

# YOUTH

## Engagement

### Benefits for your Organisation

“ Young people make up **17%** of the population but **100%** of the future. ”

Ministry of Youth Development (MYD) – Te Manatū Whakahiato Taiohi  
Youth Advisory Group member



MINISTRY OF  
YOUTH DEVELOPMENT  
TE MANATŪ WHAKAHIATO TAIOHI

*Administered by the Ministry of Social Development*

Young people's thoughts, experiences, opinions, and ideas add an important and vibrant quality to decision-making. For regional and national growth to be sustainable, young people need and want to be involved. Young people have consistently told us that they want their voice heard in decisions that impact them and their future. They must be supported and enabled to be part of the conversation about shaping a productive, sustainable, and inclusive Aotearoa New Zealand. Their involvement is vital for a number of reasons:

## Youth engagement supports better decisions

“ We are the people of the future, so we should be included in discussions and decision-making that's gonna affect us for the rest of our lives. ”

MYD Youth Advisory Group member

Government policies have a significant impact on young people and their lives. Policies that affect the whole community and specifically impact on young people's lives benefit greatly from youth engagement. Young people are valuable members of the community and have a wide range of experiences, viewpoints, and ideas to contribute alongside other citizens.

Good policy needs to be informed by the viewpoints of those the policy intends to benefit. By including youth engagement in public decision-making processes, research shows there can be a marked improvement in the quality of programmes and services received by young people.

## Youth engagement involves those who cannot vote

Young people under 18 years of age don't have the opportunity to influence the formation of government through voting in general or local body elections. Providing alternative means of contributing to decision-making and ensuring good communication channels are critical in providing those under 18 years with a voice.

Youth engagement is about creating opportunities for young people to influence, solve problems, inform, shape, design, and contribute to an activity or idea. These opportunities are created through developing a range of formal and informal mechanisms for youth engagement from:

- youth advisory groups and focus groups
- youth-friendly consultations
- youth councils
- online engagements through social media
- surveys
- a combination of the above.

## Youth engagement improves outcomes for young people and communities

Healthy youth development occurs when young people have the opportunities and support to contribute to their communities and wider society in a way that they feel valued and respected. Having access to effective youth engagement is a vital factor in cultivating young people's wellbeing and their sense of belonging and identity.

Giving young people a place in decision-making processes builds a broader base of citizen involvement and creates stronger, more inclusive communities. Both young people and communities benefit when young people are active partners in projects that aim to build community wellbeing.

## The Principles of Effective Youth Engagement

Before involving young people in decision-making, there are a number of steps that will help to ensure good youth engagement practice. The following principles<sup>1</sup> are tools to support you in involving young people meaningfully and effectively in decision-making.

# STEP ONE

## Get organisational commitment

“ Involve young people **from the outset** of a project. Don't just add it onto the end as an afterthought. ”

MYD Youth Advisory Group member

- Provide support to staff that will be working alongside young people.
- Allocate adequate resources (including budget).
- Create an action plan for the engagement.
- Create real roles for young people.
- Find relevant projects for young people.
- Make a plan for how you will value young people's contributions.
- Involve young people from the beginning to the end of the process.

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

# STEP TWO

## Create space for young people's involvement

“ In order for me to feel like I can fully participate and engage, it's important for me to **feel safe and welcomed**, which is only possible when my **needs are met**. I also need to feel like I'm not on the table as a token but rather as **someone whose voice matters and is heard**. ”

MYD Youth Advisory Group member

- Be respectful of young people's cultural beliefs and values.
- Invite a diverse range of young people to participate (go to them, don't expect them to come to you!).
- Ensure engagement opportunities are accessible to all.
- Inform young people that they are under no obligation to participate.
- Ask the young people what they need in order to engage best.
- Be aware of the potential barriers young people may face and the strategies you will use to overcome them and/or support the young person to work with them.
- Provide young people with information about the project, topic, and the decision-making process.

# STEP THREE

## Create a youth-friendly environment

- Make sure the physical space is inviting and comfortable for the young people involved:

“ Depending on the topic(s), an inward-facing table is generally a good rule. Have **water and snacks** available. **The setting is also important**, let's not book a meeting room that feels like a sweat cage after two hours. And remember to **have breaks** and allow time to go off topic. ”

MYD Youth Advisory Group member

“ If you're meeting with rangatahi Māori, meet at a **marae or purpose-built-whare**. If you're meeting with the LGBTQIA+ community, include **mihi whakatau** that clarifies safety by **asking pronouns and set a kaupapa of respect**. ”

MYD Youth Advisory Group member

- Build positive and ongoing relationships between your organisation and young people.
- Develop a sense of belonging and security for young people so that they can be honest and don't feel the need to self-censor.
- Create youth engagement that is fun, challenging, and meaningful.
- Provide young people with timely feedback about the decision-making process and how their input was given.

## MANA TAIOHI

([arataiohi.org.nz/mana-taiohi](http://arataiohi.org.nz/mana-taiohi))

Mana Taiohi is a principle-based framework created by Ara Taiohi – the peak body for youth development in Aotearoa New Zealand. Informed by youth voices, people who work with young people, Aotearoa New Zealand-based literature, and a Te Ao Māori worldview, it's an important and useful framework to use when planning engagements and in considering how you will practise its interconnected principles.

“ **Don't just listen.** Take on board what they're saying and use it. It's one thing to say **you've heard** from young people but applying what they've said is where change really happens, and it's how your organisation **will thrive** even more. ”

MYD Youth Advisory Group member

MYD encourages and supports the use of a positive youth development approach to help support all young people, aged between 12 and 24 years old, to increase their overall wellbeing so that they are better able to succeed in, contribute to, and enjoy life. It also supports the broader youth sector and promotes a better understanding of how best to support and empower young people.

MYD provides a range of support to improve youth input in government decision-making including:

- comprehensive youth engagement advice on policy and programme matters
- uplifting and promoting the importance of youth voice in decision-making
- expertise in facilitating face-to-face youth engagement methods
- strong links to local and national youth organisations
- guides and resources about undertaking youth engagements and involving young people in decision-making.

For more information and advice about youth engagement, contact MYD.

**Contact us**

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