

INQUIRY INTO COMMUNITY CONSULTATION PRACTICES

Organisation: Youth Affairs Council Victoria

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Committee Secretary
Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee
By email: epc.council@parliament.vic.gov.au

YACVic Submission: Inquiry into Community Consultation Practices

Dear Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee,

Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into Community Consultation Practices in Victoria.

As the peak body for young people and the youth sector in Victoria, a key part of YACVic's work is elevating the voices of young people to government and ensuring our advice is based on meaningful youth participation. Young people have a right to participate in decision-making that affects them, and our vision is to ensure young people are respected, and they are active, visible and valued in their communities.

Young people are the experts of their own lives, and have the contemporary, real-world knowledge and experience of issues and opportunities impacting them and their communities. However, young people's voices are largely underrepresented in community consultation, often misrepresented or tokenised, and rarely included in government decision-making. Too often, young people are left out of the conversation, they are given limited meaningful opportunities to contribute, or discussions are held too late as a 'tick box' exercise. Excluding young people from community responses can lead to feelings of disconnection, alienation, and disengagement from both the community and democratic processes.

Involving young people is about understanding their unique perspectives and experiences and making sure more underrepresented voices are heard – so government can make informed policy decisions, and strengthen community trust, connection, and transparency. Further, young people have unique and valuable perspectives which are sometimes missed by adults, but which their peers may relate and respond to. They are often creative, innovative, and forward-thinking, bringing a lens of intergenerational equity to policy solutions.

Meaningful youth consultation requires giving young people a seat at the table, involving them from the start, and creating safe environments for them to grow and learn to contribute meaningfully. Young people are leaders in their own right, and giving them a seat at the table builds their capacity and skills to engage with policy development and community leadership.

It makes sense to speak with young people, not for them, and for them to speak for themselves.

This submission is based on the voices of young people and youth workers supporting young people through our Youth Participation Practice Network (YPPN),



and should be read in conjunction with YACVic's key work on youth participation, including:

- [Youth Engagement Resource Platform \(YERP\)](#): This is a comprehensive resource funded by the Victorian Government launched in late 2024, co-designed with 10 young people, following extensive consultation with young people and the youth sector. It provides best practice advice on youth participation (involving young people in decision-making processes). Relevant resources to this Inquiry include:
 - [Youth participation: getting started](#) – including why involving young people is important; youth participation 101; how to involve young people; why hire young people; and youth participation models.
 - [Youth participation: level up](#) – including paying young people; transparency; how to invite meaningful feedback from young people; organisational advice (including for the Government); and approaching evaluations.
 - [Youth participation in action](#) – including creating a Youth Advisory Group; how to run a consultation with young people; and why and how to have young people on interview panels and boards.
 - [Diversity and inclusion](#) – including consulting First Nations young people and cultural safety; engaging disabled young people and access needs (creating an access key and a social script); and creating accessible and inclusive spaces.
- [Youth Participation Practice Network \(YPPN\)](#): YACVic convenes and coordinates a thriving network of over 700 Victorian professionals who are committed to empowering young people through best practice youth participation, engagement and supporting the voices of young people.
- ['A seat at the table': Young People and Disaster Recovery](#) and [Fact Sheet: Engaging, Including and Consulting with Young People](#): This is a guide to meaningful Youth Engagement, Participation, and Inclusion.
- [Future Proof: Young People, Disaster Recovery and \(Re\)building Communities](#): A report on the outcomes of YACVic Rural's 'Future Proof' project, with funding to develop a Youth Advisory Group and supporting the participation and input of 183 young people in the project's decision-making.
- [Mapping youth policy, participation mechanisms and services across Local Councils in Victoria](#): In 2021 YACVic undertook a project examining the development of local Youth Strategies, highlighting the need to increase co-design with young people in the design, development, and delivery of local council youth strategies.
- [Code of Ethical Practice for the Victorian Youth Sector](#): This document outlines the ethical practices and responsibilities of youth workers in Victoria, centring the rights of young people as the primary consideration in decision-making. In 2023-24 the Office for Youth funded a revision of the



Code, co-designed with young people and the youth sector, which will be available in July 2025.

Our recommendations align with Victoria's Youth Strategy, [Our Promise, Your Future](#), and [Victoria's Child Safe Standards](#).

We ask that the Committee recommends that the Victorian Government:

1. Strengthen youth consultation practices in line with best practice for meaningful youth participation, as outlined in the [Youth Engagement Resource Platform \(YERP\)](#) developed by YACVic. This includes:
 - Engaging young people at the beginning
 - Ensuring consultations are accessible and inclusive
 - Skilled and youth-led facilitation
 - Building transparency and closing the feedback loop
 - Remunerating young people
2. Strengthen consultation practices with First Nations young people in line with the Values, Knowledge and Actions set out in '[Wayipunga](#)', KYC's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth participation framework.
3. Strengthen consultation practices with multicultural young people in line with '[Not just ticking a box](#)', the Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network's resource and CMY's '[Inclusive Organisations Good Practice Guide](#)' for engaging and supporting youth participation with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.
4. Extend consultation timeframes to a minimum of 10 weeks to allow for meaningful youth engagement and outcomes.
5. Improve transparency by clearly stating what assumptions have been made about young people and what research and data has been used to design the consultation approaches.
6. Avoid tokenism and consultation fatigue by clearly stating the purpose of engagement, how input will be used, and provide feedback to youth participants to show their contributions are valued.
7. Involve young people in the design and distribution of promotional material of consultations to ensure they are youth-specific, including using social media to promote opportunities.
8. Prioritise inclusive outreach to underrepresented young people, building on partnerships with youth organisations and community services to reach young people who may not be engaged through mainstream platforms. This requires sufficient time to be allocated to building relationships with community organisations.
9. Invest funding to support and expand YACVic's Youth Participation Practice Network (YPPN) to empower members with knowledge, skills and



confidence in facilitating youth participation – including stronger engagement from the Office for Youth (OfY) at the YPPN meetings.

10. Engage platform – Strengthen youth-friendly channels on Engage, including language, accessibility and format of engagement opportunities, co-designed with young people. Provide support for OfY to promote opportunities to the youth sector and community organisations.
11. Leverage local council resources to increase youth engagement. YACVic recommends the government dedicate funding to establish best-practice processes for youth engagement across local councils. This could be done by expanding YERP – Youth Engagement Resource Platform with dedicated articles for local councils.

We would welcome the opportunity to give evidence at an upcoming public hearing for this Inquiry, including support for representation from a young person(s).

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Sincerely,

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Mary Nega

CEO YACVic

Young people's experiences of community consultation practices

This section explores Terms of Reference (TOR) (a): community consultation practices done by, and on behalf of, state and local government authorities in Victoria.

[*Victoria's Youth Strategy*](#) focuses on youth participation in *Priority 4: Young people are respected and involved in decisions in their community*, highlighting that “every issue our state faces is an issue of importance to young people”. Young people have a human right to participate in decision-making, and are passionate about shaping a fairer, more sustainable, and inclusive future for themselves and their communities.

Mission Australia's latest Youth Survey shows young Australians are interested and engaged in political and social issues, but almost 65% did not feel their community gave them a voice on important issues.⁽¹⁾ Young people are too often overlooked or excluded from community consultations or engaged in tokenistic ways which lack meaningful and diverse engagement.



Through discussions with our YPPN and Youth Advisory Groups, some challenges and common barriers include:

'Tick box' or tokenistic opportunities

When young people are not engaged at the beginning of the planning and design process, this results in consultations that are not designed with or for young people. Frequently, questions are not relevant to young people or tailored to their experience, and overuse inaccessible language and jargon. Many young people are not provided support to engage in safe and meaningful ways – such as through group agreements, pre-briefing and de-briefing, being paid for their time, and lack of clarity on the consultations scope, purpose or expected impact. This can leave young people feeling disempowered, disconnected, and can erode trust.

Unrealistic timeframes

Community consultations are frequently open for feedback for short periods limiting young people's opportunity to meaningfully contribute. Young people need time to find the opportunity and then consider, research, and feel empowered to respond and participate in consultations.

For youth organisations like YACVic to support young people in consultations, we need a minimum 10 weeks lead time to ensure young people's engagement is informed, supported, safe, and ongoing, including to:

- identify the issue and its relevancy to young people and provide evidence-based solutions
- translate the language used in the opportunity and make it accessible to young people
- promote the opportunity to young people through our networks and socials
- design the session, including preparing young peer facilitators and considering risk and child safety
- check in with participants and run a pre-briefing, including overview of their rights to privacy, and what to expect from the engagement
- run the consultation and debrief with participants
- remunerate young people
- follow up with support if needed
- close the feedback loop to ensure young people understand the outcome of the consultation and how their lived experience will be used.

A failure to provide substantial time to community consultations often leads to tokenistic outcomes, resulting in policy and program solutions which are not relevant or relatable to the intended audience.

Target cohort not being reached

Excluding young people from the initial engagement design process can result in a lack of targeted information sharing, so young people do not know about the



consultation, find out too late, or do not know how to contribute. Consultation times often clash with other commitments (such as school or employment), rural and regional young people need to travel, and an overreliance on remote consultations excludes some cohorts – such as those without access to reliable internet or a device at home.

Over-consultation and consultation fatigue

Too often, consultation without tangible action or change leads to consultation fatigue, resulting in young people disengaging from civic processes and losing faith in government decision-making.⁽²⁾ When consultations lack meaningful outcomes or fail to incorporate feedback or existing knowledge, community members become disengaged or exhausted.

No feedback loop

Closing the feedback loop in consultations is essential, but often missed or deprioritised. Closing the feedback loop happens when you inform young people about the result or impact of their feedback, ensuring youth participation is meaningful. Consultations rarely work if young people are tokenised for their efforts and fail to make young people feel like they have a place in these discussions, and their lived experience is respected.

Best practice for community consultation with young people

This section explores TOR (c) standards of conduct, including preparedness, to be expected in community consultations; (d) groups or regions unrepresented by existing consultation practices, and options to improve their engagement; and (f) best practice community consultations.

Youth participation through consultation is about providing meaningful opportunities for young people to influence decision-making processes, valuing their contributions and empowering them to help shape our world. The concept relates to ideas of citizenship and how young people can be actively involved in society.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child states that young people have the “right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child”.⁽³⁾ Participation is a human right, and a strong protective factor for young peoples’ wellbeing. This is reflected in Standard 3 of the [Victorian Child Safe Standards](#), which states “Children and young people are empowered about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.”



Involving young people from the start in planning and design, ensuring consultation is safe, engaging, and accessible.

Planning

Consultations should be thoroughly planned with and for young people to ensure that they feel comfortable to express themselves openly and provide their own opinions on issues that affect them. Involving young people in the planning right from the start will make the consultation more engaging and accessible for other young people. Young people should be given the opportunity to identify and define the problem, as well as influencing solutions. Furthermore, receiving input early from young people may be more cost-efficient, as it reduces the need for additional consultations or policy redesign.

The IAP2 Spectrum shows that different levels of participation are needed depending on the goals, time frames, resources and levels of concern in the decision to be made.⁽⁴⁾ Most importantly, the Spectrum sets out the promise being made at each participation level. View the full resource [here](#).

If possible, consultations should be co-designed with young people. This is a participatory tool for problem-solving that brings those with technical expertise and lived experience together, on equal ground, to explore ideas and design solutions. Teams that include young people bring their lived experience, and often very valuable technical expertise too, into projects and critical decision making.

Safety

Safety considerations of the group are paramount in the planning phase. This includes meeting the requirements of the [Victorian Child Safe Standards](#) if participants are under 18, and, depending on the topics covered and who is attending, whether ethics approval is required.

Trauma informed approaches should be used whenever working with young people. Working in alignment with the [Code of Ethical Practice](#) for the Victorian Youth Sector can also help to develop empowering and safe spaces for young people.

Community partnership and collaboration

Consultations are most effective when delivered in partnership with youth services, schools, and community organisations that have established, trusted relationships with young people. These organisations bring deep expertise in inclusive, safe, and culturally responsive youth engagement—ensuring consultations are more meaningful and representative.

Youth engagement is particularly powerful when young people are supported to lead the process themselves. At YACVic, we train and support Young Peer Facilitators to design and run consultations with their peers.⁽⁵⁾ This model creates spaces that are not only safer and more engaging, but also more relevant



to the lived experiences of participants. It also builds young people's confidence, skills, and leadership capacity.

However, government often underutilises these existing networks and capabilities. Community organisations frequently lack the resources—and the lead time—needed to design and deliver high-quality youth consultations. Without proper resourcing and collaboration, opportunities for genuine youth participation are missed, and the quality of input is diminished.

Meaningful engagement with young people

Promoting the consultation

Ensuring young people are aware of consultation opportunities requires:

- Involving young people in the design and distribution of promotional activities to ensure they are youth-specific – this will make them appeal to other young people.
- Use social media to promote opportunities – including TikTok and Instagram.
- Promote through organisations, networks or partnerships that young people access, such as youth services/organisations, schools, TAFEs, universities, libraries, or sports centres.

An engaging conversation

Consultations with young people should meet them where they are at, and be fun, engaging, and provide opportunity for young people to develop their knowledge and capacities and skills for decision-making.

The best method (or combination of methods) for engaging with young people will depend on the circumstance. For example, collecting individual responses via surveys, interviews or internet and social media discussions, or collecting group responses via forums, reference groups, peer consultations, arts programs, or contacting young people's groups or organisations.

Best practice for engaging young people:

- The purpose, objectives and expectations of the consultation must be clear, and communicated in a number of accessible ways.
- To meet the needs of young people, consultations should be flexible and make use of multiple engagement methods including multiple formats such as hands on activities, art, storytelling, podcasts, and games.
- Hold consultations in accessible locations (both online and in-person) and times (for example, after school).



- Provide incentives such as remuneration, food, transport access or accommodation costs for rural and regional young people.
- Ensure language and communication is youth-friendly so young people can understand and give meaningful responses, including explaining complex terms.
- Work collaboratively with young people to establish clear ground-rules from the start such as, 'everyone has the right to be heard and respected', or, 'this discussion is confidential'.
- Build trust between the facilitator and the participants, and among participants.
- Use skilled facilitators with a deep understanding of the issues, lived experience, or working with young people.
- Support young people to lead consultations, developing deeper peer-led conversation.
- Respect and value young people's lived experience and ideas.

For consultations over a long period, think about strategies to keep young people engaged.

- Provide regular updates, celebrate participants' efforts and recognise any gains, no matter how small.
- Broaden young people's roles so they are engaged at different levels. For example as consultants, an advisory group, or engaged in the research and report writing process.
- Consider training participants to carry out further consultations with other young people.

Ensuring consultations are inclusive, accessible and culturally safe for the diverse needs of participants by breaking down barriers to participation.

Consultations must prioritise cultural safety, inclusivity, and access needs. As a starting point, young people should be asked how they prefer to participate and offered a number of ways they can engage.

Resource: [Youth participation 101](#) – including barriers to participation and how to address them.

Accessibility

If a consultation is not accessible, then young people may be unable to participate fully and effectively, or at all. Some accessibility tips include:



- Having gender neutral toilets
- Regular breaks after 45-60 minutes
- Ensuring spaces can accommodate mobility devices
- Using plain language in verbal and written communication
- Using captions and providing interpreters if necessary
- Limiting fragrance
- Sending information in advance so people can feel prepared.

This list is not exhaustive. It's important to ask young people for their access needs so you can make their experience more accessible. It is also best practice to make spaces, events and programs inclusive regardless of who is there.

For best practice on consulting with disabled young people, YACVic recommends working with the [Youth Disability Advocacy Service \(YDAS\)](#), the leading voice for disabled young people's inclusion.

Resources:

- [Understanding disability](#)
- [How to ask someone about their access needs](#)
- [How to create an access key](#)
- [Creating accessible and inclusive events, programs and meetings](#)

Cultural safety

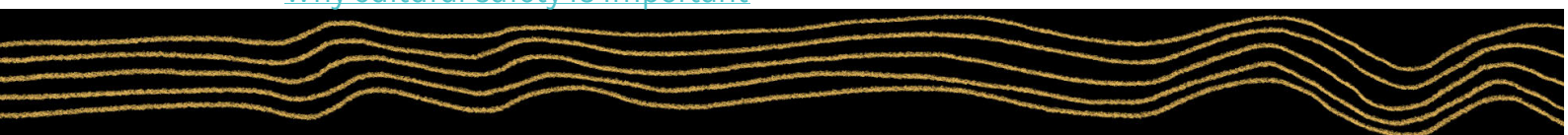
Young people come from many different backgrounds and cultures and sometimes this means spaces are not safe for them. This may be due to a lack of understanding and competency around their lived experiences, and ways to support them. As a result, young people may feel uncomfortable, or that they need to be a 'spokesperson' for their group or identity, and the burden of educating the people around them falls on the young person. Young people also report the burden of assumptions and biases that many young people from First Nations communities and those with refugee and/or migrant backgrounds face.

'Cultural safety' is a term originally [from First Nations people](#). Consultations should make an effort to understand how First Nations young people have unique cultural safety considerations. Different communities will often have different structures around consultation processes and how to engage with them respectfully.

For best practice on consulting First Nations young people, YACVic recommends working with the [Koorie Youth Council](#), including strengthening practices in line with the Values, Knowledge and Actions set out in '[Wayipunga](#)', KYC's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth participation framework.

Resources:

- [Culturally safe youth work for First Nations young people](#)
- [Why cultural safety is important](#)



For best practice on strengthening consultation practices with multicultural young people, YACVic recommends working with multicultural youth organisations. This includes practice in line with the [Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network's](#) (MYAN) resource '[Not just ticking a box](#)', and the [Centre for Multicultural Youth's](#) (CMY) resource '[Inclusive Organisations Good Practice Guide](#)' for engaging and supporting youth participation with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds.

It's essential to recognise that young people have different experiences and ideas, and to avoid over-consulting with the same young people to address gaps in understanding and knowledge.

Inclusive and safe spaces

Access and cultural safety are crucial to creating safety, but being inclusive and ensuring the right to 'feel safe' is upheld goes even further. Making a space welcoming for all young people and their intersectional identities is fundamental. There are complexities that arise from having multiple intersecting identities and this can sometimes result in young people feeling uncomfortable in some settings that only support one facet of their identity.

Young people have reported these as barriers which mean they fall between the 'categories' or feel like they belong in too many at once, resulting in feeling like opportunities are not for them. For example, LGBTIQ+ young people who come from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Some ways to implement this are:

- Using [inclusive language](#) and steering away from ableist and gendered language.
- Encouraging the sharing of pronouns (role model this by sharing your pronouns).
- Setting participant 'agreements' before a consultation. These are a set of guidelines/rules that everyone in the space will uphold. They can include things such as mutual respect and listening to people when they are sharing.
- Setting a 'statement of commitment' - a public statement that outlines how you intend to commit to something. It should lead actions and accountability. It's a good idea to include a contact method (a few options to cater to different access needs) so that people can reach you to discuss or give feedback. The commitment can be to a specific group or cohort or addressing inclusivity in general i.e. a statement of commitment to diversity and inclusion.
- Developing an [access key](#) or [social script](#).



- To ensure consultations prioritise the emotional and psychological safety and wellbeing of participants, include supportive resources, a support person, or in some cases a psychologist. Sharing lived experience can be re-traumatising, particularly when discussing matters that may be triggering or cause distress.

Remuneration

Young people often face financial barriers to participating in consultations. Many rely on casual or part-time work, balance study and caregiving responsibilities, or lack access to paid leave—making unpaid engagement a significant burden. These barriers disproportionately affect young people experiencing disadvantage and can lead to exclusion from processes that directly impact their lives.

Providing remuneration is not just fair, it's best practice. Paying young people for their time recognises their lived experience and contributions as expertise. It affirms that their insights are valued equally to those of professionals and sends a clear message that youth engagement is serious, not symbolic. Remuneration also supports broader participation by reducing inequity and encouraging continued involvement in future opportunities.

Recommended Resource: [Paying young people](#) – including when and how you should remunerate young people.

Transparency and feedback: Clearly explaining how their information will be used, including the impact and outcomes of the consultation.

Transparency and feedback

Creating a space which encourages open dialogue and honest communication helps to develop positive relationships with young people, increase trust, strengthen engagement, and improves agency for a young person to make decisions regarding their lives and their interactions within youth participation activities.

Embedding transparency and feedback into consultations is essential, including open and clear communication to ensure young people are informed about the process and their role from start to finish. This should include opportunities to

- pre-brief – so young people understand expectations and are given an opportunity to ask questions about the consultation; and
- de-brief – so young people understand how their information will be used and can access additional support, particularly if personal or distressing issues have been raised.

If it is a longer consultation, young people should be given an opportunity to give feedback on the consultation process as it progresses, giving them agency to voice their suggestions or concerns as they arise.



Transparency is a core value within the Victorian Child Safe Standards, allowing young people to have access to all information that enhances the decision capabilities of a young person.

Closing the feedback loop

Closing the feedback loop is a vital step in any consultation process; it means informing young people about how their input was used and the impact it had. When done well, it demonstrates that young people's contributions are respected and meaningful, and it strengthens their trust and willingness to participate again.

Transparent communication is key. This includes clearly explaining what will happen with young people's feedback from the outset, and following up after the consultation with accessible updates to show how their voices shaped outcomes. For example, if a group of young people contributed ideas to a local planning consultation, they should be kept in the loop on how the project progresses, and where their input made a difference.

Embedding feedback loops in consultation practices keeps young people engaged over time, not just as one-off contributors but as ongoing partners in shaping their communities.

Recommended Resource: [Inviting feedback from young people](#)

Engage Platform

This section explores TOR (e) the use and effectiveness of the Engage Platform and areas for improvement.

The Engage Platform is currently the Victorian Government's central hub for promoting community engagement and open consultations. While Engage is a valuable tool for youth workers and organisations to stay informed, it is not designed with young people in mind. The site's layout, language, and navigation are not youth-friendly, making it difficult for many young people to find or act on opportunities. This limits the platform's reach and risks excluding diverse and underrepresented youth voices.

To improve accessibility and relevance, the Engage Platform should be co-designed with young people to ensure it is visually appealing, easy to navigate, and written in clear, youth-friendly language. Importantly, consultation opportunities should also be promoted through the digital spaces young people already use, and in community spaces they frequently access.

Government departments should also take a more active role in ensuring information about consultations reaches young people through trusted



community organisations, schools, and youth services, especially those working with underrepresented cohorts or those who have limited resources to digital engagement.

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