

## GUIDE 05

# WAYS TO ENGAGE YOUNG PEOPLE



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# TOOLS AND MINIGUIDES



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## Why do the ways we engage with young people matter?

The ways we engage young people matter because they directly influence the depth, quality, and inclusivity of their contributions. Different engagement methods open doors for a wider range of young people to participate, allowing us to meet them where they are most comfortable and able to share their ideas authentically. By providing diverse and flexible options—like workshops, consultations, surveys, or creative activities—we respect young people’s varied experiences, strengths, and communication styles. Thoughtfully choosing our engagement methods is about fostering long-term, collaborative relationships that can lead to more impactful, inclusive, and sustainable outcomes.



# 01

## OVERVIEW OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT APPROACHES

There are three broad approaches to youth engagement in policy settings:



**Consultative:** Young people are invited to contribute their ideas and opinions via facilitated mechanisms. Can be short term or one-off engagements e.g. surveys, or longer-term e.g. youth advisory groups.

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**Collaborative:** Young people co-produce policy alongside policymakers as equitable partners.

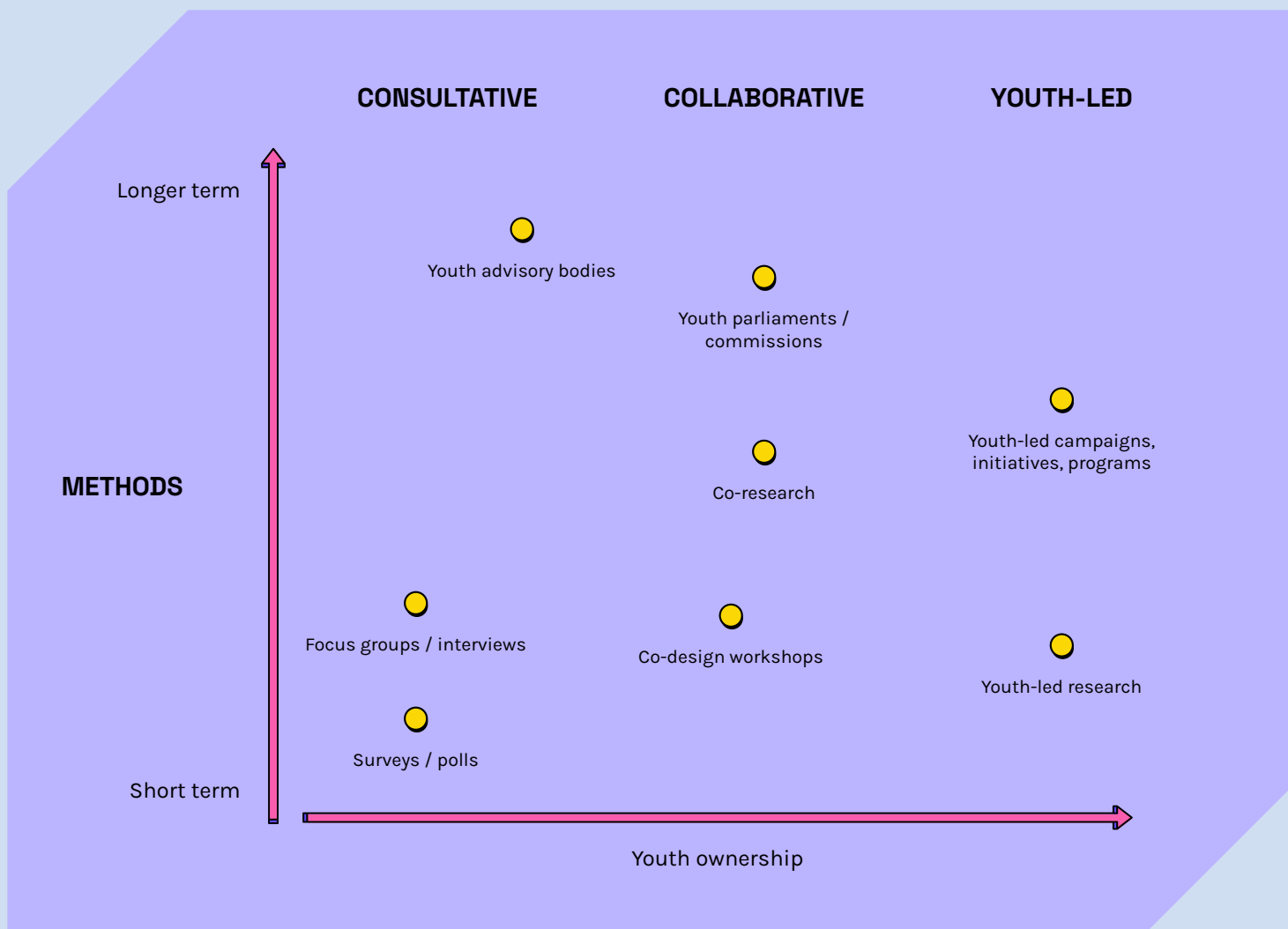
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**Youth-led:** Young people lead the design and implementation of initiatives to influence policy.



See the ‘Strengths and limitations of engagement approaches’ mini-guide for more information on the roles of young people and policy makers in each approach, along with the strengths and limitations.



Some methods work well for short term or one-off consultations with young people to hear their opinions and feedback. Over longer periods of time, other methods can provide young people with more ownership of the process and empower them to genuinely inform policymaking. Different methods can be combined and tried at different stages of the policy cycle, from collecting evidence, to making decisions.

Young people want to collaboratively work in partnership with policymakers in ways that are mutually respectful. The most appropriate approach to engagement is dependent on the context, including:

- The goals of the policymaking process.
- Resources and time available.
- The skills and capabilities of those involved (both policy makers and young people).
- The age, location and other demographics of young people.
- Young people's own priorities, interests and capacity (and the barriers that certain groups of young people face).

Whatever approach is taken, the most important goal is to ensure it is meaningful for all those involved. To do this, reflect on three questions at the beginning, and throughout the process:

1. Are we in the right mindset for starting youth engagement? (See 'Guide 2: Getting into the right mindset')
2. Are we enacting the ethical guidelines for successful youth engagement? (See 'Guide 2: Getting into the right mindset')
3. How do we know what is working well? (See 'Guide 8: Tracking impact and outcomes')

## Planning and designing youth engagement

Five tips for designing youth engagement initiatives that are grounded in youth engagement principles:

**Avoid assumptions:** Listen to young people's needs and ideas. Understand how they want to be involved and the challenges they face.

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**Work together:** Involve young people in planning events and creating surveys. They can also help lead discussions and evaluate outcomes.

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**Define goals:** Be clear about what you want to achieve. Set goals together with young people so they know the purpose.

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**Use mixed methods:** Combine surveys for broad input and small-group workshops for deeper discussions.

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**Start small:** If resources are limited, begin with a few actions and expand gradually. Document what you learn for future use.

# 02

## BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND TRUST

We know that many young people can be sceptical about engaging with government. Strong relationships allow young people to feel able to speak up when they need support, and to feel confident to fully contribute. Building strong relationships is about all collaborators putting in effort, time and commitment to meet each other where they are at.

See the '*Building relationships and trust*' mini-guide for some strategies to try.





# 03

## HOW TO ENGAGE YOUNG PEOPLE ACROSS THE POLICY CYCLE

Young people can be engaged in any stage of the policy cycle – it does not need to be in the beginning issues identification stage, or only in the consultation stage.

Sometimes, decisions or plans are made before youth engagement happens. Involving young people from this point on is still possible. Be up front about what stage you are at, and why young people's input is needed now. If it's within scope to change, ask young people for their feedback on the decision or plan and other ways they'd like to be involved moving forward.



The below diagram shows instances where young people can be engaged. It is not always possible to include young people in all stages of policy development, but there are many options available.

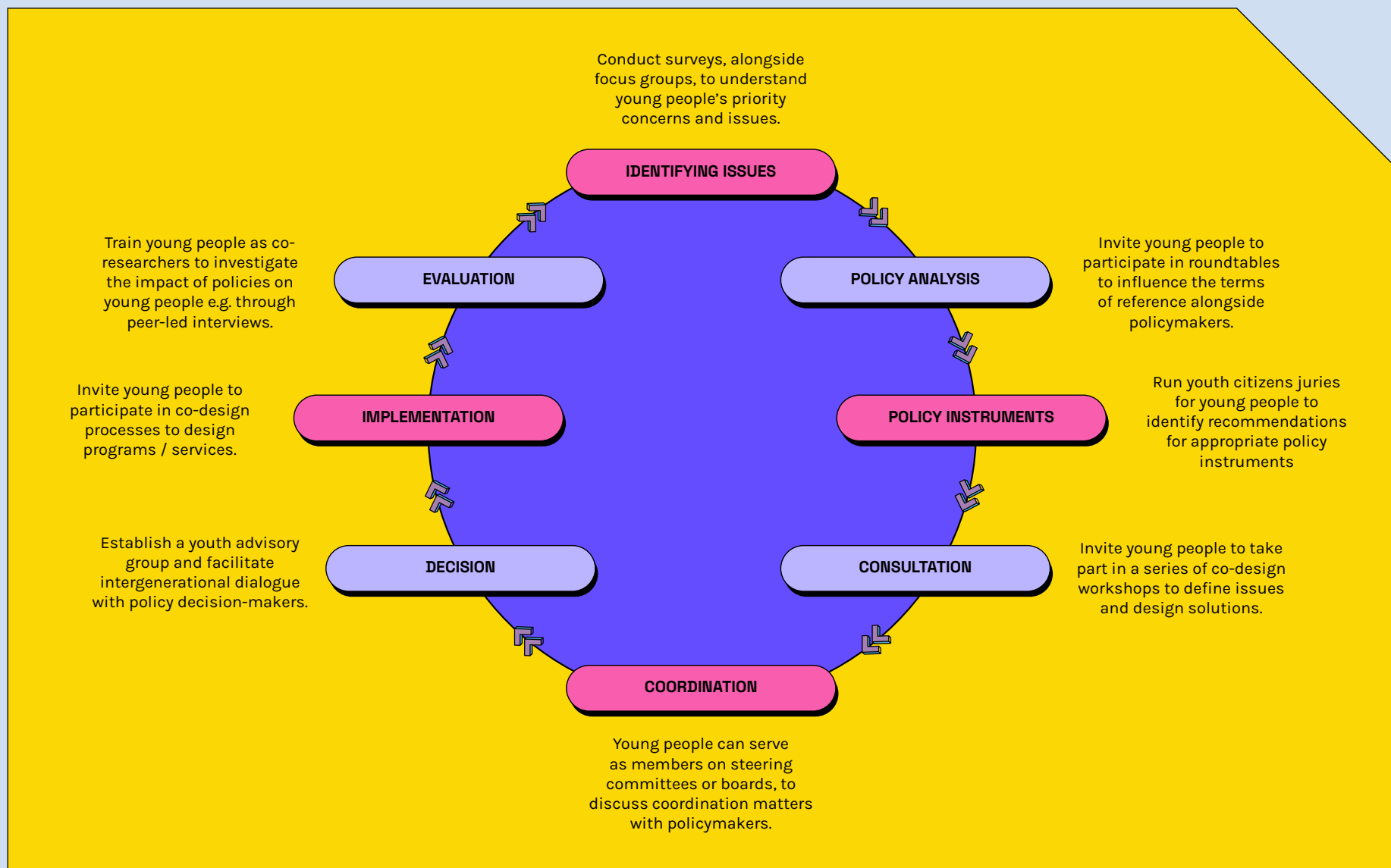
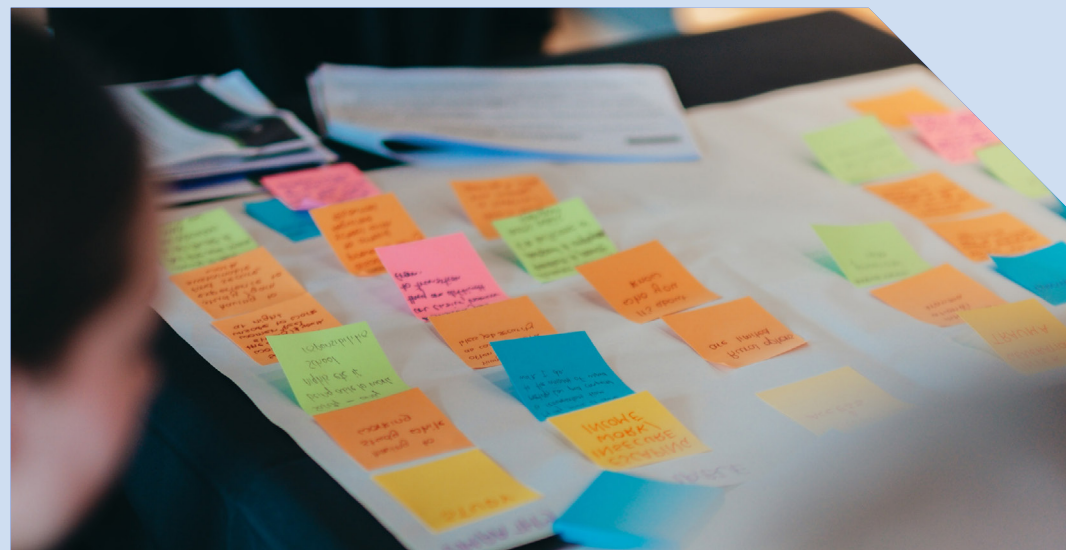


Figure adapted from: Althaus, C., Bridgman, P., & Davis, G. (2018). *The Australian policy handbook : a practical guide to the policy making process* (6th edition.). Allen & Unwin.

To foster meaningful engagement, it is important to create spaces for facilitating rich discussions, with connection, mutual learning and fun. Ideally, you will have the resources to work carefully and deeply with young people. But, no matter what the circumstances, strive to maximise opportunities for collaboration, where young people can see what impact their involvement has had.

- **Inclusivity and flexibility:** Make sure engagement methods suit everyone, considering physical and cultural needs.
- **Transparency:** Be clear on the purpose and what decisions can be influenced by youth input.
- **Respect and accountability:** Value young people's contributions and follow up on their feedback.
- **Fun and engagement:** Keep activities enjoyable to foster creativity and team building.



## **FURTHER RESOURCES**

There are many youth focused organisations committed to empowering young people's engagement in policy processes who have expertise and existing relationships with young people. See some examples below:

- The Australian Government Office for Youth
- Foundations for Tomorrow
- Think Forward
- Foundation for Young Australians