



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Communities**



Youth Participation Kit

10-15 year olds





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When adults hear what you have to say, better decisions are made. Being involved in decisions can make things better for yourself and other young people.

This kit will help you understand how you can be part of making decisions as a young person and why your voice matters.

We have also created a kit for young people aged 16 to 25 and handy resources, all available on the Department of Communities website here:

www.wa.gov.au/organisation/departments-of-communities/youth-participation-kit



What is Youth Participation?

Youth participation means having a say in decisions that affect your life, at home, at school, in your community, or online.

It's about being included in planning, solving problems, and sharing your ideas in ways that help shape the world around you.

Participation can look like lots of different things. It might be joining a group at your school, helping in your community, volunteering your time, or more!

You don't need to be older or more experienced to speak up – as a young person, you know what matters to you and that is valuable and important.

For example, you know what you like, what makes you feel safe, and what you understand. You also know what you don't like, when you don't feel safe, or when information is confusing. These are important things for people to know when working with young people.



Why should you get involved?

When you take part in decisions and share your voice, you:

- Make your school, community, or family better
- Help solve problems in creative ways
- Show that young people are important and capable.

Participation helps you understand how the world works and gives you tools to help positively change it.

Being involved in your community can also benefit you as it might allow you to:

- Share your ideas and be creative
- Help fix things you care about
- Build confidence
- Learn new skills, including skills that could help you get a job one day
- Make your school or community better for everyone
- Meet new people and make friends
- Find a new hobby or activity.

Everyone has something valuable to contribute, and small actions often lead to big changes that make a positive difference.



Your rights and responsibilities

Children and young people in Australia have rights that are outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the Convention). Australia has signed the Convention which means the agreement is legally binding.

The rights in this document apply to every child, without exception.

This means you have the **right** to:

- Be heard and taken seriously
- Be included in decisions that affect your life
- Be safe, respected, and supported.

Being involved also means you have **responsibilities** to uphold, including to:

- Listen to other people's ideas
- Be respectful when you share your opinion
- Try your best and follow through if you commit to something.

Understanding your rights and responsibilities helps you become a strong, respectful and effective participant.

In Australia, laws and age restrictions dictate how old you must be to do certain things and take on certain responsibilities, like driving a car or having social media profiles. This is usually to keep you safe and ensure someone is looking out for you.

As a young person, you will usually need permission from a parent or a guardian to participate in some activities such as volunteering or work if you're under the age of 16 years, some places may need parent/guardian consent for anyone under the age of 18 years.

If you're unsure, it is best to talk to an adult you trust if you feel safe to do so.



Ways you can get involved



Participation can happen in all sorts of ways and there are lots of ways you can get involved in activities and projects of interest to you where you feel safe and supported. We have listed a few ideas below, but this isn't the whole list!

At School

- * Join the student council or a leadership group
- * Suggest ideas to your teacher
- * Help plan assemblies, activities, or school events
- * Provide tutoring to younger students or others who need some help.

In Your Community

- * Join a youth group, local council or committee
- * Volunteer at events or in clean-up projects
- * Share your ideas with your local council or library
- * Give help to someone younger than you or someone in need.

At Home

- * Share your thoughts during family decisions
- * Ask questions about family rules or routines
- * Help make plans or solve household challenges
- * Contribute more to household jobs like gardening or chores.

Online

- * Join safe, positive and respectful groups
- * Share ideas or creative work that helps others
- * Take part in surveys or digital consultations
- * Start or sign petitions about issues you care about
- * Ask your parents or guardian to follow social media accounts that support causes you care about.

Finding where to get involved

There are a lot of organisations and groups out there, so it's important to take the time to find the right one for you.

Look for organisations that are working to achieve the goals that are important to you, who make you feel safe and who you believe to be fair, kind and make a real and positive difference.

You can find information on most organisations through their website and by asking people who are aware of the work they do. Once you are 16, you can also find information by following organisations on their social media channels. Reaching the comments sections on posts is a good idea.

You might like to consider visiting your local government office, local youth centre or asking around at your school. Of course, doing an online search of reliable websites can help if you've got a good idea of what you're looking for.

If you're unsure whether a website is safe and reliable or not, you can ask a trusted adult (like a parent or guardian, teacher, or librarian) for help!

When looking at different opportunities, it might be useful to ask yourself these questions:

- Is the goal of this important to me and does it match my values?
- Do their opportunities look useful and fun?
- Can I participate close to where I live, work or study?
- Do they seem fair and kind?
- Does their work seem to be making a real difference?
- Am I available for the times they need?
- Are they flexible with this?

If you're interested in youth issues and opportunities, there are some reliable organisations listed below who often share articles, ideas and opportunities. You might like to sign up for newsletters or updates from these groups:

- Young People Connect WA to hear about opportunities to join the Ministerial Youth Advisory Council or become a Youth Week WA Ambassador
- Australian Government Office for Youth to learn about the National Youth Steering Committee and Advisory Groups
- Volunteering WA
- Volunteer Resource Centre
- Youth Affairs Council of WA
- Australian Youth Affairs Coalition
- Commissioner for Children and Young People WA

Until you turn 16 years of age and can use your own social media, you could ask your parent/guardian to follow these groups on social media so they can let you know about opportunities to be involved.



What to expect when you get involved with an organisation



When organisations involve young people, they have a responsibility to make sure it is easy and supportive for you to participate.

Adults can make participation better and safer when they:

- Ask for your opinion and really listen
- Explain what they are doing and why
- Give you feedback about what happens next
- Support you without taking over
- Create spaces where everyone is welcome.

If these things aren't happening, it's okay to ask questions or talk to a trusted adult.

In Australia, we also have a set of 10 principles (rules) for organisations that work with young people to follow. This includes your school, youth centers and sports clubs. The National Principals for Child Safe Organisations are there to make organisations in Australia better and safer for young people.



Being recognised for your time

When you help out in a group, share your ideas, or join a project, you are giving your time and energy, just like adults do. It's fair for you to be acknowledged or thanked for your time. It shows that your ideas and hard work are valued.

It is important to remember that being acknowledged for your time doesn't mean you have to agree with everything, it just means that your voice and your time are important.

Acknowledgement doesn't always mean money; you could be acknowledged for joining in many different ways!

When you join a group or share your ideas, you might get:

* **Money:** Some groups pay you for each meeting you attend.

* **Gift cards:** You might get a voucher to use at a shop you like.

* **Snacks or meals:** Food might be provided at meetings.

* **Transport help:** Bus fares or rides might be paid for so you can get to meetings.

* **Fun activities:** Sometimes, groups might say thank you with a fun outing.

* **Certificates:** You might get a certificate to show you were part of the group.

* **References:** Adults might write a letter saying how you helped, which can be useful for school or jobs.

These are all ways adults can show respect for your time and ideas when you take part.

If you are not sure if, how, or when you will get acknowledged, it's okay to ask the adults running the group to explain it to you.

What does meaningful participation look like?

Participation isn't as simple as being involved or not...there are different levels to it, some more involved and powerful than others.

One way of thinking about youth participation is Hart's Ladder.¹

This shows different ways young people can be involved. The higher the step, the more power and decision-making young people have.



Use these questions to reflect on your experience:

- * Do I feel safe to share my ideas?
- * Do adults listen to me and take me seriously?
- * Do I feel that my feedback is appreciated?
- * Do I know what will happen with my feedback?
- * Do I get updates or results afterward?
- * Can I help plan or lead parts of the project?

If you answer 'no' to any of these, you might be part of a lower step on the ladder – and you can speak up or ask how you can be more involved.

¹ Roger Hart, 1992: "Children's Participation: From Tokenism to Citizenship"

Tips for getting involved and speaking up

- **Think about what matters to you** – do you care about your school, the environment, bullying, or making things fair for others?
- **Start small** – find a group that is doing something you care about, fill out a survey on something that matters, or talk to a trusted adult.
- **Don't worry about being perfect** – your perspective is valuable, but you aren't expected to know everything.
- **Work with others** – teamwork can make big things happen so consider joining a club or existing group that's doing something important.
- **Ask questions** – being curious helps you learn and grow.
- **Use your talents** – for example art, writing, public speaking, teamwork.
- **Stay kind and confident** – your ideas have value.
- **Be patient** – real change takes time, and your efforts matter.



Things to remember

Youth participation is about **respect, fairness, and inclusion.**

It's your right to have a say, and it's your responsibility to use your voice thoughtfully.

You don't need to wait to be older to get involved. Start where you are, use what you have, and take the first step.

Be true to yourself, everyone has something valuable to contribute, and small actions often lead to big changes that make a positive difference. Your voice matters, and so does the way you use it. Start with what's important to you. Talk to others. Join a group. Ask questions. Create something.



Participation is a journey – and every step counts.





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