

GUIDE 02

GETTING INTO THE RIGHT MINDSET



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Why is youth engagement important?

When young people are involved, they bring new ideas that help shape government policies and programs. This collaboration helps create better solutions for them and the broader community. By listening to young people's experiences, we can make sure policies match their needs, leading to more innovative and inclusive programs and services.

Meaningful youth engagement means young people actively help make decisions and shape policies. It's important for government to listen to their views and create spaces for real conversations. This approach builds trust and empowers young people to play a role in shaping the future.

So, how can we do this? This guide will help you understand what it takes to build trust between young people and institutions. It will encourage you to reflect on your approach to youth engagement and identify opportunities for growth. By the end, you should feel ready to start your engagement journey with young people!



01

REDEFINING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Effective youth engagement means genuinely listening to young people and including their views and experiences in policies and programs. It's important to understand the difference between communication and engagement:



Communication is sharing information about decisions that have already been made.



Engagement is about building relationships and involving people in discussions and decisions.

There are different approaches to youth engagement. It is important to choose the best approach to engagement for the initiative you are working on. All engagement approaches, if done well, can lead to better policy and program outcomes:

1. **Consultation:** Young people are invited to contribute their ideas and opinions via facilitated mechanisms.
2. **Collaborative:** Young people co-produce policy alongside policymakers as equitable partners.
3. **Youth-Led:** Young people lead the design and implementation of initiatives to influence policy.

Each engagement approach has different strengths and limitations, is more suitable to certain contexts and stages of the policy cycle, and has particular methods or tools to support the engagement approach.

See 'Guide 5: Ways to engage young people' for more information on the different approaches to engagement.

To support genuine youth engagement, policymakers should:



View youth as collaborators, not just participants.



Recognise their influence on policies that affect them.



Focus on lasting partnerships and mutual learning.



Commit to giving feedback on how their input is used.

See the 'Define your why' checklist to help you define the purpose of youth engagement clearly and ensure it is tied to actionable outcomes.



02

UNDERSTANDING POWER DYNAMICS IN YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

Power dynamics between policymakers and young people can create barriers. Shifting the focus to empower young participants ensures their ideas are genuinely valued. This involves recognising existing power structures and being intentional about leveling the playing field between you and young people.



YOU CAN GET STARTED BY:

Reflect on your position:

Reflect on how your position influences interactions with young people.

Fostering collaborative spaces:

Create environments where youth feel comfortable sharing their ideas freely.

See the 'Reflect on your influence' checklist to help you reflect on how young people might perceive your position and authority during engagement activities.

See the 'Check your assumptions' checklist to help you examine any assumptions you have about what young people can or want to contribute.

See the 'Consider different perspectives' tool to help capture the different views of young people and policymakers before your engagement.

03

BUILDING ON A FOUNDATION OF ETHICAL ENGAGEMENT

Inclusive youth engagement is only possible if it's informed by an ethical approach. A group of young people, youth serving organisations, Australian officials, and the Australian Government's Youth Steering Committee worked together to create ethical guidelines to inform youth engagement approaches. See the 'Ethical Engagement Guidelines' [here](#). Considering these guidelines at the start and throughout your youth engagement initiative will support you to take an effective, compassionate, and enjoyable journey.

