

YOUTH

Engagement

in Local Government


“ Ensure that the **engagement** captures the **diversity** of your region. ”

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 have consistently told us that they want their voice heard in the decisions that impact them and their future. Many councils are doing great things around youth engagement that are effective and have positive benefits for councils, communities, and young people.

Young people have a stake in local government, use services provided by councils, and are an integral part of the community. They bring new energy and ideas to issues and decisions, often with unique perspectives. For regional growth to be sustainable, young people need and want to be involved.

Effective engagement is about young people:

- being informed
- having opportunities to add value to your council's activities
- making decisions or being involved in the decision-making process
- developing leadership and advisory skills
- organising themselves
- influencing outcomes on issues which affect their own lives and their communities
- continuing to be involved in monitoring and follow-up
- feeling safe, supported, included, and valued.

Youth engagement can mean a number of different things. Each council needs to ask what kind of experience it is they want to provide young people, and what their desired outcomes are. Examples of ways to engage directly with young people in your community are included on the next page.



Online engagements

Online engagements can be good because they allow a greater number of young people to get involved, and the time commitment tends to be smaller. However, the quality of the support and development the young people receive does tend to be far less.

Online engagements could include:

- running an open zhui (hui over Zoom) to discuss a specific project or programme
- social media polls and/or question call-outs
- surveys
- youth newsletters
- a combination of the above.

Online engagements can also be added on to higher quality engagements and can be especially effective when young people are involved in their design. For example, if your Youth Advisory Group is providing feedback on your council plan, they might want to consult a wider group of young people via a combination of online efforts.

Youth-friendly consultations

Youth-friendly consultations with young people can occur in a number of ways, including:

- collaborating with schools to carry out certain parts of the consultation
- running youth forums and focus groups
- consulting with existing youth advisory groups
- partnering with young people to do the listening and talking with other young people.

Youth-friendly consultations have a clear purpose in ensuring young people are:

- given the choice to participate
- fully informed and aware of the purpose of the consultation
- listened to and taken seriously
- involved in the design and implementation of the consultation
- are kept informed of the results and outcomes.

Youth Advisory Groups

These may be organised on an “as needed” basis to advise councils on issues and events as they arise. They provide a youth perspective and the opportunity for young people to develop a range of skills and abilities. They work best with a designated staff member working alongside young people. It’s important that advisory groups have a purpose and are given real projects to advise on.

Examples of activities Youth Advisory Groups may engage in include:

- evaluating the performance of a specific council programme from a youth perspective (e.g., council services used by youth)
- advising on the creation of a new project or event
- evaluating and improving a council city plan
- advocating for the communities they belong to within a specific project
- communicating between the council and the community on a specific project.

Youth Councils

A Youth Council is a formal group or board of young people that provides representation or a voice for youth in the community. Councils facilitate the involvement of young people in local governance and decision-making. Youth Councils can consist of ten to 12 participants, or more in larger communities. Compared with Youth Advisory Groups, Youth Councils tend to meet more consistently, be more across wider council activities, and have more access to leadership development opportunities.

Examples of activities Youth Councils may engage in include:

- representing the views of young people at a local level
- organising events
- advocating for issues that matter to young people
- facilitating consultation on council plans
- making submissions or creating petitions to the council or government
- speaking at council and youth council meetings.



Ensure that the engagement **captures the diversity** of your region. Meet young people **where they are at**, don't expect them to meet you where you are. ””

MYD Youth Advisory Group member

No matter your engagement type, it's important that:

- the council is 100% committed
- young people are involved from the beginning
- a designated council staff member works alongside the engagement/s
- there are fun elements, and it's not all work no play
- council members and staff are supported to work with and alongside young people
- there is an adequate budget, meeting resources, and staff support
- the focus is on real issues and there is an opportunity to facilitate change and provide timely feedback.

Get the message out

Once you've decided on an engagement type, it's time to promote the opportunity. There are lots of ways to reach young people. These could include:

- local schools, alternative education programmes, and universities
- social media and online forums
- youth groups (including specific branches of youth groups e.g., rangatahi Māori, Pacific young people, rainbow young people, disabled young people etc.)
- sports and recreation centres
- parents and whānau
- places of employment
- maraes, churches, cultural clubs, and societies.

It will be especially effective if you involve young people in the design of your message.



“ Make sure you’re telling **every young person** in the area about the opportunity to **join your engagements** – personally I didn’t know for a long time that they existed. ”

MYD Youth Advisory Group member

Advice from young people

In 2023, we asked young people what advice they would give to councils looking to set up a youth engagement and they had this to say:

- “Listen to us genuinely, we have a lot to offer.”
- “Follow the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.”
- “Work in partnership with us.”
- “Critically reflect on whether the engagement is tokenistic, and whether the information collected will be treated with respect during and after the engagement.”
- “Ask us what we need in order to engage best.”
- “Pay us for our time!”
- “Provide us with support and resources so we can contribute fully.”
- “Be clear and consistent with your intentions.”
- “Make sure the right people are carrying out the engagement process.”
- “Make the space inviting, relatable, safe, liberating, confidential, and informal.”
- “Expand roles beyond just a seat at the table.”
- “DO IT!”

Contact us

Phone: 0508 FOR MYD (367 693)

Email: mydinfo@myd.govt.nz

Website: myd.govt.nz

Instagram: [instagram.com/ministryyouthdevelopment](https://www.instagram.com/ministryyouthdevelopment)

Facebook: [facebook.com/ministryofyouthdevelopment](https://www.facebook.com/ministryofyouthdevelopment)



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