



Joining a group or organisation

Youth Participation Kit: Young people

Resource 3

A lot of the time, your participation in the community will be through an existing organisation. Organisations seek input and ideas from young people for their service delivery and decision-making processes. By getting involved, you gain experience, make contacts and learn important business skills. It is also a great way to really make a difference in your community.

Choosing a group

There are a wide range 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, and who you believe to be ethical and making a real difference. You can find information on most organisations through their websites and social media channels (reading the comments section is a good idea), and through asking people who are familiar with the work they do.

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

- Are their goals the same as mine?
- Do their opportunities look practical and fun?
- Can I participate close to where I live, work or study?
- Do they seem ethical?
- Does their work seem to be making a real difference?
- Are there ways I could start small with a low level of commitment and gradually become more involved if / when it suits me?
- Does it seem like there are opportunities to participate in decision-making?



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- Will my participation give me valuable experience to use in future study or work?
- Can I offer something useful to the organisation?

Get in touch

Once you have selected an organisation, you might want to sign up online, send them an email or phone or go into their office. Whichever approach you use, the response will tell you a lot about whether this is an organisation for you. A welcoming, professional response when you first contact them will give you some confidence in the organisation and provide you with a clear path for getting involved right away. You might like to do some initial research on organisations that have a good reputation and a supportive environment where volunteers are respected, valued and provided with worthwhile opportunities to make a difference.

Get started

Some groups require induction, training or orientation, so it is important to be prepared and spend some time learning about what they do before getting to work. It can sometimes seem a bit daunting, but this will give you further opportunity to see if the organisation suits you and whether you suit the organisation. Don't be afraid to pull out early if you are not happy - but once you have made a commitment, do your best to stick to it.

When you start out with an organisation, they should give you all of the information you will need, including:

- guide to what you will be doing
- explanation of why and how your efforts will help
- background information about the organisation and what they do
- details of any policies, procedures or requirements you need to abide by
- who you can ask for help if you need it.



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Things to expect when you are involved with an organisation

Organisations usually have policies, procedures and structures in place that organise how they do things. This can be frustrating for young people, especially when you just want to get out there and help. But it's important to remember that those things exist to make sure that the organisation works safely and effectively, so even though things may take a little longer to get done, the rules are there for a reason.

Treat your volunteer commitments like you would your professional or personal commitments. If you can't be there for any reason let people know with plenty of notice. As a volunteer you have responsibilities, but the organisation has responsibilities to you as well. You are entitled to be:

- treated with respect
- provided with the training, supervision and other support you need
- working in a safe environment
- covered by insurance
- treated without discrimination.

Get more involved

Many organisations will have different levels of involvement to suit different levels of commitment, skills and time availability. This can lead to opportunities to increase your involvement.

You could eventually take on leadership roles or develop new initiatives for volunteer action. You may also have the opportunity to represent volunteers and young people in the governance of the organisation, either in management working groups or on the board. This can lead to some of the most satisfying roles for a volunteer, where you really have a sense that your contribution is making a difference, not only through the practical work you do, but also in helping steer that organisation and ensuring its sustainability for the future.



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When you're in an advisory role

When you get involved in an advisory role in an organisation, it can take some getting used to. You should always remember that:

- you have unique views and ideas
- you were given this opportunity for a reason
- you are there to share your ideas and you should be heard.

Being part of important meetings and talking to important people can be very intimidating. You may feel that you do not have the knowledge and experience to make a significant contribution, but this is not the case.

Believe in why you are there. The organisation has chosen you for a reason. Your views and ideas will be valuable for the organisation (even if you can't quite see how). As a young person, you have a lot to offer an organisation.

Getting your message across

Being assertive means making sure your voice is heard, but not in a way that could offend or upset anyone. You have a right to ask questions and to express your views and opinions. That is why you are there, so speak up. But listening carefully, being polite and respecting the views and opinions of others will go a long way towards making others respect you, listen to your ideas and take them seriously. If you're feeling uncomfortable in a role, you should find someone to talk to about it—you'll probably feel better once you let someone know, and they should be able to help you work out how to feel more at ease.

Case study: Youth Advisory Councils (YACS)

Lots of local governments in Western Australia have Youth Advisory Councils, which are groups of young people who are involved regularly in the community and local government, provide advice to staff and Councillors and often put on events and activities for local young people. They can work on their own projects or be consultants to make sure that youth perspectives are being included in a range of decision making at the Council. This can include helping to prioritise funding for youth activities or development projects, or planning events for young people.



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To find out if your local government has a YAC, check their website, visit a local youth centre, or speak to a staff member at the Council. Most YACs are always looking for new members, so why not give it a go!

If your Council doesn't have a YAC, you can talk to the Youth Development Officer or Community Development Officer from the Local Government about trying to start one. Often there will be lots of Council approval processes and people you need to win over, so you will need to have some patience while you get things started.

Resource sheet 6 and the 'Youth Participation Kit: Guide for Organisations' have some useful tips, and other YACs are usually willing to provide advice as well.

Bunbury YAC

Bunbury's Youth Advisory Council (YAC) advises Bunbury City Council on issues affecting young people as well as creating exciting projects to benefit young people in the Bunbury region. As one of the most formal YACs in the State, the team of 14 young people are passionate about making a positive difference in the community and supporting their peers to achieve great outcomes. The YAC is heavily involved in the planning and delivery of the Shift Youth Festival, which is an opportunity for members to develop their skills as they collaborate with multiple community groups and service organisations to celebrate and embrace young people. The YAC also provides advocacy and support to other events and programs, with one member being pivotal in the installation of community lockers in town.

Vision: Celebrating and advocating young people and their communities.

Mission: We challenge expectations and assumptions, activate places and spaces, and empower young people to have a voice.

Tagline: Be a voice, not an echo

Facebook/Instagram: @bunburyyouth

"The Bunbury Youth Advisory Council (YAC) is not just another ordinary youth representative body. In essence, we are change makers working with the City of Bunbury Council to make it a great place for young people to live, work and play. This is the goal that binds the group despite our diverse ages, interests and perspectives. We have been highly successful in implementing this goal, including by convincing Council to create a new precinct for young people right in the heart of Bunbury. In the three years I have



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served on the YAC, I have found it to be highly beneficial for my personal and professional development. Not only have I made a number of great friends, I now know how I can work to bring about meaningful change in our community.” - Sean Van Der Wielen, Bunbury Youth Mayor

