



IMPORTANCE OF LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Young people are receptive and sensitive to language and the way we communicate. They can probably spot it a mile off if you are being disingenuous or trying too hard. They will also pick up on an atmosphere or energy.

A JFY Connector rated language and communication as being in the top two most important things alongside having young people with lived experience running the peer network. He reflects that:

"If you say it in a way that doesn't resonate with people, you lose them."

YACVic, however, warns against trying to copy young people and be like them:

"It's important to be yourself. Young people are good at spotting fakers – but always keep things respectful and appropriate."

Young people look for good common sense, a down-to-earth approach, with a focus on key points. Avoid long, complicated and dull documents. Avoid jargon! Humour is a great way to build trust and support.

Another way of engaging is to make conversations ideas-based. For example, you could start by looking at current events or ideas such as inclusive education. Give young people a space to talk about what's going on and what they think about it. Allow them to have differing opinions, but make sure they treat all opinions with respect.

For example, Seed is Australia's first Indigenous youth climate network. They are building a movement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people for climate justice with the Australian Youth Climate Coalition.

Its vision is for a just and sustainable future with strong cultures and communities, powered by renewable energy. Its network is based on a common goal and passion:

"Climate change is one of the greatest threats facing humanity, but we also know it is an opportunity to create a more just and sustainable world."⁵

Think about your use of language, and use creative, bright, engaging, plain language wherever possible. Consider whether you need to use interpreters, or have written information translated into other languages.

Use of bright colours can be good but also using black and white imagery can give things an edge that often appeals to young people.

Young people, who are known for their energy, curiosity and passion, want a free atmosphere where their opinions not only gain an audience but also count toward something.



Try and create environments in which young people feel comfortable enough to express their opinions freely – especially when they hold contrary views. Story-telling is another way to get people engaged and avoid the use of too much small-talk. In the TED talk, How to turn small talk into smart conversation, the advice is to ask for stories not answers:

“Aim for questions that invite people to tell stories, rather than give bland one-word answers.”⁶

Film and animation can be used to communicate and engage with children and young people. For some young people, videos on YouTube and similar platforms can be appealing and relatively easy to produce, if finances permit.

“All the initiatives, programs and strategies you initiate must be underpinned with positive attitudes and the belief that youth are valuable partners, and not problems to be solved or simply a group to be served.”

Apathy is Boring’s Youth Friendly Guide

For more information

YERP by Youth Affairs Council Victoria:



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

Youth Friendly:



<http://youthfriendly.org.uk/index.php/what-we-do/youth-friendly-documents>

Apathy is Boring developed the **Youth Friendly Guide** to help non-profit professionals meaningfully engage young people in shaping and directing their organisations:



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

This booklet looks at teen leadership:



https://www.canr.msu.edu/uploads/resources/pdfs/cyi_2017_4h_teen_leadership_curriculum_web.pdf



Once you have an engaged peer network, and young people are turning up and participating, they will hopefully start demanding they take CONTROL: to make real decisions, and actually be heard.

There is quite a lot of theory about empowerment and motivation of young people. We consider these in the next section. Ultimately, the best way to find out how to empower and motivate the young people you are engaging with is to ask them.

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