

# YOUTH ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT





## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

The Australian Government acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia where we gather, live, work and stand. We acknowledge all Traditional Custodians, their Elders past and present, and we pay our respects to their continuing connection to their culture, community, land, sea, water and skies.

We extend this respect to all First Nations young people and acknowledge the importance of First Nations young people having a strong connection to their culture and Country. We also recognise and support the right of First Nations young people to self-determination and to share decision-making with the Australian Government.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Office for Youth would like to thank all involved in developing the Toolkit. We would also like to recognise the Australian Government's Youth Steering Committee, and all young people involved through consultations. The efforts of all those involved in research and engagement were instrumental in shaping this Toolkit, which will continue to grow and be adapted to meet the Office for Youth's evolving work.

# INTRODUCTION

In March 2024, the Australian Government launched the youth engagement strategy, Engage! which commits to improving engagement with young people in the decisions that affect them, and build the capability of Government departments and agencies to effectively engage with young people. A key commitment of Engage! is the Youth Engagement Toolkit.

The Toolkit is an evidence-based resource comprised of practical guides, and concise templates that assist in effective engagement with young people aged 12 to 25.

The Toolkit aims to support Australian officials by providing practical tools and frameworks that foster inclusive collaboration, align youth participation with policy objectives, and ensure that young people have an opportunity to shape decisions that impact their lives. Young people hold the potential to provide policymakers with new information and different perspectives to help approach challenges in a more inclusive and respectful way.

The Toolkit was designed in collaboration with officials and youth representatives. This resource values the diversity of Australia's youth population and aspires to support safe and inclusive engagement with all young people in government decision making. However, the Toolkit is a resource that can be used by any individual or organisation working closely with young people.



# YOUTH ENGAGEMENT PRINCIPLES OVERVIEW

Through *Engage!*, the Australian Government has outlined the following principles for working with young people:

## PLANNING

- We ensure that engagement is informed and led by young people.
- We give young people and their advocates time to prepare and respond.
- We are honest about the scope and impact of young people's contributions.
- We collaborate with the youth sector.

## DELIVERING

- We meet young people in the spaces they feel most comfortable.
- We make engagement fun and diverse.
- We create accessible, respectful and inclusive spaces.
- We are transparent about how information will be used.

## FOLLOWING ON

- We close the loop with young people and let them know how their contributions were included.
- We include young people in evaluation.

## **YOUTH ENGAGEMENT SUPPORT, BARRIERS AND FRAMEWORK**

Across the Toolkit you will find advice on how to engage young people to access valuable insights and foster inclusive decision-making. With the right support you can create meaningful engagement initiatives that support young people to contribute effectively.

By embedding youth engagement in all stages of policy development, policies and programs that affect young people will be more responsive to the needs and aspirations of young people.

### **What works for youth engagement?**

Successful youth engagement is often achieved when there is a supportive culture, adequate resources, and inclusive practices. Organisations that are genuinely committed to youth engagement have:

- a positive attitude towards young people
- a diverse youth network with many perspectives
- a commitment to accessible communication and engagement.



## Effective youth engagement involves:

- **Listening:** Pay attention to what young people are saying and value their opinions.
- **Involvement:** Genuinely include young people in decision-making processes that affect them most.
- **Support:** Provides resources and guidance to help young people express their experiences and ideas.
- **Respect:** Treat young people as equals and acknowledge their contributions.
- **Opportunities:** Create chances for young people to lead projects and activities where it makes sense to do so.
- **Education and upskilling:** Offer training, mentorship and encouragement to build skills and confidence.
- **Feedback:** seek feedback on how to improve youth engagement methods and provide feedback on how young people's advice has been considered and adopted.
- **Engaging with First Nations Young People:** Engagement must recognise and respect unique cultural backgrounds, perspectives, and needs while celebrating and valuing the unique insights and experiences First Nations young people have to offer.
- **Ensure diversity:** Engage young people with diverse lived experience.

## What has stopped meaningful youth engagement in the past?

Barriers can include:

- Being unsure of how to engage in a safe and inclusive way.
- Not having the resources and time to engage young people meaningfully.
- Not having the skills to engage young people in an innovative and age-appropriate way.



## How to get started

As someone who has picked up this Toolkit, you've already taken a big step in learning about how to successfully engage young people.

Read through this Toolkit to build up your skills and knowledge. You can also reach out to the Office for Youth for any questions you have or support you may need.

