



contributing and changing

Young People's Involvement
in Government Planning and
Decision Making

Purpose

A declaration signed by Ministers called “Stepping Forward: Improving the pathways for all young people” describes a vision of an Australia where:

- young people's opinions and contributions are sought and valued; and
- young people are encouraged and supported to take an active role in their local communities and the nation.

Contributing and Changing: Young People's Involvement in Government Planning and Decision Making broadly describes the actions Australian governments will take and the principles governments have endorsed to ensure young people's participation is meaningful and ongoing.

Aged between 12 and 25 years, young people are valuable members of the community and make significant contributions to community life. Government policies have a significant impact on young people's lives and, accordingly, young people are entitled to have their voice heard in public policy making. Young people's participation in decision-making provides opportunities for them to influence or have 'their say' on issues of importance to them. Getting involved also means young people will learn new skills along the way.

Actively engaging young people in the design and delivery of public policies, programs and services that impact on their lives is common sense and is critical to their success. Including young people in decision-making also contributes to a balanced, representative and democratic community that ultimately benefits all Australians.

Principles

Young people have a diverse range of assets and resources and can contribute positively to government decision making in many different ways. Australian governments are committed to the following principles which underpin young people's engagement in the design and delivery of public policies, programs and services.

Empowerment

Empowering young people refers to increasing the ability young people have to personally influence what is happening in their lives and communities. In government decision-making processes this includes:

- involving young people in the planning and delivery of services that interest and impact upon them;
- equipping young people with skills so they can increasingly contribute to decision-making and instigate matters for government consideration;
- creating the opportunities for young people to become more involved in their communities.

Valuing diversity

Youth participation and engagement processes will be creative, flexible and inclusive of young people's diversity. This diversity includes cultural and linguistic background, gender, life-experience, view-points, age, health and well-being, location, class, disability, spirituality and sexuality.

Purposeful engagement

Participation will be beneficial to young people and be a positive, meaningful experience, which acknowledges young people's input and contributions.

Encouragement

The freedom of young people to comment, provide advice and participate is respected and fostered by governments.

Commitments

The successful engagement of young people to influence and contribute to the development of policies, programs and services occurs across all levels of government. Engagement processes are not always perfect and real challenges and barriers to young people's effective participation still exist. The following statements of commitment by Australian governments will enhance the engagement and participation of young people in government decision-making.

Creating the enabling conditions for participation

Young people's participation in government decision-making is valued. Governments recognise that young people may require additional support, skill development and resources to best enable them to participate in the development of policy, programs and services.

Accordingly, Australian governments are committed to better assisting young people's engagement and participation by:

- creating more opportunities for engagement in government decision making processes;
- empowering young people to participate through the provision of information, training and support, including clearly defining roles and responsibilities;

- providing a range of user friendly participation mechanisms and options to best engage the diversity of Australia's young people;
- seeking, valuing and recognising young people's contributions;
- providing adequate resources to facilitate young people's participation;
- providing young people with feedback on decision making outcomes and how all contributions have been taken into account; and
- doing it better: ensuring systems and processes for reviewing and improving young people's active involvement in government decision-making.

Young people and change and innovation

Active participation processes encourage young people to raise their own issues with government. They also encourage or enable young people to take responsibility for their contribution to solutions.

Government is committed to recognising young people's role as instigators of change and innovation by:

- creating opportunities that enable young people to instigate and lead issues for government consideration, as well as respond to government priorities and agendas;
- developing relationships that enable governments and young people to share in agenda-setting, discussion of policy and the development and evaluation of policy, programs and service options;
- ensuring there is sufficient time and flexibility during consultation processes to allow for the emergence of new ideas by young people; and
- recognising and supporting young people who are current leaders in change and innovation.

Sharing what works

Australian governments are committed to sharing information about youth participation and engagement processes and experiences.

There are many examples of successful engagement with young people in government decision-making. We can learn from these experiences and continually improve our methods.

Valuable information comes from:

- constantly reviewing and improving the processes that facilitate young people's engagement in government processes;
- creating opportunities to showcase effective responses for facilitating young people's active engagement in the development of policies, programs and services;
- modelling and testing best practice in engaging young people; and
- encouraging and facilitating young people learning from one another through peer support.