



KEEPING YOUNG PEOPLE ENGAGED

Once you have a crowd or just one or two young people to turn up to your first meeting, the next thing to consider is how you will keep them engaged, and, even more importantly, how to make that engagement meaningful.

"Meaningful youth participation is not just about opportunity; it is about seeing young people as partners and equipping them with the knowledge, skills and resources to effectively participate."



<https://myan.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/youthparticipationfinalinteractive.pdf>

The key here is to ensure the peer networks are run by and for young people. The **Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic)** talks about youth participation as "a doing word". Young people want to be active, and YACVic lists the three key principles of youth participation as:

Empowerment: Young people having greater control over their lives through participation.

Purposeful engagement: Young people taking on valued roles, addressing issues that are relevant to them, and influencing real outcomes.

Inclusiveness: Ensuring all young people are able to participate, regardless of background, culture, where they live, their gender or sexuality.³

A JFY peer network member says that meeting new people and having a voice is key to keeping people engaged in their peer network.

"Peer networks are great because they give young people a chance to meet new people and talk about issues you have and you can say whatever is on your mind."

However, that network member also warns against resting on your laurels and says facilitators need to mix it up to keep people engaged. This might be by changing venues, doing something completely different and making sure the network is vibrant and grabs people's attention.

Peer Connectors

JFY employs Peer Connectors to facilitate their peer support network meetings. They consider this to be a crucial part of why the peer network meetings are so successful. The Peer Connectors have lived experience of disability and are passionate, enthusiastic and positive young adults who are active citizens in the community.

The Peer Connectors provide guidance and leadership to young adults living with disability who participate in the JFY peer support networks. The role involves facilitating group meetings of young adults living with disability and their support people, including some preparation and review work. Meetings are themed on topics of interest that are identified

by members, such as employment, education, sexual health, the NDIS, or self-advocacy. The Peer Connectors are positive role-models, who share their knowledge and life experiences with the members.

The role requires good written and verbal communication. In taking on this position, the Peer Connectors have gained valuable experience when it comes to facilitating group events.

The **Youth Affairs Council Victoria** has also developed an online toolkit about involving young people. It stresses the need to take an informal approach and to think about the reasons why young people will want to get involved with a peer network. This might include:

- making a difference or change in their own lives
- making a difference in the lives of others
- having new experiences
- learning new skills or developing talents
- professional learning or career opportunities
- meeting new people or hanging out with friends.

That is not to say that your peer network has to be all these things to all people (but if it is – outstanding work!), but it does need to provide an opportunity for all or some of these elements, so that the young person considers it worth turning up.

Canada's **Apathy is Boring** is a leading national, non-partisan, youth-led charitable organisation that uses art and technology to educate youth about democracy, with the aim of increasing youth voter turnout, increasing youth engagement in the democratic process, and building a sustainable dialogue between youth and elected officials. One of their central messages is about belonging.

"Youth are looking to belong. We're looking for opportunities to build community, gain skills, and contribute to something meaningful."

Apathy is Boring's Youth Friendly Guide

This guide also talks about what young people NEED to stay engaged. To stay involved in any cause, youth need:

Meaning: To be doing something that matters

Control: To make real decisions, and actually be heard

Connectedness: To be part of a community.

This is a reminder to re-visit the first section and to remember WHY you are running the peer network and what it will give to the young people.



For more information

YERP by Youth Affairs Council Victoria:



<https://yerp.yacvic.org.au/get-started/involve-young-people/involving-young-people-guiding-principles>

Canada's **Apathy is Boring**:



http://www.youthfriendly.com/uploads/3/1/3/9/31399973/youth_friendly_guide_4th_edition.pdf



The third bead is on the string and hopefully people are turning up to your network because it is interesting and engaging.

Another key consideration for young people is that the peer network needs to be fun and enjoyable. In the next section we look at how to do this: creating a youth-friendly atmosphere and vibe.

Take a moment to think about keeping young people engaged in a youth peer network. How will you ask them what they want? How are they being empowered? Are your meetings inclusive, and does everyone have a chance to participate? Could you use Peer Connectors or similar?

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