



Engaging youth: a practical tool

Successfully applying youth participation principles to alcohol-related initiatives

Health New Zealand
Te Whatu Ora

Degrees of Involvement

For a successful Youth Participation project, you need to be very clear what degree, or degrees, of involvement is needed – and what you'll need to do to make involvement accessible for young people.

This scale will give you an idea of how involvement intensity can vary. It's by no means the final word, because it's simply drawn from existing initiatives. Be prepared to be creative and invent whatever you need for your project, using this framework as a guide.

Role	Level	Example	Method	Comments
Onto-it organisers	Highest ★★★★	You're planning an <i>after-ball party</i> for underage students	Organisers must be drawn from the same young people who will be attending the event. This creates a sense of ownership.	Enforcing safe drinking or alcohol-free policies is much easier when young people themselves are helping regulate their own behaviour and that of their peers.
Influencers	High ★★★★	You may need a youth perspective in your <i>advisory group</i>	This is a great opportunity to establish ongoing relationships, hear young people's views on issues and share the decisions your team makes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware that this may require young people to fit into existing adult structures and environments. • Flexibility is critical, especially in the early stages, to ensure everyone feels comfortable in the process.
Role-players	Medium ★★★★	You're running a <i>CPO</i> [Controlled Purchase Operation] to identify vendors selling alcohol to minors.	CPOs require young people to assume a role and play a specific part.	<p>It's important they're fully aware of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What's involved • Why it's required. <p>Likely consequences for themselves, their peers or the community.</p>
Consultants	Low ★★★★	You may be compiling a <i>youth needs analysis</i> and want to survey young people.	The best place to engage with them is to start where they're already at. Go to where young people are – don't expect them to come to you. This may involve talking to young people at school or church, on public transport or the sports field, via txt messaging – the possibilities are endless.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It needs to be a two-way exchange. • Young people need to know how they can contribute and what will happen to their contributions. • Consider the ethics of your approach – you may need to seek consent from parents, schools or related organisations.

Role	Level	Example	Method	Comments
Ad-hoc advisors	Lowest ★★	You're designing a new <i>parent pack</i> resource	Parents are the relevant participants with this project. Teens may provide ad-hoc, unstructured advice, since this project indirectly affects them.	If young people aren't the primary target audience for a project, you don't necessarily need to encourage high levels of involvement.

Maintaining credibility

With the best of intentions, it's easy to leave young people feeling their participation is token, manipulative or just decorative. To maintain the credibility of the process it's important to give young people:

Choice. They must choose to be involved

Understanding. They must understand the process and the purpose of their involvement

Flexibility. Young people must have the flexibility to choose the way they express their opinions

Full consideration. Their ideas must be considered in full, not picked over selected piecemeal to suit adult needs

Feedback. Young people need to know what happened to their contribution and how it helped.

Also consider the ethics of your approach – you may need to seek consent from parents, whānau, schools or related organisations, particularly if participants are below the age of 17.

An effective tool for involvement

'Youth Participation' guidelines have been developed from a set of learnings that have been developed and used in a wide range of health promotion fields over a number of years.

This booklet will show you ways to apply the practical elements of the process to alcohol-related initiatives.

What is youth participation?

There are several key elements to Youth Participation:

Purposeful relationships. Youth Participation is a relationship in which adults and young people work together intentionally and purposefully

Valued roles. It's an active process where those who get involved choose freely to do so, and take roles where their contribution will be valued

Relevant projects. People work on projects that affect them in some way

Meaningful outcomes. Everyone must see that the process will result in something that will actually make a difference.



Why involve young people in alcohol-related initiatives?

Alcohol is a part of young people's culture and socialising, the same as it is for most people in New Zealand. Young people drink for many of the same reasons adults do – for fun, to help them socialise or to relieve boredom or stress. So, their drinking issues can't be totally addressed in isolation from the rest of the community.

Because young people have unique cultures and needs, we need to adopt a creative approach.

Facilitating and allowing youthful input is vital to ensuring initiatives are real and therefore more effective.

There are other benefits: involving young people also builds awareness, fosters leadership and gives opportunities to make a difference in our communities.

Checklist

Double-check

It's easy to put young people – and adults – off with a bad experience. Before you start your project, give it one more double check.

Features:

Does your Youth Participation programme include:

- Clear purpose
- Defined roles and responsibilities
- Realistic time frames
- Accessible location
- Accessible times
- Accessible transport
- Comfortable environment
- Food, kai and refreshments
- Breaks during meetings/time-out in the process
- Reimbursement for expenses and costs
- Rewards and appreciations
- Review, evaluation and feedback.

Experiences:

Does your Youth Participation programme offer:

- Real and relevant issues
- Participation as a choice
- Acknowledgement of cultures
- Open communication
- Trusting relationships
- Supportive adults
- The flexibility to change
- Addressing barriers
- Emphasising benefits
- Developing skills
- Fun and interest
- A worthwhile contribution.

Thirsty for more?

Check out the websites of these organisations for more Youth Participation info and models such as Hart's ladder and Westhorp's Continuum:

Amohia te Waiora, Health Promotion, Health New Zealand – Te Whatu Ora
alcohol.org.nz

Ministry of Youth Development:
myd.govt.nz

Australian Government office for Youth
youth.gov.au/

Youth Affairs Council Victoria:
acvic.org.au



Making it work

Making the Youth Participation process work requires:

- **Enjoyment:** Everyone should find it fun and enjoyable to be involved.
- **Recognition:** The strengths, talents, skills, interest and abilities of the young people involved should be recognised, celebrated and extended.
- **Commitment:** Everyone involved, adults and young people alike, must show commitment to each other and to the outcome or intention of the project.
- **Inclusion:** The process should be open, involve all appropriate participants and not exclude anyone who is impacted by the work.
- **Valuing:** People need to see that any contribution they make, at whatever level they choose to operate, is valued.
- **Resourcing:** There needs to be sufficient time, money and other resources to make a reasonable job of the project.
- **Empowerment:** Young people should be able to see they're getting more control over their lives by participating.

1. What is your project – describe it.

Eg. after-ball party, youth needs analysis)

Things to consider:

Include target audience, purpose, aims, objectives, outcomes and anything else that may be relevant. Ask yourself: is this a project that young people will want to be involved in?

Having a good description is essential in assessing your Youth Participation process later. Be prepared to develop and amend your description, as things may change.

2. Why do you want or need to involve young people?

(Eg. because this issue affects them)

Things to consider:

When you're kick-starting a Youth Participation project you need to consider why the partnership between adults and young people is important.

Young people can bring fresh new perspectives and creative, innovative energy – but they do not always need to be involved in projects that don't affect them. Remember,

Youth Participation works best when the project is real, means something to young people and they choose freely to be involved.



3. Why will young people care about this? What can they offer?

(Eg. desire to make a difference, helping to promote the event)

Things to consider:

Encourage everyone to be upfront about their motivation, ensure the contribution, commitment and outcome sought is clearly communicated to everyone. Spelling these things out at the beginning can be a useful reference when you come to unexpected hurdles.

4. What degree of involvement will you need?

(Eg. onto-it organiser, ad-hoc advisor)

Things to consider:

You need to decide what level of involvement is required. Will it be necessary to meet weekly, as a team and make equal decisions about the event – ie. needing ‘onto-it organisers’? Or are you requiring less structure that can be achieved through ad-hoc advisors?

5. What are the barriers – what could make it hard for young people to get involved?

(Eg. meetings during school hours, can’t afford to catch the bus there, etiquette of meetings)

Things to consider:

Ensure meeting times will be appropriate so everyone can attend, and not too time-consuming.

Ensure people can get to the venue. Make the location welcoming and comfortable and provide food. Ensure information is clearly communicated before, during and after meetings.

You don’t necessarily have to pay young people for their involvement, it’s good to foster a culture of volunteerism and ‘giving something back’ to the community. However, young people should be reimbursed for any agreed expenses such as bus fares.

6. What are the potential benefits for young people, adults and the community?

(Eg. young people will feel valued, they'll develop leadership skills)

Things to consider:

They should be benefits you can articulate and measure. For example, young people may develop their public speaking skills. Adults may find their work evolves and involves more hands-on youth mentoring. Organisations may be challenged and adopt new policies. The wider community thinks more positively about young people.

7. Where will you find them – where do they go?

Eg. schools, drop-in centre)

Things to consider:

You'll need to get out and go where they are. This could mean finding and going to places where young people gather – schools, on trains or buses or in public spaces like parks or malls. It could also mean being more switched on to youth culture. For example, young people are very mobile so the best way to contact them could be by txting.

8. How will you build supportive working relationships between young people and adults?

(Eg. delegate appropriate adult, arrange some training)

Things to consider:

Relationships are fundamental to successful Youth Participation. If adults initiate the project and invite young people, one of the adults needs to take responsibility for regularly checking with young participants to ensure they're enjoying the process and feeling informed. Sharing tasks, eg. training together, can often help equalise partnerships.



9. How will you develop and extend young people’s skills?

(Eg. confidence with public speaking, dealing with the media)

Things to consider:

When Youth Participation includes effective youth development, you see young people grow through their involvement.

Start by identifying existing skills, knowledge and experience. For instance, the confident extrovert in your group might be the one you’d ask to secure prizes for your event.

Or, a young person considering a police career may appreciate the opportunity to see real policing in action by taking part in a Controlled Purchase Operation.

10. How will you evaluate, provide feedback and celebrate your success?

(Eg. de-brief feedback dinner, rewards for all involved)

Things to consider:

Get creative with the closure so everyone can identify highlights and hopefully end on a positive note. Fun awards may get people laughing, a chilled-out debrief dinner may help everyone relax. Taking time to review outcomes and assess what worked and what needed improvement is important – your next Youth Participation project will be all the more successful for it. Record your evaluation and include the thoughts of everyone involved. Encourage both young people and adults to reflect on their personal contribution and provide feedback to each other.

Aim for improvement

Planning and implementing successful Youth Participation projects is a learning experience.

- Ask young people for their feedback and suggestions on ways to improve involvement.
- Talk with others involved with Youth Participation projects.

Sharing experiences, information thoughts and successes is important and a valuable professional development opportunity.