

Always provide feedback

Provide feedback as soon as possible after the consultation occurred. Young people are regularly consulted and feedback from them indicates that they rarely hear what happened to their ideas and views. If at all possible, provide them with a transcript of their consultation, or a summary of all responses. Ideally, also send them a copy of a final report or notify them of actions that have occurred in response to their views.

Remember to think about what is in it for them

Providing some form of recognition for participation is always a good idea, particularly if you want young people to participate in any future consultations. Seek advice from people such as youth workers, teachers and foster carers as to what may be an appropriate form of recognition. For example, a certificate of participation may be suitable for one group; yet another group may not participate at all unless you provide a pizza at the consultation. Food is a great way to engage with young people and it also rewards them for their participation. Bus passes to get to and from the consultations may also be useful.

You don't have to do the consultations yourself

There are a number of effective participation mechanisms that can be used for consulting with young people. Skilling up young people to conduct the consultation on behalf of the organisation is one option. The Tasmanian Youth Forum and the Youth Network of Tasmania are excellent community resources on youth participation and they may be able to assist with a consultation. A further option is to provide adults who work directly with young people with tools to collect the information you are after.

A 'good' consultation provides as much information to young people as they give back to you

To enable young people to participate effectively in the consultation they need to understand the topic of the consultation and what is required from them. Provide a short simple summary – either written, verbal or a combination of both – to the young people and also a copy to anyone who may be assisting them. Throughout the consultation clarify any 'wild' perceptions and answer any questions that the young people may have about the topic. At the end of the consultation provide any relevant phone numbers, web sites, and brochures that may help those that wish to find out more information or provide feedback. Depending on your subject matter, it may be useful to leave the contact details of Kids Helpline or other support services in case the discussion raises issues for them.

Top 10 Tips

SYC's guide to consulting with Young People



youth network of Tasmania
www.ynot.org.au

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Tasmania
Explore the possibilities

*SYC (Statewide Youth Collaborative Group)
is a partnership between Government and
non government service providers*

Consulting with young people takes time – don't rush it

Young people lead busy lives. Some work, go to school, volunteer, look after siblings and/or parents, have social lives, have homework, get involved in relationships, are affected by crisis, and sometimes they do all this at once! Many young people rely on public transport and have limited access to money, and generally have very little time to fit everything in. Don't expect a rapid response from young people, unless you are asking for an on the spot comment on a board at a youth event. If you want more detailed comments from young people, talk with their youth workers, teachers etc about a fair timeframe for feedback. Keep in mind that you may need to gain permission from relevant authorities (including schools) to consult with young people and this takes time. It may also take a while for young people to feel comfortable around someone who is asking for their thoughts on issues. Time taken to get to know one another will be well spent!

Identify which young people you want to hear from

First, identify which young people you wish to consult with and how specific they need to be for your consultation - e.g. refugees, young people with a disability or youth justice clients. Think about which organisations (such as Councils, youth health centres, sporting clubs) connect with the young people you want to hear from through organised activities. Once you have determined and located the group you want to talk with, decide what activities you may be able to do with them. If you are unsure of who your target audience of young people is or don't know how to contact them, ask the Youth Network of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Youth Forum for assistance.

Be flexible, fun and innovative

Standard consultative mechanisms will not work for everyone. For example, a written response via snail mail or the web may not be the best way of capturing the views of a wide range of young people, or young people from a specific group. Some young people, like adults, respond better to visual aids or open face to face discussions rather than the written word. Literacy skills should be taken into consideration as some young people may not have a high level of reading or writing ability. Some young people may prefer to participate in a group where they can interact together; others may appreciate the opportunity to provide individual feedback. The key is finding out from young people themselves how they want to be consulted. Again, those organisations who support young people will be able to assist you find this out.

Don't always do the same activities with young people

One size does not fit all. Not all young people are techno savvy or have immediate access to the web, SMS, Twitter, Facebook, My Space etc. While social media sites are an excellent way of communicating with young people, some may not have access to the Internet or the ability to use these kinds of technologies. Although most youth centres and all educational facilities provide access to the web, computers, printers etc, this does not guarantee that young people will respond to your requests for input. Most educational institutions do not permit students to access social networking sites. It is best practice to have multiple ways of engaging young people.

Many young people prefer face-to-face conversations

Organising face to face contact will take time. You may like to get assistance from the local youth workers or teachers to help organise young people to come to you; better still, make the effort to go to them in their home territory! Regardless of where you meet, research the location of the meeting and the group or individual beforehand so you can prepare the appropriate type of consultation e.g. visual, audio or written; and whether you might use butchers paper and games, or simply listen and take notes.

Be careful about raising expectations

This not only applies to the young people but also to the adults who may be helping with the consultation. For example, if you are consulting on public transport and young people identify that their area has no buses, then they may expect that these issues will be fixed. If nothing else, respect their participation and tell them who and what the information is for and explain how it might affect the final decision making processes. Be open about any constraints that may prevent their suggestions from being realised. Gaining some understanding of constraints such as budget, legislation or policy is part of the learning process for young people. Remember, consultation is a conversation between yourself and the community.

