!* 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.

Citizen Me! is for all individuals and organisations who seriously want children and young people to participate in making decisions that affect children's lives. It has also been prepared for children and young people themselves who act as peer facilitators in the participation process.

Citizen Me!

Introduction (continued)

Sections of *Citizen Me!*



Why include children and young people in decision making

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



Enabling participation

- Levels of participation
- Building capacity for participation within an organisation
- Building the capacity of children and young people to participate



Practical information for participation

- 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?



Ethical considerations

- 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' groups of children and young people
- Mandatory reporting



Obtaining consent

- 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 'hard to reach' groups of children and young people



Evaluating the participation process

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



Where to get further information

- Other agencies that can help
- Consultation and participation resources
- References for Citizen Me!

Other elements

Case studies: *Citizen Me!* is brought to life by the individuals, organisations and children and young people sharing their effective and practical experiences through case examples.

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 reflect on why they are seeking children and young people's involvement, and how this can be best achieved within their specific contexts.

We have prepared *Citizen Me!* for use as a live document.

We intend to update this resource regularly with new information and case studies so that we can all continue to be inspired by the difference that children and young people's participation makes.

To this end, we encourage you to use the information provided and adapt and build on it to suit your organisation's needs. We invite your critical feedback and your submission of case studies of best practice participation for inclusion in future updates of *Citizen Me!*

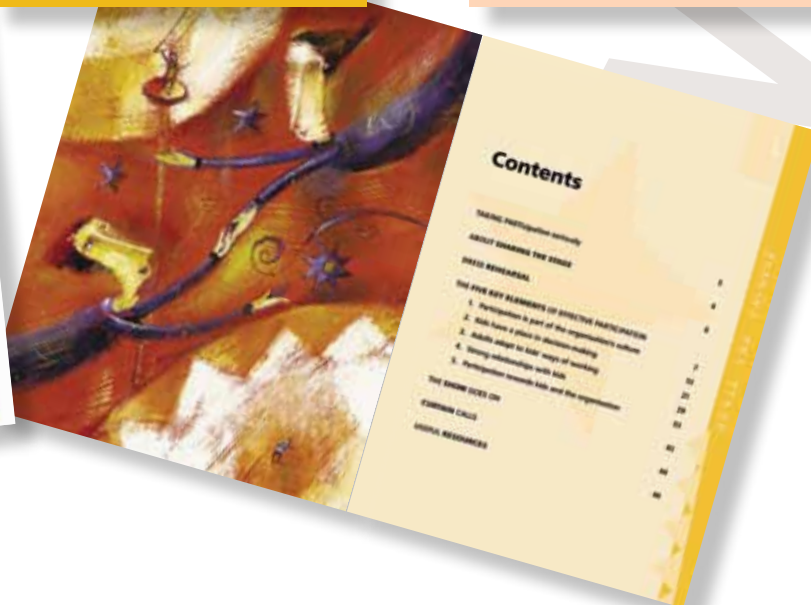


Citizen Me!

A note on previous Commission publications on participation

Between 2001 and 2004 the Commission published the TAKING PARTICIPATION Seriously kit, a series of booklets with information and practical ideas for children and young people's participation in organisations and workplaces. These booklets contain useful information, such as practical activities and games to do with children and young people, involving children and young people in conferences and events, staff selection, boards and committees and research projects. You can find these resources on the Commission's website.

Citizen Me! was developed to provide organisations with additional information such as ethical considerations, consent, capacity building and evaluation. It contains the most up-to-date information required for organisations to involve children and young people in their decision making, whether as a one-off consultation, or in an ongoing process.



Tell us what you think

Please help us improve and build on this participation resource by completing our online user survey for *Citizen Me!* at www.surveymonkey.com/s/citizenme

Citizen Me!

Engaging children and young people in your organisation

Why include children and young people in decision making



“I expect that my opinions, ideas and contributions will be truly valued and will be taken into consideration seriously when developing new policy.”

– Young person

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



Citizen Me!

Why include children and young people in decision-making

Introduction

The many benefits of involving children and young people in organisational decision making mean that it is well worth breaking down the barriers to their participation.

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 set of Participatory Rights for Children and Young People. We encourage you to print this out and keep it in a prominent place in your organisation.

Underlying assumptions and principles

Assumptions

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

- Children and young people have the capacity to participate (because they can).

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 organisations. These include governance activities, sitting on selection panels, working on program design, development, planning, implementation and evaluation and monitoring the level of participation within organisations.

- Children and young people have the right to participate (because they should).

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).

- Children and young people have critical and unique perspectives on their lives (because they do).

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 don't know, and change adult perspectives.



Principles

Linked to these assumptions are the following principles of participation:

- Participation of children and young people must 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.

- Ensure that children and young people's participation will bring them no harm.

Organisations have a responsibility to minimise the risk of physical 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.

- Develop an explicit ethical strategy to anticipate ethical considerations that may be confronted during their participation.

It is best to plan for ethical contingencies at the outset. However, the strategy should be flexible to deal with unanticipated ethical contingencies that can arise during the process.

- Try to think continuously about how beliefs and values towards children shape participation.

Your own beliefs and values, as well as broader social and cultural attitudes towards children, 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.

- Take steps to redress inherent power imbalances between children, young people and adults.

There are a number of ways to minimise adverse power relations within a participatory project. For example, choose a location in which children and young people feel comfortable. Also, speak with children at their height level rather than standing over them (Kellett, 2011).

- 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.

- Enhance and develop the capacity of children and young people to participate.

Organisations need to develop in all children and young people the skills and knowledge required for effective participation.

The capacity of children and young people to participate varies. It may be convenient to seek the participation of those already capable, but this would ignore the potential contribution of those less capable. 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.

Young people's expectations in participatory projects

In preparing *Citizen Me!*, the Commission asked a group of young people what expectations they have when asked to participate in an organisation's decision-making processes. In their words, they expect

"That my audience will listen to me"

"That I will be able to express my feelings about a particular topic or issue"

"To learn something new and unexpected"

"To be heard and valued"

"To be told what will happen to my contributions"

"To feel interested and engaged"

Citizen Me!

Why include children and young people in decision-making

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:

- gaining new perspectives on an issue, by obtaining new knowledge and a better understanding of children and young people's issues
- developing more effective policies and services based on the identified needs of children and young people
- developing policies and services that are more credible with children and young people

- increasing the relevance of your organisation to children and young people
- enhancing relationships between your staff and children and young people

(Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales, 2002; Smail, 2007).

Case Study

NSW Parliament benefits from consulting children and young people

The Committee on Children and Young People conducted an inquiry into the needs of children and young people aged 9–14 years in NSW. The Committee considered it important that children and young people were consulted in this inquiry and have an opportunity to voice their opinions.

Students from seven primary and secondary schools in NSW were invited to make submissions to the inquiry and to appear at the public hearing at Parliament House.

The Committee found that children and young people's input throughout the inquiry was both inspiring and informed. They provided valuable information about children and young people's needs in key areas of their lives, such as family, education, health, technology and transport. The participation of children and young people benefited the Committee and assisted the Committee in developing their recommendations.





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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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).

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

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

- 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.

Case Study

Children and young people benefit by being on the Menai Youth Advisory Committee

Menai Youth Advisory Committee (MYAC) is open to young people between the ages of 8–18 years who have links to the Menai area. It aims to represent young people's views and to provide a forum to discuss and act on issues of importance to young people. Committee members also participate in planning activities and events for young people. The committee consists of up to 12 young people including representatives from local high schools.

Young people benefit in several ways by being a MYAC member. They have opportunities for training and skill development to learn how to represent the broader needs of young people in the area.

MYAC members also learn how to plan and run events, including how to manage a budget of over \$10,000 per annum. Members are provided with rewards for their participation.

In addition to event planning and management, MYAC members gain invaluable skills in leadership, advocacy, mentoring, lobbying, public speaking and dealing with the media.



Citizen Me!

Why include children and young people in decision-making

Barriers to involving children and young people in decision making

“I believe the main barrier for any youth participating meaningfully and effectively is the stigma surrounding young people that older people have. Young people are often viewed as being too young to be valuable and able to contribute toward the discussions and ultimately the decision making of the organisation.”

– Young person

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 time and resources and workload pressures

Involving children and young people in decision making takes considerable time and commitment. Many children will have little experience in organisational decision making and will 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 may find it difficult to provide the time required to support children and young people.

There are also costs involved in children and young people's participation, such as transport, training costs and other resources.

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 *Citizen Me!* for details of training for organisational staff.)



Barriers to young people's participation

We asked young people to describe the main barriers to participating meaningfully and effectively they have experienced:

“The uncertainty of what I can and cannot do and say”

“The make-up of the organisation, like how particular things run”

“Organisations and individuals not willing to shift positions and policies”

“More than once I have been unable to participate because I have been unable to afford the train fare to the venue”

“I live in a community where there aren't many opportunities so I often have to travel to participate”



Citizen Me!

Why include children and young people in decision-making

Participatory rights for children and young people

Children and young people have the potential capacity to participate in decision-making processes. They have unique perspectives on their lives.

Children and young people have a right to:

- have a say about what is important to them
- be listened to
- be treated with respect
- be provided with information about how they will be involved in decision making
- be given information in a language they understand and a format that is appropriate to them
- participate in a way that suits them
- be given clear objectives and limits for decision making
- be prepared for what will happen in a decision-making process and who will be there
- be given time and space so they can say what they mean
- have a support person with them in a decision-making process, such as a relative or worker they trust
- be given feedback about what will happen with the information they provide
- provide their own feedback on the decision-making process
- refuse to participate or withdraw from a process at any time
- benefit from their participation.

For further consideration:

- What are the ways in which children and young people can benefit from participating in our organisation's decision making?
- What are my own values, assumptions and beliefs about children and childhood? How will these shape the ways in which I involve children and young people in my organisation's decision making?

Tell us what you think

Please help us improve and build on this participation resource by completing our online user survey for *Citizen Me!* at www.surveymonkey.com/s/citizenme



Citizen Me!

Engaging children and young people in your organisation

Enabling participation



In this section:

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



Citizen Me!

Enabling participation

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

“The best participatory experiences have been ones I have planned or been involved in the planning. The reason is, there was trust, reciprocity, respect, inclusion and consideration of the context of participants and the decision to be made.”

– Young person

Models of participation

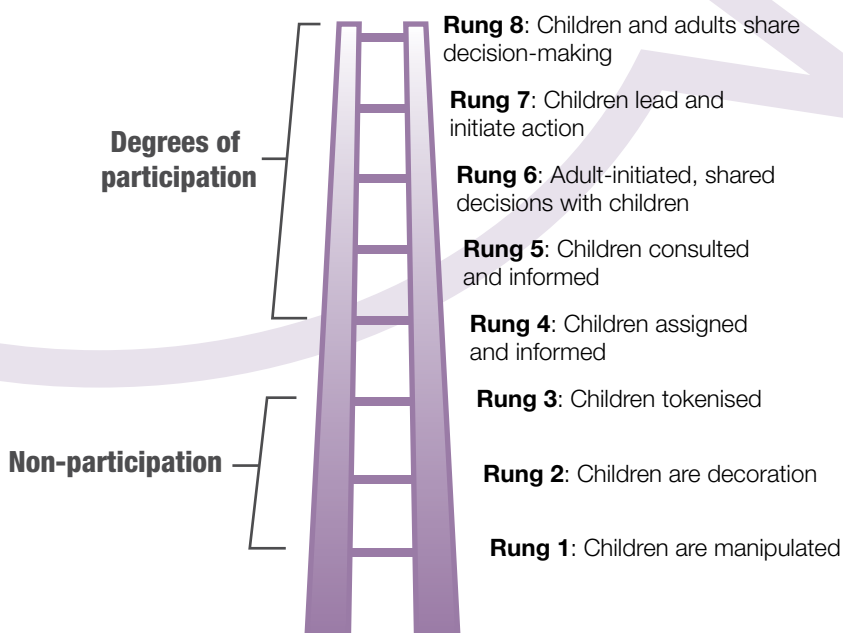
There are different levels of participation, and theoretical models differ in the way these levels are conceptualised. The following is an overview of some of these theoretical models.

Hart's Ladder of Participation

The most recognised model is Hart's Ladder of Participation. The ladder has eight rungs, each rung representing increasing degrees of participation and different forms of cooperation with adults.

Hart calls the three lowest steps on the ladder 'non-participation' as opposed to what he calls 'real participation'. At the highest end of the ladder, children and young people initiate ideas and share decisions with adults.

Figure 1. Hart's ladder of participation



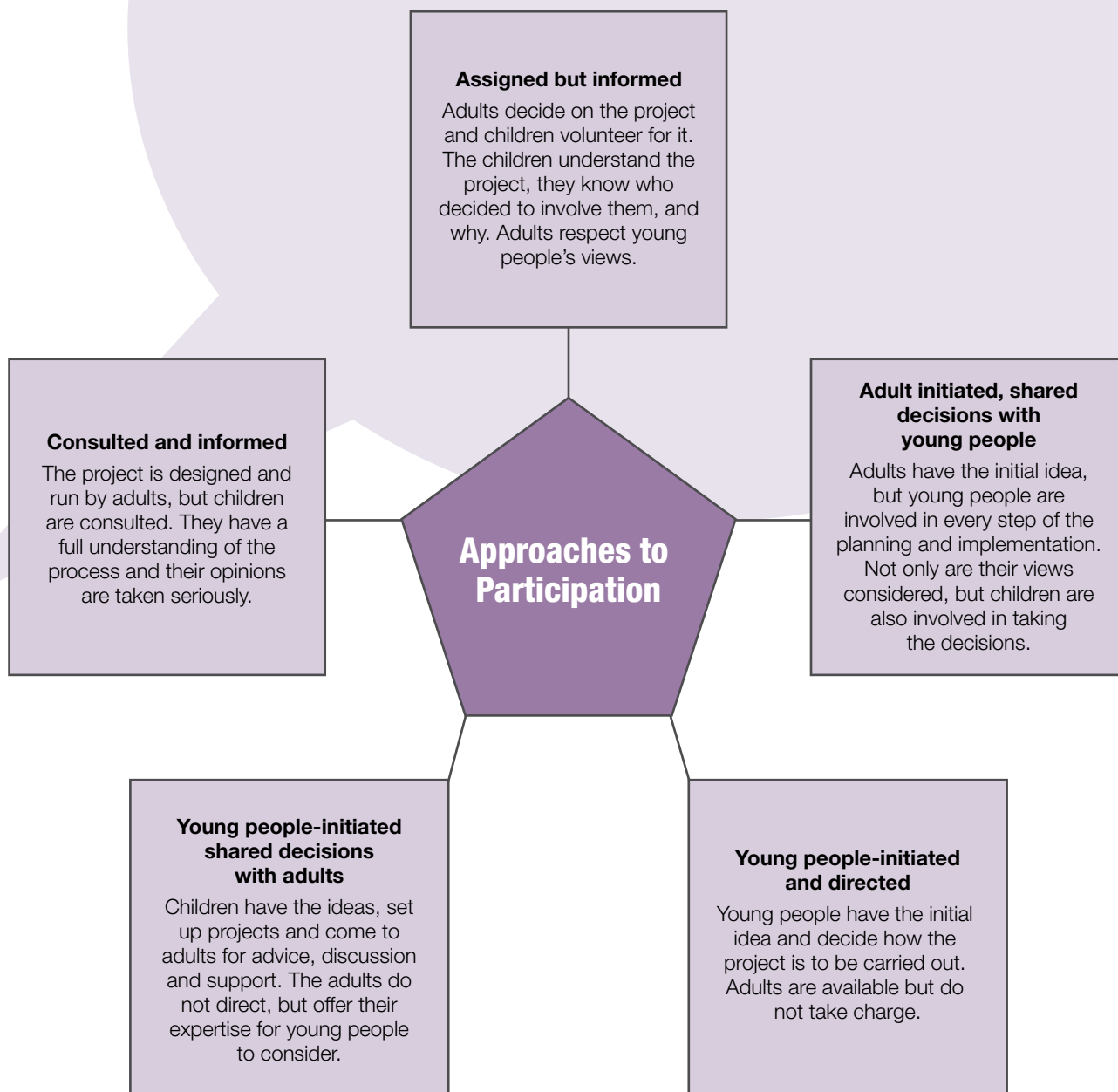
Adapted from Hart, R. (1992). Children's Participation: from Tokenism to Citizenship. Florence. UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.



Treseder's model of participation

Treseder's (1997) model talks about five different but equal forms of participation. It is similar to Hart's model in that it uses the concepts of child- and adult-initiated participation. Treseder says that children and young people need to be empowered to be able to participate and that organisations have to assist them in this.

Figure 2. Treseder's model of participation



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

Citizen Me!

Enabling participation

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.

Figure 3. The six stages of Westhorpe's (1987) Continuum

1	2	3	4	5	6
Ad hoc input	Structured Consultation	Influence	Delegation	Negotiation	Control
An environment is established which supports young people to contribute their ideas or information about their needs.	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.	Involves some formal, structured input in order to ensure at least a minimal level of influence on the organisation.	Young people are provided with real responsibility for undertaking particular tasks within an organisation.	Young people and the organisation each contribute their ideas, information and perspectives. Decisions are reached by consensus and compromise.	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.

Adapted from Westhorpe, G. (1987). Planning for Youth Participation: a resource kit. Youth Sector Training Council of South Australia.

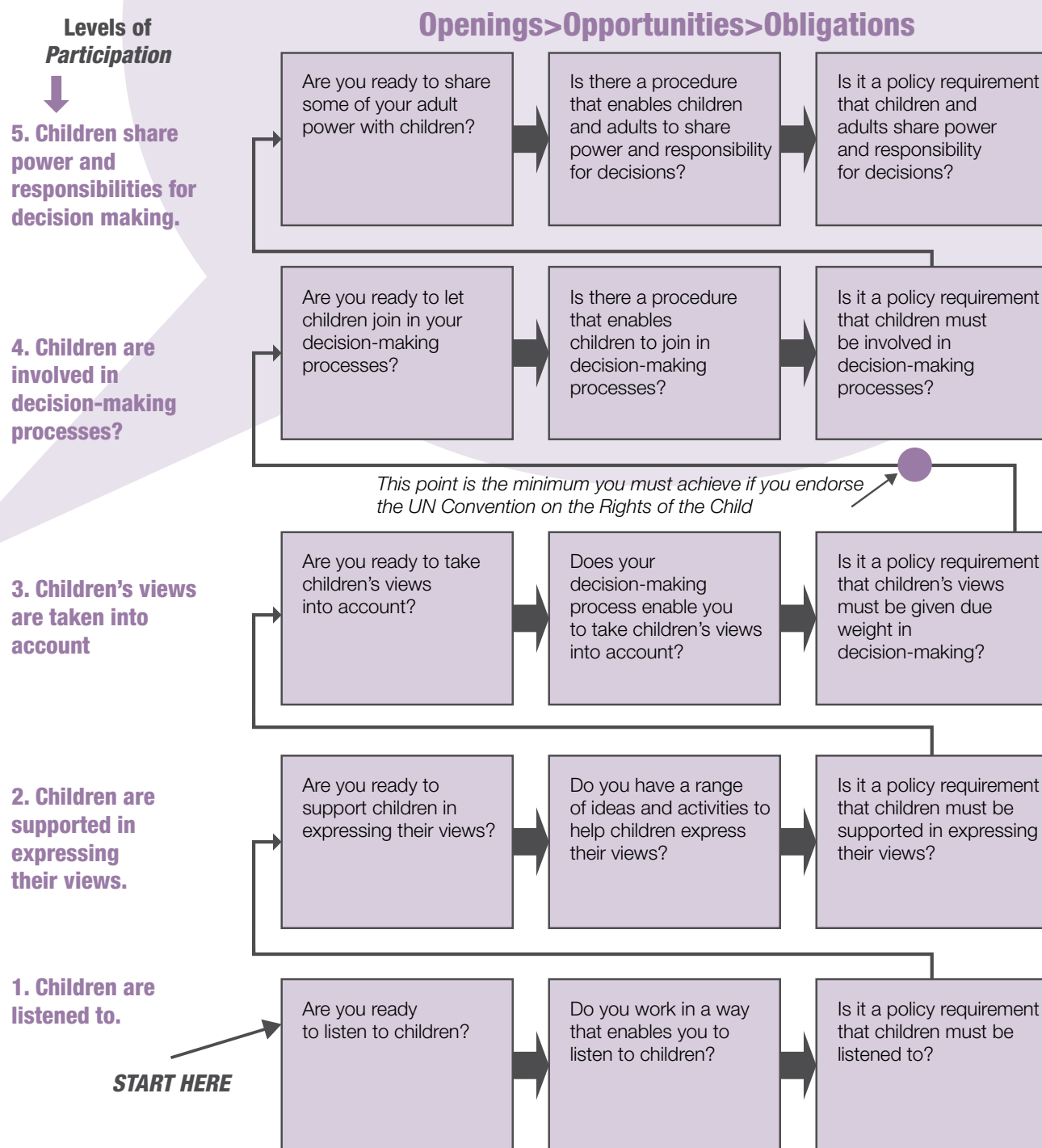




Shier's Pathways to Participation

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).

Figure 4. 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.

Case Study

Young people Big Voice Advisory Group

Young People Big Voice (YPBV) is the youth advisory group for the Centre for Children and Young People (CCYP) at Southern Cross University. It was established to help ensure the Centre's research, education and advocacy activities are informed, supported, enhanced and challenged by the views and perspectives of children and young people. YPBV comprises eight young people aged between 13 and 20 years with wide-ranging backgrounds and diverse experiences.

YPBV have developed their own terms of reference:

- Make sure the views of children and young people are heard in the activities of the Centre so that its projects reflect the real, lived experience of children and young people.
- Actively contribute to the development and implementation of CCYP projects and activities which will help children and young people.
- Promote and encourage action as an outcome of consultation.
- Play a consultative role in the community, including for government and non-government organisations.

An adult facilitator supports the activities of the group and maintains regular contact with YPBV members through monthly meetings, phone contact, group email and discussion.

YPBV's contribution to the work of the CCYP has included:

- engaging in consultations with researchers to assist in refining research questions, methods, tools and processes being involved as speakers, organisers and panel members in seminars and conferences
- being involved in the development of postgraduate courses
- developing submissions to, and appearing before, parliamentary inquiries
- undertaking consultations with community and government organisations regarding various aspects of their work with children and young people.

In the words of one YPBV member:

Benefits of being part of YPBV are bountiful. For a young person it is a unique opportunity in many ways, a place where you can learn things and gain skills you could in no other place. For all members the intimate knowledge of child rights and the issues surrounding them is useful. From meetings and consultations, you gain a wide-ranging knowledge of the issues you are dealing with as well as hearing perspectives. This comes in useful in many contexts including helping other young people to know their rights and being switched on and informed in school and work environments.





Capacity building for participation

“My best participatory experience was when I was completely taken care of and wanted for nothing. I participated to absolutely no expense of my own and there was always someone there to support me ... I always, always felt safe, secure, supported, happy, well fed, included and valued.”

– Young person

What is ‘capacity building’?

‘Capacity building’ in *Citizen Me!* refers to the development of new skills, attitudes and ways of working to overcome the challenges of facilitating 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

Perhaps most importantly, the leaders of the organisation and the senior staff need to act as the ‘champions’ for participatory practices. Participation is unlikely to be effective if they 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 involved in the work of their organisation, listening to what they have to say and showing high interest in the process. When busy executives make the time to listen to their concerns, they show staff that children and young people’s participation is important (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2001).

The organisational culture

Commit to making children and young people’s participation part of your organisational culture. One way is to specify such a commitment into organisational strategic documents. Also try to integrate children and young people’s participation as an ongoing activity, rather than as a one-off exercise or project (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2001).

When involving children and young people in decision making, create a more informal culture in your approach to organisational processes. If meetings are long, consider having regular breaks. Use relaxed venues, wear casual dress, and try to use informal, jargon-free language (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2001; Bell, Vromen & Collin, 2008).

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 the content that should be included in such training (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 (see ‘*Why include children and young people in decision making*’ in *Citizen Me!*).
- 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 *Citizen Me!*).
- Techniques for involving children and young people in organisational decision making (see ‘*Practical information for participation*’ in *Citizen Me!*).
- Small group exploration of scenarios (practical examples of good practice).
- Action planning – what can the participants do in their organisation as a result of the training.
- References, resources and support materials for participants to refer to after the training (see ‘*Where to get further information*’ in *Citizen Me!*).
- 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.

Horder (2010) also advocates a co-facilitation model where young people are involved in the delivery of the training to organisational staff. In this situation, young people deliver as much or as little of the course as they feel comfortable with and this will develop over time as their confidence grows.

Citizen Me!

Enabling participation

Case Study

Young people training out-of-home care caseworkers

The Create Foundation provides training to workers involved with young people in out-of-home care. The workers are typically completing their training and about to hit the field.

As part of this training, a young person with an out-of-home care experience is invited to talk to the workers about their time in care in a strength-based way. The young person's role is to provide advice and expertise as a young person with a care experience.

The Create staff member and the young person talk about issues such as education, transitioning from care and leaving care preparation, family and sibling contact, building worker relationships and young people's participation in decision making. The workers are then invited to ask the young person questions to inform their practice.

According to Create staff, the workers benefit greatly from speaking with the young people as they have transitioned from care and are able to objectively look at the care system and suggest improvements.

The young people also benefit from their participation. In the words of one young person:

"It feels good to know that my experience has helped community workers gain a better understanding of how young people feel about making their own choices versus others making choices for them."





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 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 support that are needed:

Clear objectives

You need to provide sufficient information to children and young people so that they understand the purpose of the project they will be involved in.

Group cohesion

When decision making is to be group based, you 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 may need training if they are to participate meaningfully and effectively. Training could include all or any of the following:

- 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 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 (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2001).

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). Also, the presence of lots of adults or well-known adults can intimidate children and young people and make them less confident to participate.

Providing feedback

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 don't see results for their time and effort (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2001). Children and young people will understand if it is not possible to act on their suggestions if the reasons why are explained to them.

Timescales

Realistic timescales need to be set.

It can take a considerable amount of time to develop children and young people's capacity to participate in decision making. This is especially true for certain groups of children and young people (e.g. those in out-of-home care or with a disability) and when working with 'hard to reach' groups.

Children and young people will often need time to fully understand what their participation will involve. It is important that they do not feel rushed or pressured to make a commitment. They will need time to feel comfortable to express their views and opinions.

Also keep in mind that they may have other commitments and might have to participate around these.

Citizen Me!

Enabling participation

Encourage capacity building

Your organisation can also encourage children and young people to develop new skills and build their capacity to participate by:

- sponsoring children and young people to attend conferences, seminars and training courses in their fields of interest
- giving children and young people the opportunity to work on issues that interest them.

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 are only capable of certain forms of participation at a certain age. Instead, the assumption should be that all children have some degree of competence. That assumption leads to the question of what support your organisation can provide to enable all children to participate to the best of their ability. For example, young children may be unable to get their views across in a group-based discussion. Instead of assuming that there is no way to access those views, try to help them express themselves through drawing and talking about pictures (Chawla, 2001).

Young people tell us what they need to participate

In preparing *Citizen Me!*, the Commission asked a group of young people about the most important things they need in order to meaningfully participate in organisational decision making. In their words, they require:

- Skills to express ourselves clearly
- To feel comfortable (not under threat)
- For adults to respect, listen and incorporate our experiences and opinions into projects
- Open-minded and enthusiastic facilitators
- A briefing before the decision making
- A goal that is being worked towards
- Flexibility
- Time to think things through
- Encouragement, support and guidance from a staff member
- Financial and logistical support from the organisation
- Knowing the end result: "Why am I doing this?"



Case Study

Child-led research in a non-government organisation

Burnside conducted a project to give children the opportunity to lead and generate their own knowledge about the world. They aimed to build children's skills and capacity to research and present their ideas in ways that were meaningful to them.

To do this, they provided training to nine children on how to conduct their own research based on an established training model. They met weekly over a period of six months. The training model was 18 weeks in total.

All the children were supported and resourced to carry out their own research project on a topic of their choice and then supported to disseminate their work. The project was externally evaluated and the evaluation included obtaining the children's views.

Resources included:

- a venue conducive to children and young people's learning
- facilitators with expertise in both children's research and working with vulnerable children
- IT (computers, audio recorders, projector), stationery and other material resources for use as teaching aids
- program budget for transport, catering and additional recreation sessions
- consent forms that supported the principles of informed, ongoing consent
- reporting documentation – newsletters, monthly reports, case notes, session reviews
- a Supportive Project Advisory group with the capacity to make decisions at the required levels within the organisation.

The external evaluation found that children enjoyed and valued being part of the program. They were satisfied with the way it was delivered. There were positive benefits for the children and young people in terms of developing skills and improved well being. The facilitators and the organisation also benefited.

In the words of some of the children who participated:

"They knew how to explain the stuff to different people ... some of us knew stuff on a different level, so some of us are smarter and some of us aren't so smart"

"I'm more confident now – I was really quiet ... I noticed it when I started making jokes and doing more stuff and talking a lot more and laughing ... because I used to not know a lot and once you learn a lot more it just makes you confident to put it out there."

Of the three facilitators, only one had research experience. If the program were run again, it would be ideal to increase the number of facilitators with research expertise to more easily address children's individual needs during the program.



Citizen Me!

Enabling participation

Case Study

Building the capacity of the Commission's Young People Advisory Group

The Commission's Young People Advisory Group (YPAG) has two roles:

1. Inform the Commissioner about what's important for children and young people in their communities.
2. Give the Commissioner advice about topics the Commission is interested in.

There are 12 members of the YPAG, recruited from within six school communities. The six schools represent the three school sectors in NSW and provide some representation across the State. The 12 YPAG members are in Year 9 and 10 at school and have the skills and knowledge required to participate effectively in the group, and the commitment of their families to take part.

When the YPAG was first formed, members attended a two-day orientation at the Commission. The Commission arranged travel and accommodation for the young people and their parents.

Leading up to the orientation, conversations were held with key Commission staff and with each school's support people so that everyone was aware of their roles and responsibilities. An information package was also sent out before the orientation. The package included information about the Commission, the Advisory Group, the role of schools, as well as consent forms for the young people and their parents.

A session for the parents/carers was held at the orientation so that they had appropriate knowledge of what their children's participation in the YPAG would involve.

The orientation for the young people included lots of getting to know you activities, so that they would feel comfortable with each other and with Commission staff, including the Commissioner. Training was also provided for the young people around their role in the YPAG and the role of the Commission, and also in research skills.

YPAG members will be receiving governance and media training, as well as more research training in future meetings.

We asked the young people to evaluate the orientation sessions. They reported feeling satisfied with the orientation because they had:

- a greater understanding of their role
- developed relationships with other members and key Commission staff
- gained new skills to help them in their role.

"Helped me understand the role I will be playing as an advisory group member. Got to meet and form friendships with the other members." (Girl, 15 yrs)



For further consideration:

- What does participation mean to me and to my 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 the participation of children and young people?

Tell us what you think

Please help us improve and build on this participation resource by completing our online user survey for *Citizen Me!* at www.surveymonkey.com/s/citizenme



Citizen Me!

Engaging children and young people in your organisation

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?



Citizen Me!

Practical information for participation

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 can take time and effort, but 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'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.

- Do they have the required skills to participate fully?
- Is there sufficient time for them to develop these skills?
- Are there any good reasons for not involving children and young people in your decision-making processes?
- Is the topic for discussion confronting and likely to be distressing for the children and young people?

It is not appropriate to seek children and young people's participation if there are not likely to be any benefits for the children and young people themselves.

Have clear aims and objectives

What do you hope to achieve?

Develop a set of clear aims and objectives for the project, 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 timescales

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

Of course, there are times when short timeframes 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 feedback on how their advice was used.



Work out the required resources

Participatory work can be resource intensive, in terms of both staff time and cost. 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. 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.

Who will facilitate the process?

All staff who will be involved in participatory work need to have a good understanding of, and commitment to, the principles of participation (see '*Why include children and young people in decision making*' in *Citizen Me!*). 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 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 (Office for Youth, 2006).

Who you select as 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 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.

Citizen Me!

Practical information for participation

Which children and young people will take part?

Children and young people have the right to participate in decision making. This includes all children and young people, from the 'highly engaged' (those with a heightened understanding of issues and a strong capacity to participate), through to the 'disengaged' (those children and young people who suffer feelings of alienation and disconnectedness, and face significant barriers to participation) (Burns, Collin, Blanchard, De Freitas & Lloyd, 2008).

There are groups of children and young people towards the 'disengaged' end of the spectrum that are often left out of decision-making processes. Some of these 'hard to reach' groups include those with disabilities and mental health issues, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 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.

Your organisation should try to include all of these 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 Assembly for Wales, 2002).

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 (e.g. Government, Independent), 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 (e.g. Youth.com, Youthgas). Snowballing techniques can also be effective. This is where you start with a small group of children and young people and ask each of them to bring along friends (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2004).

(See 'Where to get further information' in *Citizen Me!* for details of agencies that can help recruit children and young people.)

Where will the project take place?

Setting is important for a participatory project.

Children and young people are more likely to express their honest views and opinions in an environment that is comfortable and non-threatening. For example, a local playground, Police Citizens Youth Clubs (PCYCs), a local café or pizza place, a skate park, or any other place where children and young people hang out.

You need to consider a number of important questions when choosing a venue:

- Is the venue suitable for the nature of the particular activity planned (e.g. it would not be appropriate to discuss sensitive issues in public spaces)?
- Does the chosen venue pose any safety issues for the children and young people or organisational staff?
- Will the children and young people have a say about where they will participate?
- Is the venue accessible and easy to get to?
- Is the venue comfortable in terms of seating, fresh air, temperature and required equipment?



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.

When communicating about meetings or consultations, 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 feed back 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.



Citizen Me!

Practical information for participation

What methods of participation can you use?

Children and young people are not a homogenous 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 also important to remember that the following age groups are really only a guide – it is very difficult to attach specific methodologies to fixed ages. Children's cognitive capacities and maturity levels will differ within each age group.

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

Early years of childhood

There are 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

- 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.

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.

Middle years of childhood

Different methods will be appropriate for different ages within the wide age range of the middle years (approximately 9–14 years).

As with younger children, game-based methods are likely to be more effective with the early primary school-aged children.

Those in the upper years of primary school, middle school and the early years of high school are beginning to develop, or have developed, superior language skills so may enjoy individual or group-based interviews or focus groups (see Kellett, 2011, for a detailed discussion). Some children may prefer these methods to game-based ones, enjoying the recognition and feeling of being more 'grown-up'.

Case Study

Children's participation in the middle years of childhood seminar

The NSW Commission for Children and Young People hosted a seminar about the social and emotional development of children in the middle years of childhood (9–14 years).

We asked children to participate in the seminar as we felt this would orient seminar attendants to the emotional and social development of children in their middle years through their lived experiences.

In preparation for the seminar, four of the children recorded diary-style entries into a voice recorder once a day for five days, completing the following thoughts in their own way: “*I am thinking... I am feeling... I am hoping...*” We also provided children with a disposable camera and invited them to take pictures of things and places that are important in their lives. Children were given workbooks with pictures to help with the exercise.

The photos and recordings were combined to create shorts vignettes which were played throughout the seminar.

When attendants were asked for their feedback on the seminar, they reported that this methodology was a great way for children themselves to inform knowledge and practice. The parents of the children who were involved in the audio-diary exercise said their children had really enjoyed the experience. The children were happy to share their stories to help adults understand children better, and enjoyed the mediums used to do so.



Middle to late adolescence

Methods of engaging with young people aged 15 – 17 years can be challenging.

Focus groups are effective, although the venue needs to be appropriate. This age group are more likely to give their actual views and opinions in a relaxed, non-threatening environment (such as a youth centre) than in a classroom at school where they often feel powerless (Kellett, 2011).

Surveys can also work well with this age group. However, limit the amount of open-ended questions as most 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, 2004).

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?

Existing resources

There are a variety of existing resources with extensive descriptions of participation techniques, activities and games to use with children and young people. These have excellent, tried and tested suggestions:

- NSW Commission for Children and Young People (2001). *Taking participation seriously: Children and young people's participation in conferences and events*. NSW Commission for Children and Young People: Sydney. <http://kids.nsw.gov.au/kids/resources/participationkit/conferencesevents.cfm>
- Save the Children and Dynamix (2002). *Participation: Spice it up! Practical tools for engaging children and young people in planning and consultations*. <http://www.dynamix.ltd.uk>
- Save the Children Scotland (2001). *Re:action consultation toolkit: a practical toolkit for consulting with children and young people on policy issues*. (written by Sarah Madden). Save the Children Scotland: Edinburgh.

Citizen Me!

Practical information for participation

Case Study

Children's well-being research

The NSW Commission for Children and Young people, together with the Social Justice and Social Change Research Centre, did a research project that asked children and young people between eight and 15 years what well-being meant to them.

Children were interviewed either individually or in small groups. The interview questions were contained in booklets. How each child used the booklet was up to them; they could follow the questions or skip through. A range of activities was also available to the children during the interviews. These allowed the children to express their views in ways that best suited their skills, interests and abilities.

Examples of activities included using:

- drawings to express key topics such as 'well-being places'
- a magic wand to discuss how they would change a not well-being time into a well-being time
- pictures of faces expressing different feelings to describe well-being and feelings associated with well-being.

This methodology aimed to make the research fun, put the children more at ease and reduce the pressure on them to talk if they didn't want to. In the words of one 14 year old participant: *"It is like a creative way of asking what you would really like. It is like putting a nice edge to it."*

The project was conducted over three stages and the same researcher followed the same children across all stages. This allowed trust and rapport to develop between them, which was essential to the success of the research.

Overall, the entire process gave children and young people an opportunity to express their views on matters that they typically do not get to discuss, in a way that was respectful and engaging. One 13 year old participant said: *"It was good to have a chance to be able to say what we think and stuff ... like people care enough to do a whole big study on this stuff. So that is really good."*



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's Assembly for Wales, 2002). Children and young people need to see that their contributions affect the decision-making process and make a difference. They should receive regular feedback on their suggestions and recommendations. They may lose interest or drop out if they don't see results for their time and effort (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2001).

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.

Case Study

Consulting children and young people with disabilities

The NSW Commission for Children and Young People talked with children and young people (aged 8–18 years) who have a disability. They were asked about what makes a service they use feel safe and friendly to them, and how they can stay safe in the community. This was done through a series of small group consultations.

Of critical importance to us was to be sincere to the children and young people and, above all, cause them no distress. A significant amount of time was spent on:

- developing relationships with the disability services workers
- planning the methods that would enable the children and young people to provide information in appropriate ways
- getting to know the rules of the service so we did not break them or confuse the children by doing things differently.

On the day of the consultations:

1. workers put up photographs of us so that the children and young people would recognise us
2. we played warm-up games first, so that the children and young people could feel comfortable with us
3. we carried out a series of non-verbal activities to elicit information from the children and young people – for example, a circle of belonging and safety where the young person places the people/services they feel closest to or safest with in the innermost circles and those not so important to them in the outer circles
4. graffiti walls encouraged children and young people to draw pictures about what made them feel safe and happy
5. cue cards with pictures and words were used with non-verbal children and young people to give their responses.

Perhaps most importantly, the consultations were conducted by Commission staff and the disability workers together. Involving adults that the children and young people trusted, were familiar with and had relationships with, made it possible to carry out these consultations.

Consultations with non-verbal children and young people were conducted entirely by specialist workers who had the skills and expertise required to work with these children and young people.

The outcomes of the consultations were fed back to disability services staff. This included giving them a copy of the final report and explaining what the Commission would be doing with the information gathered.



Citizen Me!

Practical information for participation



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?
- ✓ Have you planned a strategy to provide feedback and outcomes to the children and young people who participate?

For further consideration:

- Are our participatory/consultation methods responsive to the specific needs of children and young people? Can we adapt our methods for particular situations?
- How are we going to act on the information children and young people give us?



Tell us what you think

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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



Citizen Me!

Ethical considerations

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.

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.

Addressing power imbalances

Children's and young people's views are often sought within the context of adult processes that children and young people may not understand (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2005). 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 (Bell et al., 2008).
- Be open to feedback and suggestions from the children and young people (NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2005).
- Give children and young people the capacity to contribute effectively (see 'Enabling participation' in *Citizen Me!*).



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 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.

Location

It is important to choose a project location that maintains privacy but at the same time is safe and comfortable. For example, children and young people may feel they have more privacy in a shopping mall than at school.

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, 2011). 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.privacy.nsw.gov.au.

- 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.

Citizen Me!

Ethical considerations

Providing remuneration to children and young people

Where possible, children and young people should be remunerated 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). If 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.

One way around this is to give the gift or payment at the conclusion of the project and not let the children or young people know in advance so that it is not perceived as an incentive to participate (Powell, 2011).

Another possibility is to use in-kind compensation suitable to the child or young person's interests, such as movie, food or music vouchers.

Working with 'hard to reach' children and young people

Certain groups of children and young people are often under-represented in organisational decision making. They are considered 'hard to reach' for a variety of reasons, such as language and communication difficulties, their vulnerability, cultural or geographical reasons (Smail, 2007b). Some of these 'hard to reach' groups include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, those in out-of-home care and juvenile justice facilities, children and young people with a disability or mental health issue, and children and young people not in education, employment or training.

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

'Hard to reach' children and young people often require special arrangements and particular sensitivity when participating. When organisations lack the necessary training it may be more appropriate to consult with some groups of children and young people through specialist workers. For example, consider employing an Aboriginal worker to conduct consultations with Aboriginal children and young people. This can also help to gain the trust of children and young people, which is essential for effective participatory consultation (Smail, 2007b).

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, in NSW, the Department of Attorney General and Justice – 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 and Torres Strait Islander 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. For example, these guidelines state that you must discuss any findings with the community prior being presented in the media.

Mandatory reporting

Organisations and individuals should also 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, community housing providers
- law enforcement – including police.

Managers, including both paid employees and volunteers, who supervise those providing direct services to children are also mandated to report.

A mandatory reporter, whether in a government or private organisation, is required by NSW law to make a report to the Child Protection Helpline 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. This interactive tool allows reporters to enter their concerns and guides them towards whether a report to the Helpline is required. If a report is advised, mandatory reporters should contact the Helpline on 133 627.



In NSW, employees of certain government agencies which have a Child Wellbeing Unit can also seek the advice of that Unit in relation to their concerns about a child and whether their situation meets the threshold of risk of significant harm.

Individuals and organisations seeking to engage the participation of children and young people should be aware of their potential reporting responsibilities. Whether or not they are mandatory reporters, anyone who has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child (aged up to 16) or a young person (aged 16 to 18), is at risk of significant harm can make a report to the Child Protection Helpline on 132 111. Risk of significant harm can include physical or psychological harm, neglect and sexual abuse. Concerns about a child or young person who may be self harming or engaging in risk taking behaviours leading to risk of significant harm should also be reported.

Individuals and organisations should take particular note if a child or young person is in the parental responsibility of the Minister (in out-of-home care). Due to the State's special relationship of care towards these children and young people, they should be reported when they are at risk of significant harm and the Helpline should be notified if a reporter is aware they are:

- pregnant
- runaway
- missing
- homeless.

Please note that the NSW Commission for Children and Young People does not have the function of dealing directly with the complaints or concerns of individual children [s16(1) *Commission for Children and Young People Act 1998*].

Case Study

Interviewing young offenders

The Department of Attorney General and Justice – 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 sought. 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.



Citizen Me!

Ethical considerations



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?
- ✓ 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, how and when?
- ✓ Have you considered additional ethical considerations when seeking the participation of 'hard to reach' groups of 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?



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Citizen Me!

Engaging children and young people in your organisation

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 'hard to reach' children and young people



Citizen Me!

Obtaining consent

Introduction

You should always 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 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 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 decisive, factor in assessing this (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2004).

However, when seeking to involve the participation of children and young people under the age of 16 years, your organisation generally 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.

Often the age where consent is required will vary according to the particular young person and the nature and environment of the particular project. 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.

There may be instances where seeking parental consent is inappropriate and/or offers no protection, such as when parents are neglectful or abusive (Spriggs, 2010).

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.



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, 2011).

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, 2011).

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

Case Study

The process of obtaining consent

UnitingCare Burnside conducted a child-led project to teach children 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 video recorded and so the recorder was put away.

At every new stage of the project, and each time it changed direction, parents were asked for written consent again 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, and 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
- 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 unsettling to children and young people.

Consent form for parents or carers

The accompanying parental 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 principle 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. 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 should be obtained for video/audio recordings and photography.

Click here for some examples of information sheets and consent forms for parents/carers and for children and young people.



Obtaining consent when working with 'hard to reach' 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 is needed. In NSW written and informed consent must be obtained from the parent or caregiver of any child or young person detained in a juvenile justice centre that is under the age of 16 years. The Department of Attorney General and Justice – Juvenile Justice also does not permit audio or 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 who have had interruptions in their schooling may require information sheets and consent forms to be written using non-complex language. Similarly, those who come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may require the use of interpreting and translating services.



Citizen Me!

Obtaining consent



Checklist

- ✓ 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?

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?



Tell us what you think

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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



Citizen Me!

Evaluating the participation process

Introduction

An evaluation measures the extent to which the project has successfully achieved its goals and objectives (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2004). 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 (Queensland Department of Child Safety, 2006).

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 (Smail, 2007d).

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 (Cambridgeshire Children's Fund & Save the Children Fund, 2005). 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 (Children and Young People's Assembly for Wales, 2002).

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.

Ask the following questions during the process of 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 (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2004).

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 Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (2004) provides a separate list of questions for project staff and the participants during a summative evaluation. These questions focus on the planning phase, consultation process, project outcomes and future improvements.

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 children and young people hear about the project?
- Were they involved in planning the project? If so, was it an effective process? Why or why not?
- Did they understand the purpose of the project and their participation?
- Did they enjoy being involved in the project? Why or why not?
- Did they feel they had the opportunity to voice their opinions? Why or why not?
- Were they interested in what the project was about? Why or why not?
- Were there unraised issues that they would have liked to discuss?
- Did they learn anything new or develop new skills by being involved?

- Were they satisfied with how their contribution was acknowledged?
- Do they know how the information from the project was used?
- Were they told what the project outcomes were?
- How could the project be improved in the future?
- Would they 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 (Cambridgeshire Children's Fund & Save the Children Fund, 2005).

Factors to consider when evaluating

It is worth considering using an external organisation or individual to conduct the evaluation. This is helpful for maintaining a distance between the project facilitators and the participants, making the process truly objective.

Also consider involving children and young people in facilitating the evaluation. This would require training them in interviewing techniques or other appropriate methodologies. Children and young people can work with adults to develop their own questions to provide a unique view of how a particular project is impacting on children and young people (Cambridgeshire Children's Fund & Save the Children Fund, 2005).

All evaluations must adhere to the same ethical principles discussed in the *Ethical considerations and Obtaining consent sections of Citizen Me!* This means providing participants with an information sheet outlining the purpose of the evaluation and what their involvement will entail. It also means obtaining informed consent.

Citizen Me!

Evaluating the participation process

Case Study

Young people evaluate a youth involvement program

Using a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, the Inspire Foundation conducted an evaluation of its youth involvement program between 2008 and 2010.

Eighteen young people were involved in:

- developing the evaluation framework (including questions and methods)
- developing and promoting a youth survey
- facilitating workshops with staff and peer researchers.

Five of these young people were recruited from Inspire youth involvement programs as peer researchers. They worked with adult researchers on specific aspects of the research process, including conducting, transcribing and analysing the in-depth interviews.

The peer researchers were recruited based on interest and diversity of life experience rather than skill level. Two face to face workshops were held to:

- create time and space for peer and staff researchers to develop the research framework, refine the interview schedule and analyse the transcripts
- foster rapport across the whole team, including staff, peer researchers and facilitators and to help create the network of support the peer researchers might need when out in the field conducting the interviews
- work on the skills peer researchers would need to feel confident in their role, such as asking open ended questions and prompting, active listening, selecting the right venue and project managing their various tasks.

Having these workshops facilitated by two young people from the youth involvement community helped establish and reinforce the collaborative nature of the relationship between peer and staff researchers.

Young people's involvement in the evaluation was beneficial in:

- keeping the focus on practical actionable outcomes for the youth involvement program
- including youth perspectives in the framework development and gathering, analysing and disseminating of data
- emphasising young people as social change agents and challenging power differences between the 'subjects' of the evaluation and 'adult researchers', particularly in the context of the interviews.

You can read more about the project and its findings in the following report: Collin, P., Rahilly, K., Stephens-Reicher, J., Blanchard, M., Herrman, H. & Burns, J. (2011). Inspire Foundation 2009 Youth Participation Evaluation: Meaningful participation for promoting mental health and wellbeing of young Australians. Report for Inspire Foundation, Sydney. Available online: <http://www.inspire.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Inspire-Foundation-Youth-Participation-Evaluation-2009-Report.pdf>



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 describe how they experienced something (Cambridgeshire Children's Fund & Save the Children Fund, 2005).

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? (Cambridgeshire Children's Fund & Save the Children Fund, 2005).

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 (Smail, 2007d).

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.

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.



Citizen Me!

Evaluating the participation process

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? (Cupitt & Ellis, 2007).
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 for evaluation 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 the children and young people giving their views and opinions (Cambridgeshire Children's Fund & Save the Children Fund, 2005).

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 (Cambridgeshire Children's Fund & Save the Children Fund, 2005).

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 (Cupitt & Ellis, 2007).

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 (Cambridgeshire Children's Fund & Save the Children Fund, 2005).

Links to evaluation resources

- National Evaluation of the Children's Fund (2005). The Evaluators Cookbook. Participatory Evaluation Exercises: A resource for work with children and young people. [online]
www.countydurhamsport.com/files/the_evaluators_cookbook_participatory_evaluation_exercises.pdf
- Cambridgeshire Children's Fund & Save the Children Fund (2005). Are you listening? A toolkit for evaluating Children's Fund services with children and young people. Cambridgeshire Children's Fund & Save the Children: London. [online]
www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/NR/rdonlyres/91176010-5FF3-4708-8449-1BA2D1CABD9F/0/AreYouListening.pdf
- Smail, P. (2007). Blast Off Guides to increasing participation of children and young people: Monitoring and evaluation. Guide 8. Participation Unit, The Children and Young People's Participation Consortium for Wales. [online]
participationworkerswales.org.uk/resources.aspx



Citizen Me!

Evaluating the participation process



Checklist

- ✓ 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 to the people who took part in your project and its evaluation?

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?



Tell us what you think

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Citizen Me!

Engaging children and young people in your organisation

Where to get further information



In this section:

- Other organisations that can help
- Consultation and participation resources
- References for *Citizen Me!*



Citizen Me!

Evaluating the participation process and the outcomes

Other organisations that can help

Organisations in NSW

- Youth Action and Policy Association (YAPA) – the peak organisation representing young people and youth services in NSW. Website: www.yapa.org.au/
- NSW Youth Advisory Council (YAC) – advises the NSW Government on issues of concern to young people in NSW, government policies relating to young people and youth-related programs. Website: www.youth.nsw.gov.au/yac.html
- NSW Government Register for Boards and Committees – this database of young people who want to participate in decision-making processes can be accessed by all government agencies. Website: www.youth.nsw.gov.au/boards_committees.html
- Student Representative Councils (SRCs) – all government schools, and most non-government schools, have an SRC. These students can provide advice on a range of issues. It is also worthwhile asking your local school if you can speak to other students who are not SRC members. Website: www.schools.nsw.edu.au/studentsupport/studleadsrc/src/secstateactiv/nswsrc.php
- Office of Communities Regional Coordinators – Website: www.communities.nsw.gov.au/aboutus/regional_coordinators.asp
- Youth Councils in Local Government Areas – you can find out whether your Council has a youth council or youth advisory group by contacting your local Council and asking to speak to the Youth Worker or Community Worker. Website: www.lgsa.org.au

Relevant national organisations

- Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) – youth peak body at the federal level. Website: www.ayac.org.au
- Create Foundation – peak body representing the voices of all children and young people in out-of-home care. Website: www.create.org.au/
- Inspire Foundation – provides a mental health and wellbeing service for young people and empowers young people to take action on issues that matter to them. Website: www.inspire.org.au/





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.

Centre for Multicultural Youth (2005). *Considering consulting? A guide to meaningful consultation with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds*. [accessed online] www.cmy.net.au/Assets/170/1/ConsideringConsulting.pdf

NSW Commission for Children and Young People (2001). *Sharing the stage: Taking participation seriously*. [accessed online] kids.nsw.gov.au/kids/resources/participationkit/sharingstage.cfm

NSW Commission for Children and Young People (2001). *Conferences and events*. [accessed online] kids.nsw.gov.au/kids/resources/participationkit/conferencesevents.cfm

NSW Commission for Children and Young People (2003). *Meeting together – deciding together*. [accessed online] kids.nsw.gov.au/kids/resources/participationkit/meetdeciding.cfm

NSW Commission for Children and Young People (2004). *All aBoard! Young people on boards and committees*. [accessed online] kids.nsw.gov.au/kids/resources/participationkit/allaboard.cfm

NSW Commission for Children and Young People (2004). *Checking the scoreboard*. [accessed online] kids.nsw.gov.au/kids/resources/participationkit/checkscoreboard.cfm

NSW Commission for Children and Young People (2005). *Count me in! Involving children and young people in research*. A collaborative project undertaken by the NSW Commission for Children and Young People and the Social Justice and Social Change Research Centre, University of Western Sydney. [accessed online] kids.nsw.gov.au/kids/resources/participationkit/countme.cfm

Office for Youth (2006). *Youth consultation toolkit*. Adelaide: Office for Youth, Government of South Australia. [accessed online] www.officeforyouth.sa.gov.au/Resources/Toolkit.aspx

Western Australian Commission for Children and Young People (2009). *Caring for the future growing up today: Involving children and young people, Participation guidelines*. [accessed online] www.hrc.act.gov.au/res/Participation%20Guidelines.pdf

Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (2004). *Taking young people seriously. Consulting young people about their ideas and opinions: A handbook for organisations working with young people*. Melbourne: Office for Youth, Department for Victorian Communities.

Youth Affairs Network Queensland (2011). *Effective practices for engagement, participation and consultation: A resource guide to involving young people with a disability in youth services*. [accessed online] www.yanq.org.au/images/stories/YDAC_Resource_Kit.pdf

International

Cambridgeshire Children's Fund and Save the Children Fund (2005). *Are you listening? A toolkit for evaluating Children's Fund services with children and young people*. London: Cambridgeshire Children's Fund & Save the Children.

Mantooth, L. (undated). *Youth in governance: A guide for adults involving youth as decision makers on boards and committees*. 4-H Youth Development. University of Tennessee. [accessed online] www.utextension.utk.edu/4h/ythgov/SP650.pdf

Participation Unit, The Children and Young People's Participation Consortium for Wales *Blast Off! Guides to increasing participation of children and young people*. [accessed online] www.participationworkerswales.org.uk/resources.aspx

Save the Children (2003) *So You want to Consult with Children? A toolkit of good practice*. London: International Save the Children Alliance.

Save the Children and Dynamix (2002). *Participation: Spice it up! Practical tools for engaging children and young people in planning and consultations*. United Kingdom [accessed online]. www.dynamix.ltd.uk

Save the Children Scotland (2001). *Re:action consultation toolkit: A practical tool for consulting with children and young people on policy issues (written by Sarah Madden)*. Edinburgh: Save the Children Scotland.

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