YOUTH
Development Engagement Guide
"Keepin' it real"

A resource for involving young people

> " Me mahi tahi ka tika – let's work together and it will be alright. "
>
> Ministry of Youth Development (MYD) – Te Manatū Whakahiato Taiohi Youth Advisory Group member

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

> " It's often said that the value of having young people in decision-making is because 'they are the future' – this is valid, but it seems like it's often overlooked that young people have valuable perspectives, experiences, and ideas that can enrich decision making **right now**. "

MYD Youth Advisory Group member

We can all contribute to the positive development of young people by creating opportunities for them to influence, inform, shape, design, and contribute to an idea or activity. Joining in and problem-solving by young people also helps ensure that policies, services, and programmes meet their needs and are more future-proof. Adults (as well as young people) can also gain new skills and experience through youth engagement.

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

This engagement guide was originally developed in response to requests from organisations and agencies on how they could increase youth engagement in their policy development, programmes, services, and organisations. The creation of this engagement guide supported both the Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa[1] and New Zealand's Agenda for Children[2], which were both developed with young people, and were designed for use by government and non-government organisations at many different levels.

The 2023 revision of this resource focused on updating the resource with evolved approaches to language, refreshed design, and the inclusion of new and useful information. This revision also supported the fifth recommendation from the 2022 Review[3] of the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy[4]: "Refreshing and amplifying best-practice guidelines for engaging with children and young people, to be shared across government agencies."

Your organisation, whatever its focus, will benefit from youth engagement. Along with this guide, we encourage you to use the many resources available in communities, including the people who are working with young people. Talk with organisations involving young people in decision-making and talk with young people about the forms of engagement that work best for them.

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1   The Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa is available at **myd.govt.nz**.

2   New Zealand's Agenda for Children is available at **msd.govt.nz**.

3   The 2022 Review of the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy is available at **childyouthwellbeing.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2023-05/OVERVIEW%20of%20Strategy%20Review%20A3.docx**.

4   The Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy is available at **childyouthwellbeing.govt.nz**.

Youth development through engagement

Youth development is about young people growing up and developing the skills and attitudes they need, both now and in the future. Young people need to feel positive and comfortable with their own identity, and to feel confident they have choices about their future.

Meaningful involvement helps young people develop ways for increasing their control over what happens to them and around them. They need to feel they are contributing something of value to society, and to feel connected to others and to society as a whole.

The Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa (Ministry of Youth Affairs 2002) describes youth development as:

- shaped by the 'big picture' – the wider community and influences on all our lives
- about young people being connected – with many social groups
- based on a consistent strength-based approach – resisting 'risk' and enhancing 'protective' factors and skills
- happening through quality relationships – being heard and responded to
- needing good information – finding and sharing
- prompted when young people fully participate – helping to control what happens to them and around them.

Youth engagement

Youth engagement means actively involving young people in all areas of our society – whānau, school, workplace, place of worship, social group, and wider community.

For organisations, this means involving young people in the work you do, not only by asking for their opinions and advice (consultation), but also, with your support, as leaders, advisers, and decision-makers.

True engagement relies on clear, open, and honest communication, and on really listening to what young people have to say, by:

- accepting their views
- not rewording their responses
- allowing everyone to have their say, in their own way.

There are many good reasons for fostering youth engagement:

Accepting diversity and new perspectives

Good decision-making processes allow for diverse points of views, beliefs, and experiences. Young people often bring with them new ways of thinking and acting that will add value to the work of organisations and projects. When all the relevant people are involved, you are more likely to 'get it right the first time', ultimately saving both time and money.

Utilising skills and expertise

While all people have a wide range of knowledge and skills, young people can add value through their unique skills, expertise, and experiences. Engaging also enables them to develop new skills, areas of expertise, and experiences.

Creating a positive, democratic organisation

It is democratic to have young people involved in decision-making. A wider range of involved people means a more open and fair organisation. It also contributes to the positive image of your organisation, making it easier to attract young people, and their friends and families, and to promote your organisation to them. Encouraging youth engagement also ensures youth contribution and involvement.

Positively developing young people

As well as developing their skills, young people's engagement fosters their awareness of issues that affect them and helps them to take action. You may also increase the sustainability of your own organisation by increasing the pool of people with the skills, interests, and commitment you need.

Meeting legal obligations

Some organisations may be legally obliged to involve young people in their decision-making processes. In fact, all young people have the right to participate according to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCROC). Signed by Aotearoa New Zealand in 1993, UNCROC applies to all young people under the age of 18 years. It recognises their rights to express their opinions, have their opinions considered in decisions that affect them, and to seek, receive, and give information and ideas of all kinds.

Taking a look at your organisation

There may be barriers to youth engagement, in your organisation or in the planned project, that you will need to work on before best-practice youth engagement is possible.

Barriers to engagement

Some of the common barriers identified by young people include:

- ageism/organisations that don't see the value in engaging with young people
- tokenism – young people feel they're only being engaged with as a tick-box exercise
- unfriendly and overly formal environments
- high demands on young people's time
- processes and procedures that appear complicated, overly formal, or unnecessary
- financial barriers – competition with work and/or expenses involved in engagement
- wellbeing barriers – including housing and mental/physical health
- social barriers – the engagement requires or encourages them to take part as an individual, as opposed to doing it with their social groups/peers/whānau
- overly academic or bureaucratic language
- lack of awareness – the engagement isn't promoted in spaces young people will see
- expectations that are not clearly stated or are unreasonable.

As well as barriers perceived by young people, there may be general barriers that hinder movement towards youth engagement. Some barriers identified by organisations include:

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

Supporting engagement

Whether young people are engaging in a one-off project, policy development, or anything in between, it is important to have structures and processes that help your organisation become one that:

- shows commitment to youth engagement
- is a youth-appropriate organisation
- provides training and support for young people
- respects young people.

The following questions might help with discussing your organisation's involvement of young people:

Are you committed to youth engagement?

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

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

> **Example**
> A national non-government organisation shows its commitment to young members being involved in decision-making in its constitution. The constitution stipulates that all of the organisation's decision-making bodies must have a minimum of 20% of members aged under 25 years.

Are you a youth-appropriate organisation?

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

- making meetings at times that suit young people
- providing transport (or funding for it) to meetings
- providing kai at meetings
- including structured activities balanced with fun and relaxation
- sharing information in the way they want, or ensuring they know how to participate in a formal meeting
- knowing when young people may have busy times (e.g., exams, sport/home commitments)
- ensuring your organisation is accessible to, and comfortable for, a diverse range of young people, or meeting in a more accessible and comfortable place for young people if it's not
- talking with young people about what you can do to make your organisation youth-appropriate, listening to what they have to say, and acting on it
- providing koha or payment for sharing their time and views with you, where possible and appropriate
- embracing the diversity of young people's opinions and not expecting there to be one unanimous 'youth' viewpoint on things.

Do you provide training and support for young people?

Finding ways to support and train young people benefits not only them, but your whole organisation. Your existing support and training can be enhanced to suit young people's needs, including:

- asking them what kind of support and training they would like/need
- supporting them to take responsibility for issues
- connecting them with relevant people and opportunities you're aware of e.g., to do with their career, interests or wellbeing
- organising a mentor or buddy system
- providing training.

Example
A government agency has set up a new youth advisory group to provide advice on a range of issues. At its first meeting, a weekend of training was provided for the members. The weekend provided an opportunity for the members to meet each other and staff members from the agency. They also spent time getting to know how the organisation worked and deciding how they wanted the advisory group to function.

Are you respectful of young people?

Respecting young people and treating them equally and honestly is just as important as it is with adults. Young people need to know what's expected of them and what they'll achieve through their involvement. A respectful relationship with young people includes:

- being open about how they can participate, how much weight their opinions will have, and how their input will be acted on
- not restricting what they can be involved in
- ensuring the decision-making process is clearly explained
- compensation for their time and input
- giving feedback on decisions made and acknowledging their part in the process.

Moving towards youth engagement

"Good youth engagement should feel empowering, inclusive, and meaningful for young people. Youth engagement should be designed in a way that is inclusive and welcoming to young people from diverse backgrounds and experiences. This can involve creating a safe and respectful environment, providing language support, and ensuring that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate."

MYD Youth Advisory Group member

Getting started

Before involving young people in decision-making, clarify the reasons for the planned engagement with everyone who might be involved.

Ask yourself:

- Why should young people be involved?
- What role will they have in decision-making?
- How will we make sure their voices are heard?
- How will we support them?
- What impact will their involvement have?
- How will we support and follow up with them after their involvement?

In whatever ways young people participate, it's important that the engagement is guided by the following principles[5], which contribute to positive youth development:

Engagement is by choice

Young people need to know they can choose to be involved, or not involved – there will be no repercussions.

Engaging is enjoyable, challenging, and fun

If they have a good experience when engaging, they are more likely to be open and honest, and continue to be involved.

Young people's awareness is raised

Raising awareness of social, political, and personal issues helps young people develop and leads to more informed decision-making.

Real issues are covered

We are all interested in issues that affect us directly, so involvement must be related to issues perceived as real by the engaging group.

Values and culture are respected and uplifted

Any form of engagement must respect that young people come from a range of cultures and ethnicities, and have different values, beliefs, expectations, and experiences.

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5   Based on principles developed by the National Children's and Youth Law Centre (1995) Promoting Youth Participation: A Rights Perspective, University of New South Wales, Australia, with additional principles added by the Ministry of Youth Development – Te Manatū Whakahiato Taiohi, Wellington, New Zealand.

Relationships are built

Providing time for building genuine relationships strengthens engagement.

Young people feel a sense of belonging and security

Young people are more likely to fully participate if they have a sense of belonging in a group and know they will be safe.

Adults are committed

Adults working with young people need to understand, and be committed to, youth engagement.

Adequate resources are provided

Organisations can show commitment to young people's involvement by providing adequate resourcing, including time, space, transport, funding, information, and feedback.

Contributions are valued

Organisations need to value the contributions of young people in the same way as they value the contributions of adults.

Levels of engagement

Different levels of engagement are appropriate for different projects and various stages of the same project. Providing information and consulting with young people may not always be enough.

The following table summarises 'Hart's Ladder'[6] and may help you look for the most suitable level of engagement:

Youth-initiated, shared decisions with adults	Young people have the ideas, set up the project, and invite adults to join them in making decisions.
Youth-initiated and directed	Young people have the initial idea and decide how the project is to be carried out. Adults are available for support but do not take charge.
Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people	Adults have the initial idea, but young people are involved in every step of the planning and implementation. Their views are not only considered but they are also involved in making the decisions.
Consulted and informed	The project is designed and run by adults, but young people are consulted. They have a full understanding of the process, and their opinions are taken seriously.
Assigned but informed	Adults decide on the project, but young people volunteer for it. Young people understand the project and know who decided they should be involved and why. Adults respect their views.
Tokenism*	Young people are asked to say what they think about an issue but have little or no choice about the way they express those views or the scope of the ideas they can express.
Decoration*	Young people take part in an event, but they don't really understand the issues.
Manipulation*	Young people do or say what adults suggest they do, but have no real understanding of the issues, OR young people are asked what they think, adults use some of the ideas but do not tell them what influence they have on the final decision.

* It's important to remember that Tokenism, Decoration and Manipulation are not examples of youth engagement. You are in a position to move away from these methods towards more meaningful engagement. Full youth engagement means that young people are involved in policy and programme development and in decisions about what is done.

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6   Adapted from Hart R (1992) Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship (Innocenti Essays No 4), UNICEF International Child Development Centre, Italy.

> " Tokenism is when young people are given supposed engagement opportunities but remain unempowered as decision-makers. Some ways adults can actively avoid tokenism is by:
>
> - allowing young people to define what an engagement needs to look like for them
> - trusting young people to make decisions and meet what may be seen as high expectations rather than underestimating their capabilities
> - listening more than you speak
> - being transparent in your plans to engage youth in decision- making
> - expanding youth roles beyond just having a seat at the table, youth are incredibly capable of participating within the system itself rather than critiquing it from the outside when decision-makers feel like it. "
>
> MYD Youth Advisory Group member

Making it happen

Different methods of engagement will suit different projects, or different stages of the same project. Working with young people will help you find the engagement methods which best suit them, your organisation, and the particular community you are working in. You can include young people in decision-making by:

- informing them
- consulting them
- forming ongoing groups
- sharing decision-making
- supporting youth-initiated and youth-led initiatives.

Informing young people

It is always important to keep stakeholders informed, and this includes young people. When informing young people, you can also ask them to be involved in other ways. Remember, you will need to keep them informed even if you already have young people involved in your organisation. You might use:

- social media
- email newsletters
- meetings/events
- website updates
- pamphlets
- radio, magazines, and television.

Ask:

- What are your aims in informing young people?
- Are there specific groups of young people you wish to reach?
- What about different languages, the style of language used, and the method of information?

> **Example**
> A local council sends a monthly email to a large number of young people and youth organisations, keeping them informed of what is happening within the council structure. The email newsletter also invites young people to give feedback on issues and lets them know the different ways they can be involved in decision-making. They also post eye-catching imagery with links to further information on their social media profiles.

Consulting young people

Consulting means asking for advice or feedback, usually on a specific issue or topic. It's important that the young people involved in the consultation process receive feedback about how their input is used, and the impact it has on any outcomes.

Ways of consulting include:

- hui, fono, workshops
- focus groups with a specific youth population
- interviews/focused conversations
- community youth forums
- written, text, or online surveys
- written, text, or online submissions
- social media.

Ask:

- Does the timing of the consultation clash with busy times for young people (e.g., exam times, school hours, work hours, etc.)?
- What is the best location, and what will the group need for the meeting to be comfortable?
- Is a facilitator required to meet the needs of the group?
    - If so, is the facilitator culturally appropriate and trauma-informed?
- What is the most youth-appropriate format and style for written material?
- What is the best way to provide feedback on how their advice has been used?

> **Example**
> A government agency conducting consultation with young people about policy employed a range of methods to gain feedback. They organised meetings around the country that young people could attend, using facilitators who worked regularly with young people. Young people who were not able to attend the meetings could also provide feedback through a zhui (hui over Zoom) or by completing a written response either online or in paper format. Everyone who provided feedback was sent an email informing them of the kind of information gathered during the consultation process and how that information would be used in the development of policy.

Ongoing engagement

Young people can be involved in regular decision-making through ongoing groups such as local government youth councils, student councils, or youth advisory groups. Young people involved in these types of groups are usually consulted or give feedback right through a project. Ways of involving young people on a regular basis can include:

- organising a youth advisory group for your project or organisation
- using an ongoing online forum for young people
- establishing a youth or student council (or working with one that's already established).

Ask:

- How will you encourage a diverse group of young people to be involved?
- Will the young people in the group be expected to represent the views of other young people, and how will this be supported?
- Will they need any training to fully understand what they will be commenting or working on?

> **Example**
> A local council has a youth council made up of two students from each of the secondary schools in the area. Youth councillors receive training to ensure they can gather the views of fellow students and understand the mechanisms of council. Any issues that impact on young people are referred to the youth council for comment. Youth council members are also involved in setting the annual plan and taking issues directly to Council.

Sharing decision-making with young people

Young people can fully participate in decision-making by being members of governance boards, committees, or project teams. In these roles they are often seen as representative of young people as a whole, so it is important to provide support for networking with other young people, and to ensure that the diversity of this broad group is understood. Sometimes it might be appropriate to also have a separate group of young people who work alongside your board/committee.

Ask:

- How will you ensure that institutional practices will not act as barriers to youth engagement?
- How will training and support be provided to give the necessary skills for equal contribution to decision-making?
- How will adults in the group be encouraged to take young people's views seriously?

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

Supporting youth-initiated and youth-led initiatives

Young people can participate by running their own projects and organisations. Adults and organisations can provide support and encouragement to youth ownership of initiatives by:

- offering financial support, advice, and access to resources
- providing access to meeting spaces and technology
- encouraging adults to respect young people and their decisions and treat them as equals
- promoting young people's successes
- ensuring advice and resources do not lead to adult domination of the project.

Ask:

- What kind of support can you offer young people?
- How will you encourage adults to support the project and the young people involved?
- How will you develop an equal, respectful relationship with the young people involved?

> **Example**
> A funding body was asked by its local youth council to consider developing a 'by youth, for youth' funding model. It now has a separate youth committee where young people allocate funding to young people's projects within their community. The funding body contributes a set amount of money every year and the youth committee decides on how the money will be spent. The funding body also provides the youth committee with meeting rooms, and access to administration resources and training.

Finding young people

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

Those who are sometimes overlooked include:

- rangatahi Māori
- Pacific young people
- young people from ethnic communities (in particular, former refugees and recent migrants)
- disabled young people
- rainbow young people[7]
- young people living in the regions[8]
- young people who are/have been in vulnerable situations.

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7   This resource uses 'rainbow young people' as an umbrella term to include all young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, pansexual, gender diverse, gender fluid, transgender, takatāpui, intersex, fa'afafine, leiti, queer, or whose sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression or sex characteristics differ from majority, binary norms.

8   The 'Regions' refers to non-urban, rural and often isolated regions across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Promoting engagement

When you have identified the range of young people you would like to participate, you will need to share the engagement opportunity in spaces that are relevant and important to them. Consider:

- working with other groups in your community – look for organisations that already work with young people and make use of networks already operating with specific groups of young people
- the type of promotion that will appeal to the young people you are looking for – talk with young people to find out what forms of advertising/promotion works for them and involve them in the design if possible
- promotion time – make sure you promote the opportunity well in advance to gain the widest publicity, and use both online and in-person pathways
- language – the content and style of your message, and the languages used.

Working with young people

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

Adults working with young people should be guided by the following principles:

- Adults must address imbalances of power between themselves and young people.
- Adults understand and are committed to youth engagement.
- Adults are honest with young people about the form engagements can take, and the amount of influence young people will have in the decision-making process.
- Adults are able to listen with open minds and recognise the value of young people's perspectives.
- Adults respect young people, and encourage honest and open engagement so young people and adults can learn from each other's experiences.

Specific groups of young people

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

It is important to note that these groups do not exist in isolation, and that an intersectional lens allows us to understand how memberships to multiple groups (for example, Pacific young people with a disability or chronic condition) shape young people in unique ways.

Some of the specific groups and points to consider are included below; it is also important to work with people and young people in your community who can help you identify ways to achieve full engagement.

Rangatahi Māori

Aotearoa New Zealand is a bicultural country, and government agencies have statutory and/or Treaty obligations to engage with Māori. However, engagement should not be limited to achieving formal obligations. Effective engagement with Māori, and rangatahi Māori, is key to producing better quality outcomes. It is important to consider:

- that there is no 'one voice' for rangatahi Māori – there are diverse perspectives, lived experiences, beliefs, and views
- possible cultural differences between iwi groups
- the importance whānau can play in the lives of rangatahi Māori
- that some rangatahi Māori (especially in urban areas) may not affiliate with an iwi
- the rights of rangatahi Māori to engage in a culturally appropriate and comfortable way.

Some ways you can support rangatahi Māori engagement include:

- working with established Māori networks and organisations
- having skilled mentors and facilitators to foster effective and equitable inclusion and process
- focusing on whakawhanaungatanga and building genuine relationships
- proactive outreach to prioritise and include a diverse range of rangatahi Māori
- appropriate resourcing, including for young people
- providing for whānau and support people to be present, if appropriate
- considering the environment and style of the engagement
- recognising that rangatahi Māori may prefer to work in te reo Māori
- ensuring privacy and confidentiality and clarifying this.

Pacific young people

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

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

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

- working with established Pacific people's networks and organisations
- having skilled mentors and facilitators to foster effective and equitable inclusion and process
- focusing on whakawhanaungatanga and building genuine relationships
- proactive outreach to prioritise and include a diverse range of Pacific young people
- appropriate resourcing, including for young people
- acknowledging that separate groups for people of different ethnicities may sometimes be appropriate
- considering the environment and style of the engagement
- recognising that some Pacific young people may prefer to work in their own language
- ensuring privacy and confidentiality and clarifying this.

Young people from ethnic communities (in particular, former refugees and recent migrants)

In this resource, ethnic refers to people belonging to one or more of the ethnic communities that are the focus of the New Zealand Ministry for Ethnic Communities, including people who identify as African, Asian, Continental European, Latin American or Middle Eastern. Things to consider include:

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

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

- working with established ethnic people's networks and organisations
- having skilled mentors and facilitators to foster effective and equitable inclusion and process
- focusing on whakawhanaungatanga and building genuine relationships
- proactive outreach to prioritise and include a diverse range of ethnic young people
- appropriate resourcing, including for young people
- acknowledging that separate groups for people of different ethnicities or genders may sometimes be appropriate
- recognising that some ethnic young people may prefer to work in their own language
- ensuring privacy and confidentiality and clarifying this.

Disabled young people

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

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

Some ways you can support disabled young people's engagement include:

- involving them in decision-making on the same range of topics as other young people
- having skilled mentors and facilitators to foster effective and equitable inclusion and process
- focusing on whakawhanaungatanga and building genuine relationships
- proactive outreach to prioritise and include a diverse range of disabled young people
- appropriate resourcing, including for young people
- ensuring any physical barriers are identified and removed or minimised,
- providing information well in advance, in appropriate ways
- recognising that some may need to use alternative methods of communication
- ensuring privacy and confidentiality and clarifying this.

Rainbow young people

Rainbow young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, pansexual, gender diverse, gender fluid, transgender, takatāpui, intersex, fa'afafine, leiti, queer, or whose sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or sex characteristics differ from binary norms, may be marginalised, and there is often a lack of societal awareness and understanding about their lives. Things to consider include:

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

Some ways you can support rainbow young people's engagement include:

- working with established networks and organisations
- having skilled mentors and facilitators to foster effective and equitable inclusion and process
- focusing on whakawhanaungatanga and building genuine relationships
- proactive outreach to prioritise and include a diverse range of rainbow young people
- appropriate resourcing, including for young people
- beginning engagements with a mihi whakatau that clarifies safety and asks for peoples' pronouns
- ensuring privacy and confidentiality and clarifying this.

Young people living in the regions

Recognise the difficulties of access to activities and programmes for many young people living in the regions. Things to consider include:

- accessibility
- transport
- their possible sense of isolation/disconnection with urban environments.

Some ways you can support young people living in the regions to engage include:

- creating accessible programmes/services
- having skilled mentors and facilitators to foster effective and equitable inclusion and process
- focusing on whakawhanaungatanga and building genuine relationships
- proactive outreach to prioritise and include a diverse range of young people living in the regions
- appropriate resourcing, including for young people
- facilitating internet connections/access
- addressing transport issues
- ensuring privacy and confidentiality and clarifying this.

Young people who are/have been in vulnerable situations

This includes young people with experience of the care or youth justice systems, young people with difficult home situations, young people living in poverty, homeless young people and young people living with addiction. Some important things to consider include that:

- there may be additional barriers to engagement for young people who are/have been in vulnerable situations
- young people who are/have been in vulnerable situations are likely to have experienced trauma
- organisations may need to get consent from other agencies to work with young people from this group.

Some ways you can support young people who are/have been in vulnerable situations to engage include:

- ensuring the setting provides a sense of physical and emotional security (e.g., is in a place familiar to them)
- giving the young person the option to bring a support person to the engagement
- asking the young person how they would like to engage
- having skilled mentors and facilitators (including trauma-informed) to foster effective and equitable inclusion and processes
- focusing on whakawhanaungatanga and building genuine relationships
- proactive outreach to prioritise and include a diverse range of young people
- appropriate resourcing, including for young people
- ensuring privacy and confidentiality and clarifying this.

Some practical considerations

Consent

As well as seeking informed consent from young people themselves before they participate, you may also need to seek consent from parents, caregivers, whānau, or community members. You'll need to look at:

- the ages of the young people involved
- the ways in which young people are engaging
- the information they may be providing
- their family or community background.

Confidentiality and ethics

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

- they will have their confidentiality respected
- it's okay for them to change their mind about participating
- how the information will be used if they contribute.

Process and timeframe

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

Location and meeting style

Young people are much more likely to be fully involved in the decision-making process if the location is accessible and youth-appropriate. Informality may sometimes be helpful to encourage engagement, but in some circumstances, this may be seen as disrespectful. Where formalities are used (such as a formal meeting structure), it's important to ensure that all those involved understand the process for contributing in advance. Before an engagement begins, it's also a good idea to include a mihi whakatau that clarifies safety and sets a kaupapa of respect.

Resources

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

Facilitators and supporters

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

Sensitive topics

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

Youth suicide prevention

Research shows that encouraging young people to focus on suicide can place vulnerable people at risk. There are a number of guidelines on how to work with young people around the issue of youth suicide prevention. For more information, contact the Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand **mentalhealth.org.nz**.

Age range

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

- topics
- level of engagement
- method of engagement
- whether young people might want to bring a support person with them
- safety (e.g., where young people may need to travel away from home).

Feedback and evaluation

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

> **For young people, it's important to receive feedback that is specific, actionable, and respectful. This means that the feedback should be clear and specific, highlighting the positive aspects of their input and providing constructive criticism where necessary. The feedback should also be actionable, providing young people with the tools and resources they need to continue engaging with the issue or topic at hand.**
>
> MYD Youth Advisory Group member

Feedback

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

You could provide feedback by:

- posting in online groups or emailing to keep people informed
- ensuring meeting minutes are easy to read, sent out promptly, and followed up at the next meeting
- having follow-up meetings
- regularly providing updates
- asking respondents what their preferred form of communication is (e.g., WhatsApp, email, etc.).
- allowing opportunities for respondents to reply in their own languages.

Evaluation

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

You could evaluate the engagement process by:

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

Remember to consider the specific communication needs of your particular group of young people and that not everyone may have the same communication preferences.

Checklist

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

Project name
Brief description of the project (a whole organisation approach, a policy project, research, a new or existing youth programme, service or event, a youth-focused resource)
Describe the purpose and objective for involving young people (reasons why young people are being involved)
Describe the methods you will use to involve young people (including regular ongoing involvement with a core group and/or consultation with a wider group or a consultation event to set up a regular group) Consider: Youth engagement methods (regular involvement in a meaningful way throughout the process), including: • same process as adult involvement • separate parallel process • a combination of the above. Consultation methods (usually one-off events seeking views at specific points), including: • face-to-face methods – focus groups, hui, fono, interviews, focused conversations • written/visual methods – surveys, submissions, email, social media, zhui (hui over Zoom).
Describe the range of young people to be involved in the methods and how they will be recruited Consider: • target group/s of the project • the potential needs of the young people • how you are going to recruit.

Describe the practicalities of involving young people

Consider:

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

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

Describe how the youth engagement and consultation processes will be evaluated

(including how young people will be involved in evaluation)

Useful references

Where to find further information

Website addresses

Ministry of Youth Development – Te Manatū Whakahiato Taiohi
myd.govt.nz

Ministry of Social Development – Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora
msd.govt.nz

Mana Mokopuna – Children & Young People's Commission
manamokopuna.org.nz

Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy
childyouthwellbeing.govt.nz

The Hive
thehive.nz

Ara Taiohi
arataiohi.org.nz

InsideOUT Kōaro
insideout.org.nz

Rainbow Youth
ry.org.nz

VOYCE – Whakarongo Mai
voyce.org.nz

Disabled Persons Assembly
dpa.org.nz

Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People
whaikaha.govt.nz

Ministry for Pacific Peoples – Te Manatū mō ngā iwi ō Te Moana-Nui-ā-Kiwa
mpp.govt.nz

Te Puni Kōkiri – Ministry of Māori Development
tpk.govt.nz

New Zealand Government – Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa Portal
govt.nz

Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People
acyp.nsw.gov.au

Victorian Government Youth Central
youthcentral.vic.gov.au

Youth Affairs Network Queensland
yanq.org.au

International Youth Fellowship
iyf.org

Useful resources

Mana Taiohi – youth development principle-based framework – Ara Taiohi

A principle-based framework for people who work with young people in Aotearoa New Zealand, informed by the voices of young people and people who work with young people, Aotearoa based literature into positive youth development, and a Te Ao Māori worldview.

Ngā Tikanga Whānaketanga – He Arotake Tuhinga – Ara Taiohi

A multidisciplinary synthesis of contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand research on youth development and wellbeing, as part of a broader review of the Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa (2002).

Te Tūhonotanga ki Te Hunga Māori He rauemi hei hapai ngā kaimahi o Te Taiao ā Toi – Engaging with Māori: a guide for staff of the Bay of Plenty Regional Council – Bay of Plenty Regional Council

A Māori engagement guide for staff of the Bay of Plenty Regional Council that provides a range of tools and advice, with the aim to ensure that engagement is meaningful and leads to positive outcomes for Māori, Council and the wider community.

Engagement with children and young people: Best practice guidelines – Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Best practice guidelines designed to support people in the public sector as they seek to hear and empower the views and voices of children and young people.

Freechild Institute Tools – Freechild Institute for Youth Engagement

Various toolkits and information pages for people working for or in youth voice, youth engagement, youth empowerment, youth leadership, youth/adult partnerships, or other related areas.

Te Tapatoru: a model of whanaungatanga to support rangatahi wellbeing – Logan Hamley, Jade Le Grice, Lara Greaves, Shiloh Groot, Cinnamon Lindsay Latimer, Larissa Renfrew, Hineatua Parkinson, Ashlea Gillon and Terryann C. Clark

A research paper outlining a model of whanaungatanga based on the experiences and insights of 51 rangatahi.

Ethical considerations in social research with children and young people – Malatest International

A research paper intended to inform discussion about what researchers should consider when planning social research and evaluation with children and young people.

Yavu – Foundations for Pacific Engagement – Ministry for Pacific Peoples – Te Manatū mō ngā iwi ō Te Moana-Nui-ā-Kiwa

An engagement guide for anyone who works in local and central government, or the private sector, who engages with Pacific communities. The guide also includes specific information on engaging with Pacific young people, Pacific Rainbow+ people, Pacific disabled people, and Pacific people online.

Child Impact Assessment Tool – Ministry of Social Development – Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora

An assessment tool to help government and non-government organisations in Aotearoa New Zealand to assess whether policy proposals will improve the wellbeing of children and young people.

The Youth Health and Wellbeing Survey – What About Me? – Ministry of Social Development – Te Manatū Whakahiato Ora

A survey of 7,209 young people years 9 to 12 in their schools during 2021, with an additional 502 survey responses from youth of the same age completed in their communities (e.g. at alternative education), capturing data and insights to inform decisions and policies to support youth wellbeing.

Various Youth Engagement and Youth Voice Resources – Ministry of Youth Development – Te Manatū Whakahiato Taiohi

The Resources and Reports page for MYD, which includes links to youth engagement resources, guides for getting your voice heard as a young person, research reports, and other useful tools.

Listening to the voices of children with disabilities – Office for Disability Issues – Te Tari Mō Ngā Take Hauātanga

A report that considers how the perspectives of disabled children can be taken into account in the development of the policy and law that affects them.

Disability Toolkit for Policy – Office for Disability Issues – Te Tari Mō Ngā Take Hauātanga

A disability analysis tool to help policy practitioners explore policies through the inclusion of a disability lens as they move through the policy process.

Checklist before you start your engagement – Mana Mokopuna – Children & Young People's Commission

A checklist for adults planning to or thinking about engaging with mokopuna.

Child and Youth Engagement Toolkit – Mana Mokopuna – Children & Young People's Commission

A toolkit for adults to support children and young people to have their say on the development of the Child and Youth Wellbeing Strategy (2019).

- **Consent form exemplar** – Mana Mokopuna – Children & Young People's Commission
An example consent form for anyone considering engaging with children.

- **Examples of fun activities** – Mana Mokopuna – Children & Young People's Commission
Various activity-based ideas for engaging with mokopuna.

- **Mai World: Child and Youth Voices** – Mana Mokopuna – Children & Young People's Commission
A project that listens to, engages with, and amplifies the voices of mokopuna to share them with decision-makers.

- **Planning Guide** – Mana Mokopuna – Children & Young People's Commission
A planning guide intended as a starting point to guide the user through some key steps when planning an engagement with children.

Guidelines for engagement with Māori – Te Arawhiti

Guidelines to support effective engagement with Māori, including advice on how government and non-government organisations can decide who they need to engage with, how to engage, and how to develop an effective engagement strategy.

The Youth2000 Survey Series – Various universities

Beginning in 1999, the Youth2000 series has included over 36,000 young people in Aotearoa New Zealand, with findings used widely to inform policy and practice. The latest in the Youth2000 series is the Youth19 Rangatahi Smart Survey, which combines core Youth2000 questions with a new focus on youth wellbeing.

Kia Tika, Kia Pono – Honouring Truths – VOYCE Whakarongo Mai

An ethical framework to guide engagement with tamariki and young people who are care experienced (who currently or at some stage in their lives have been in foster or residential care).

Te Tuāpapa Whakawhanake Rangatahi – Youth Engagement Framework – Wellington City Youth Council

A youth engagement framework written with the aim of increasing youth engagement with local government in Wellington.

Code of Ethical Practice – Youth Affairs Council Victoria

An ethical code for people working in the youth sector in Victoria, Australia.

Contact Organisations

There are a wide range of organisations you may be able to partner with, such as:

- local authorities
- schools
- youth organisations
- community organisations
- service clubs
- national non-profit organisations
- churches and religious organisations
- central government agencies
- industry training organisations.

YAG
Youth Advisory Group
Ministry of Youth Development
Te Manatū Whakahiato Taiohi