



Australian Government

New energy, ideas and perspectives

How young people are creating change
across the Commonwealth

Acknowledgements

New energy, ideas and perspectives - How young people are creating change across the Commonwealth

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This project has been a significant undertaking for the organisations involved and our grateful thanks go to the young people and youth organisations who willingly participated in the interviews and consultations. Your contributions have been invaluable.

The project would not have been possible without the concept development and guidance of Andrew Cummings (Australian Youth Affairs Coalition), Helen Jones (Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council), Layne Robinson (Commonwealth Youth Programme), the participants of the Commonwealth Youth Forum 2011 and staff of the Australian Government Office for Youth in the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations who provided pivotal direction, advice and support.

Thank you to those who participated in the interviews and whose work inspired this publication: Stella Agara (African Youth Trust), Jem Bamford (Australian Youth Climate Coalition), Franck Castillo (Oceania Football Confederation), James Cathcart (British Youth Council), Varghese Chakkumootil (Daya Centre for Peace), Lachlan Cooke (Indigenous Communities Education & Awareness Foundation), Timothy Ferdinand (St. Lucia National Youth Council), Ewan MacDonald-Russell (Scottish Youth Parliament), Kumari Middleton (Mayibuye), Angela Parris (VYBZING), and Warren Roberts (Youth Awareness Resource Network).

We would also like to thank the members of the project reference group for their insightful advice and ongoing support during this booklet's development: Nkandu Beltz, Lachlan Cooke, Francesca Danmole, Samuel Kavuma, Lauren Moss and Ellie Seckold.

Lastly, thanks also to Aditya Prasad (Youth Action and Policy Association NSW) for his advice on this subject and Siabhan Pope for editing and proof reading.

Copies of this report can be obtained from www.youth.gov.au.

978-1-74361-011-4 [PDF]

978-1-74361-013-8 [PRINT]

978-1-74361-014-5 [CD-ROM]



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New energy, ideas and perspectives

How young people are creating change
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Welcome from the Minister for Youth

As the Minister representing young Australians, it gives me great pleasure to release the *New energy, ideas and perspectives – How young people are creating change across the Commonwealth*. The genesis for this Guide originated during the Commonwealth Youth Forum, which ran in association with the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Perth, Western Australia in October 2011.

The Guide showcases a collection of innovative youth engagement approaches from across the Commonwealth on how young people engage with other young people to develop and progress campaigns, activities or causes in the communities and countries in which they live.

This resource demonstrates how young people are making a difference through the use of practical strategies which can be taken and implemented elsewhere by other young people, governments and communities.

The Guide presents a positive picture, showing how important young people are to our communities and why it makes good sense for governments and organisations to invest time in engaging with young people and empowering them to become leaders themselves.

I hope this resource will stimulate an exploration of ways in which young people can be more involved and how organisations and governments can engage young people and forge new and innovative ideas to bring about real changes in their communities.

I would also like to acknowledge the work of the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition who compiled the booklet and all the other individuals and organisations from around the Commonwealth who shared their valuable stories and learnings to contribute to this wonderful Guide.



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink. The signature is fluid and cursive, starting with a large 'P' and ending with a long, sweeping underline that extends across the width of the signature.

The Hon Peter Garrett AM, MP
Minister for Youth

Introduction

In October 2011, a group of International youth delegates met in Fremantle, Western Australia, to take part in the Commonwealth Youth Forum, which was held in the lead up to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). In a forum workshop titled ‘Sharing Best Practice in Youth Engagement’, delegates were given the opportunity to share their experiences engaging young people and explored lessons learned while trying to engage young people more actively and effectively in projects and activities.

The workshop showcased the diverse ways that young leaders are engaging peers in their communities and uncovered many lessons in leadership that young people can learn from one another.

This Guide is an outcome of that meeting. It is designed to encourage and inspire young people to engage other young people to make change in their communities. It explores the principles that underpin effective youth engagement, and ways in which young leaders are already working to create change with their peers across the Commonwealth.

The Guide draws on information collected from many groups, projects and organisations around the Commonwealth that successfully engage young people in their work. As you read through the case studies, you’ll see that

they’re working on a diverse range of issues and using an equally diverse range of methods to engage young people and improve their communities. However, these groups all share a commitment to ensuring young people are meaningfully engaged, with a genuine respect for the contributions young people make and the benefits they can bring to their communities.

Engaging more young people in your projects, activities and organisations can deliver enormous opportunities and benefits. Young people bring overwhelming energy, passion and fresh perspectives to the groups and organisations they engage in: together, great things are possible!

We hope that you will draw inspiration from this Guide and harness the lessons of others to grow as a leader, engage your peers and make change in your community.

As more groups, projects and organisations seek to harness the ideas, perspectives and skills of young people, we will see more young people equipped with new skills and empowered to become leaders. Through this guide, we showcase some of the fantastic projects and activities that young people are leading, with the hope of inspiring the creation of new and positive ways in which young people can contribute, learn and thrive.

PART ONE:

Good practice in youth engagement

Across the Commonwealth and around the world, young people are doing amazing things to bring about change. In countries on every continent, young people are coming together to lead campaigns, run projects, start new organisations – all aimed at improving their communities, their nations, their world.

While young leaders around the world engage with young people in a range of different ways, we have found five common best practice principles for effective youth engagement that underpin their activities.

The five principles are drawn from a range of reports and resources, including “A guide to youth friendly practices” from Canada¹, and “Youth Led Community Organizing” from Australia.² The principles were further developed in consultation with the project’s youth leadership steering group to make sure they fitted the day-to-day experiences of young people making change in their communities.

Whether you are already engaging other young people in your projects and activities or you are just starting out, this guide will help to ensure that your efforts are geared towards success from the beginning.

Basing your approach on these principles will provide a positive experience for the young people engaged in your projects and will maximise their contributions to your project or organisation. You will build a positive environment where young people have the opportunity to grow, learn and make change in their community and have their voices heard. You will also harness the power of the new ideas, energy and perspectives offered by young people.

Five principles for best practice in youth engagement

1. Support Young People’s Access
2. Seek Diversity
3. Empower All Young People
4. Give Rewards and Recognition
5. Create a Fun and Motivating Culture

1. A guide to youth friendly practices, City of Calgary, Canada

2. Youth-Led Community Organizing: Theory and Action by Melvin Delgado and Lee Staples, Oxford University Press, US

PRINCIPLE 1:

Support young people's access

It's important to make it as easy as possible for young people to take part in your project, campaigns or activity. You can do this by removing or reducing the barriers that might get in the way of young people from taking part.

For example, it's important to remember that young people often have less money and fewer transport options than older people. You'll also find that young people don't all have the same amount of time to commit to a project, and they may only be available on certain days or times due to other commitments like school, work, sports, hobbies and family. Similarly, while they have a lot to offer, young people may not have the same level of knowledge and experience as older people. Make sure you take these things into account when planning your project or activity.

If you recognise, plan for and address these access issues, you can make it easier and more attractive for young people to get involved and stay involved with your project or organisation.

When you recognise and plan for the barriers that sometimes prevent young people from engaging with your activities, you make it easier and more appealing for young people to get (and stay) involved with your group or organisation.

Putting it into practice

- Hold meetings in central locations that are close to public transport
- Provide transport to and from meetings or help to pay young people's travel costs
- Hold meetings and events in the evenings, at weekends or during school and university holidays
- Provide young people with information and skills training sessions to make sure they can overcome gaps in knowledge or experience.

FROM PRINCIPLE TO PRACTICE:

The Daya Center for Peace

Daya Centre for Peace, www.dayacenterforpeace.org

Hyderabad, India, Commonwealth region: Asia

About the organisation

The Daya Center for Peace was founded in 2011 and aims to help children and young people to become agents of non-violence and social change in India. It does this through programs that empower young people to get involved in conflict mediation and peacemaking in their communities including leadership training, discussions about peace and film nights.

How they do it

The Daya Center faces more barriers than most when it comes to making their programs accessible to young people. These barriers are varied including geographic isolation of their program's participants which can impact their ability to deliver their programs and attract young people.

Despite this, the group has a history of improving young people's access through building networks and communities that support young people from a diverse range of ethnic and religious backgrounds to come together and take part in their activities.

To make sure their messages reach young people in isolated areas, the group asks some former participants of the program to act as ambassadors. These ambassadors travel through their regions delivering training to young people who are not able to attend the regular Daya peace programs due to geographic isolation and other challenges.

During times of less violence, Daya works closely with young people in conflict-prone communities and empowers them to be ambassadors of peace. This helps Daya to maintain a positive environment in times of increased tension. These young ambassadors are organised into youth groups, and work to promote peace in their communities through regular community events.

Lastly, to ensure the safety of participants, Daya collaborates with local partners in selecting safe spaces – such as schools, community halls and religious centres – to hold their workshops and meetings. These relationships are key to their work, allowing them to reach the broadest range of young people. It has taken lots of time and energy in relationship building with leaders and communities in the north of India to develop the level of trust required.

PRINCIPLE 2:

Seek diversity

Young people come from a wide range of different backgrounds, and have different opinions and experiences, hobbies and interests from each other.

Because of this, no one young person can speak on behalf of all young people. Young people are as diverse as their backgrounds and interests. These are influenced by a wide range of factors: their social, and economic backgrounds; gender and sexuality; disability, geographic isolation, environmental and cultural influences; the things they like and dislike – just to name a few.

Recognising these different backgrounds, experiences and perspectives of young people can greatly increase the contributions of young people to your project or activity.

Plan ahead to make sure that the young people you engage reflect the community or group you are working in, and that they represent as diverse a mix of young people as possible. This will give you a better opportunity to bring together a representative group, and offer the broadest possible mix of new ideas and skills. You will also be helping young people to make friends with other young people from different social, economic and cultural backgrounds.

Putting it into practice

- Deliberately seek out young people from groups or backgrounds that you've had less contact with
- Consider how you will engage young people who may have specific needs – young people with a disability, young people who live in rural or remote areas, and young people from religious or cultural minority groups. Young people from these backgrounds might need some extra help to get involved
- Keep trying new ways of engaging young people, to make sure you are reaching as diverse a range of young people as possible.

When you make sure that the young people you engage are as diverse a group as possible, you get a truly representative group and the broadest possible mix of new ideas and skills. Young people will also benefit by being exposed to, and building relationships with, people from different backgrounds and walks of life.

FROM PRINCIPLE TO PRACTICE:

ICEA (Indigenous Communities Education & Awareness) Foundation

ICEA Foundation, www.iceafoundation.com.au
Perth, Australia, Commonwealth region: Pacific

About the organisation

ICEA is a youth-led organisation set up in 2007 to promote reconciliation, unity and mutual respect for all Australians by creating experiences, relationships and understanding between young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and non-Indigenous Australians.

The group was founded by its current CEO, Lockie Cooke, while he was in high school. Lockie was inspired to set up ICEA after being exposed to a diverse range of young Australians, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, during a school trip to the Kimberley region of Western Australia. The experience gave him an appreciation for the diverse cultural identities that exist in Western Australia.

How they do it

The Marja Mob program is one of the three reconciliation programs run by ICEA. It brings together a group of young Australians to build

relationships and understanding of each other's cultures and backgrounds, in school-based settings.

For ICEA's message of reconciliation to succeed, it's important that its programs are accessible to young people from a diverse range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds - giving them the opportunity to build relationships with people they would otherwise not meet.

While they encourage all the students in their communities to get involved, they have prioritised the engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, who they believe play the most critical role in bridging the gap and building reconciliation in Australia. To improve their success in engaging young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, ICEA has created a strong mentor group and a team of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ambassadors who encourage other young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to become involved with the ICEA's activities.

The Marja Mob also involves young people of different ages in different ways. The program is hosted for young people ages 15-17, with 18-22 year olds given the opportunity to be Marja Mob Mentors and 20-25 year olds acting as ambassadors for the program. This ensures diversity in experiences and knowledge, creating opportunities for young people to learn from one another.

Although the Marja Mob is mainly a school-based program, early school leavers can also be involved. Young people who leave high school early have the opportunity to remain involved with ICEA and to take part in Marja Mob events. This is a positive way for them to stay connected with other young people in their community.

Young people who are not at school are often overlooked by those seeking to engage young people. However ICEA has realised that these young people can play a vital role in building a truly diverse organisation, along with the benefits that those young people receive from taking part in the program. ICEA has found that involvement in the Marja Mob program often helps young people who have left school early to be aware of the importance of education, and in many cases has inspired these young people to take up traineeships to learn new skills and further their education.

The young people involved in Marja Mob work hard to create an atmosphere that is inclusive for all young people that take part, based on respect for one another.

"We have learnt that engaging young people helps our organisation to continuously evolve. Young people bring innovative and fresh ideas and are best placed to tell us how we can further engage young people and spread our message most effectively to the youth in our community."

*Lockie Cooke, CEO,
ICEA Foundation*

Over the past five years ICEA has consistently achieved its goal of developing relationships and understanding through the experiences that its programs create, and places great value on the role young people have played in making sure the organisation's programs are innovative and relevant.

PRINCIPLE 3:

Empower all young people

It's important to empower all of the young people involved in your group or project. Sometimes this takes a shift in thinking.

Power and responsibility are shared differently in every group, project and organisation. Sometimes they favour some members over others – older members over younger ones, long term members over newer ones, guys over girls and so on. It's important to think about how this affects your group, to make sure all the young people involved benefit equally.

Giving all young people involved in your project or organisation real responsibility and ownership often takes a culture shift! But when it happens, all the young people involved can have a genuine impact. Sharing power and responsibility equally will see young people gain more confidence and skills, and as a result your group will be exposed to exciting new ideas.

Putting it into practice

- Give all young people involved in your group or organisation ownership of and responsibility for specific projects or activities
- Recognise all young people as equal partners within the group

When you give young people real responsibility and ownership for projects, you create a culture in which young participants' skills and confidence grow as they see their actions having a genuine impact.

- Create opportunities for young people to develop new skills and be exposed to new experiences
- Think about ways of providing mentoring and support – like having new members “shadow” more experienced ones
- Support and encourage young people to step into leadership roles.

FROM PRINCIPLE TO PRACTICE:

Youth PATH (Poverty Alleviation through Heritage Tourism)

St Lucia National Youth Council, www.slunyc.org

Castries, St. Lucia, Commonwealth region: Caribbean

About the organisation

The St Lucia National Youth Council is an independent non-government organisation of over 150 youth and student organisations, which represents the interest and ideals of Saint Lucia's young people.

How they do it

The Youth PATH program promotes sustainable solutions for young people's development by empowering young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to become tourism entrepreneurs.

Youth PATH attracts unemployed young people and those who are just out of school (two groups that often face more barriers in looking for opportunities for learning or work) and provides them with training and business development skills in running cultural and natural heritage sites. They also receive training in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and other important life skills.

The young people receive certificates of participation, which are recognised by the National Commission for UNESCO. They are also given the opportunity to start up small businesses operating and maintaining heritage tourism sites. It is hoped that these sites will become centres of tourism, and that this will empower young people and reduce poverty in their communities.

Because St Lucia is a small island nation with limited resources, finding new opportunities for sustainable employment is really important. The natural beauty and rich history of the Caribbean islands is an ideal environment for the Youth PATH program.

FROM PRINCIPLE TO PRACTICE:

Pacific Youth & Sport Conference

Oceania Football Confederation, www.oceaniafootball.com

Commonwealth region: Pacific

About the organisation

The Oceania Football Confederation (OFC) was founded in 1964 as an umbrella organisation for 11 national football associations within Oceania. As well as supporting and administering football in the Oceania region, OFC uses football as a “school of life” to raise awareness about social issues such as gender equity, social integration and building peace.

How they do it

The Pacific Youth & Sport Conference is a program of the OFC. It gathers 1,000 young people aged 16–25 from the 25 Pacific territories for six days of discussions and workshops on health, education and social issues. The young people also talk about ways that sport can be used as a tool to tackle these issues and improve young people’s lives and communities.

The first Pacific Youth & Sport Conference was held in March 2010 in Auckland, New Zealand, with the next conference planned for December 2013 in New Caledonia. The Conferences empower young people by giving them training and helping them to develop

and run projects that tackle the social issues that affect them. Young people collaborate with each other on issues such as healthy living, fair play, gender equality and teamwork.

“The Conference promotes leadership and gives motivation for learning. Young people are given the opportunity to develop positive citizenship skills. Sport has given them a sense of responsibility and leadership.”

Franck Castillo, Head of Social Responsibility, Oceania Football Confederation

At the Conference, young people express themselves and have their ideas discussed at workshops and roundtables. They take ownership of the projects they develop during the conference and present these to their Minister for Youth & Sport, who they work with to implement, monitor and evaluate these projects within their communities.

PRINCIPLE 4:

Give rewards and recognition

Young people benefit most by seeing the direct impact their actions have. Recognising and rewarding their hard work encourages young people to continue being involved, and to take part with energy and enthusiasm.

One challenge that many youth projects face is to encourage young peoples' involvement and contributions, while helping them to be realistic about their expectations.

It is important that young people have a realistic understanding of the contribution they can make when taking part in a project, and what their involvement is likely to achieve. Telling young people that their involvement in a project will change the world can leave young people feeling disappointed, disillusioned and disengaged when they see only small changes at the end. But at the same time we want young people to reach for the stars! It can be hard to find the right balance.

From the beginning of your project, spend time finding out what the young people involved want to achieve. Be clear about the reasons why you want them involved and what you hope to achieve from their involvement. It is important to set achievable goals. But it is also important that you paint the bigger picture with the young people involved, explaining how their involvement contributes to the project's overall goals.

Putting it into practice

- Make sure recognising and rewarding achievements is part of your plan for engaging young people
- Set clear and realistic objectives with the young people involved from the beginning
- Help young people see how their part contributes to the whole project
- Acknowledgements such as certificates, recognition by their peers, gift vouchers and celebrations all remind young people that they are valued and appreciated – as well as being fun!

When you recognise and reward the efforts of young people, you encourage them to continue participating with enthusiasm.

FROM PRINCIPLE TO PRACTICE:

Africa Youth Trust

Africa Youth Trust, www.africayouthtrust.org

Nairobi, Kenya, Commonwealth region: Africa

About the organisation

The Africa Youth Trust (AYT) is an independent, non-partisan youth development and advocacy organisation. Established in 2005, AYT seeks to harness the energies of young people towards peace, equity, and prosperity within and across communities in Africa.

AYT promotes democratic dialogue and ensures young people are engaged in national and regional affairs. AYT offers policy briefs, guidebooks and policy related commentary to young people, development partners, the private sector and government. AYT has formed a national and a regional network of youth action partners who they work with to advance and support a youth-led approach towards development.

How they do it

AYT promotes its mission and vision to young people by including them on their business cards. It also provides an introduction to the organisation, project profiles and other briefs during every event and activity.

AYT works hard to make sure young people are regularly informed of the successes of the organisation and the impact of their work. Communication tools such as discussion forums and blogs are used to share information among the young people involved. The organisation complements this with a strong Information and Communication Technology (ICT) team that ensures that the project processes, successes, challenges and innovative practices are documented on its website and on its social media platforms. This ensures information about AYT's project goals and successes are communicated as widely and transparently as possible.

AYT uses an organisation-wide database to track and monitor the efforts of young people who have participated in their projects. The organisation recognises the contribution of young people by offering participants certificates as recognition of their efforts and as evidence of their engagement.

PRINCIPLE 5:

Provide a fun and motivating culture

Everybody enjoys a positive working environment. Projects and organisations that take time to build a fun atmosphere, healthy relationships and an inclusive environment for everyone will naturally attract young people.

No matter how much a young person may want to be part of your project or activity, or volunteer for your cause, if the environment is unpleasant, negative, overly competitive or exclusive it could be a deal breaker. It can also lead to wasted time, energy and resources for everyone involved if young people lose interest and drift away.

Putting it into practice

- Think of ways to make your meetings or activities fun and engaging
- Run activities that encourage team building and strengthen team spirit amongst the young people involved
- If tension or conflict arises within the group, make sure it gets dealt with and discussed
- Consult regularly with the young people involved to find new ways to make your group positive and a rewarding place for young people.

If you create a fun, social environment, young people will naturally be attracted to your organisation or group. Who doesn't want to be part of the fun?

FROM PRINCIPLE TO PRACTICE:

Mayibuye South Africa

Mayibuye South Africa, www.mayibuyesouthafrica.org

KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, Commonwealth region: Africa

About the organisation

Mayibuye is a youth-led organisation that's using dance, performing arts and life skills workshops to build a generation of young people who are equipped to lead their community and act as positive role models. The organisation was founded in 2009 by four young people from South Africa and Australia. They engage young people through performing arts, educate them on issues facing their communities – such as HIV, substance abuse, bullying and racism – and empower them to become positive role models by putting on performances which promote healthy decision making throughout their communities.

How they do it

In South Africa, Mayibuye has organised a series of “Performance Troupes”. These groups of young people meet after school to take part in performing arts and life skills workshops, which they then turn into performances. The troupes meet three nights a week in three towns in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa (Hammarisdale, Umlazi and Pietermartizburg) and are attended by a range of school-aged young people from different socio-economic, cultural backgrounds, both guys and girls.

Mayibuye's young leaders use a range of approaches to build and maintain a positive and motivating culture within these groups. This ensures there are places where young people feel comfortable and enjoy participating.

The organisers actively promote inclusion, harmony and diversity in their programs. The group uses performing arts to create a common ground among young people from diverse backgrounds. They work together, perform together and celebrate together. Young people are applauded for attempting activities, even if they are unsuccessful, to ensure they don't limit their involvement in the programs due to barriers such as shyness.

If conflict occurs within Mayibuye's Performance Troupes, it is dealt with by their team leaders – young people who have been nominated by the group to decide on the consequences when problems arise due to inappropriate behaviour or disrespect.

Mayibuye uses anonymous surveys to measure the satisfaction of the young people involved. These results allow them to understand how young people are feeling about their workshops, and also what they would like improved in the future – ensuring they maintain a positive and engaging environment.

Finally, Mayibuye gives young people the opportunity to meet their “idols” and learn from industry professionals. This builds excitement and appreciation for the opportunities provided by the Performance Troupes.

“Mayibuye is a Zulu word from South Africa that means ‘bringing back what was lost’. It evokes a time when everyone was happy and life was simple, filled with singing and dancing.”

www.mayibuyesouthafrica.org

Many young people comment that they feel like Mayibuye is their family, and that they spend their entire week looking forward to the Mayibuye workshops. They are proud to be able to show their talents to their friends and family, with the Hammarsdale and Umlazi groups performing regularly at various festivals and opening ceremonies throughout KwaZulu Natal.

PART TWO:

How to engage young people

There are a whole range of ways that young people get involved in projects, activities and organisations. These are just four of the commonly used methods that often work well with young people.

Each of these methods presents unique strengths and weaknesses, and will present different opportunities when it comes to engaging young people in your organisation or project. Similarly, each can be an effective tool as a stand-alone method for engaging young people or – as we will explore in the case studies – some methods can be combined to enhance each other.

Consider the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities of each of these methods when deciding how you're going to engage young people in your work.

Four ways to engage young people

1. Youth-led organisations
2. Community forums
3. The Internet and social media
4. Activist campaigns

1. Youth-led organisations

A youth-led organisation is an organisation that is wholly or mainly led and run by young people. Many youth-led organisations have age limits for their members and leaders to make sure the group remains focused on young people. Increasingly, young people are choosing to start their own organisation rather than get involved with established organisations.

Youth-led organisations work across a wide range of issues and interests. They empower and enable young people to be leaders in their own right, rather than waiting for opportunities to come along within established organisations run by older people. Because young people lead them, youth-led organisations tend to be dynamic, innovative and quick to use the newest ideas and technologies.

However these strengths can also have their downsides. For example, youth-led organisations often experience high rates of turnover of their young leaders and volunteers, due to the fact that young people's lives tend to change quite quickly. This can lead to a significant rate of "memory loss" within the organisation.

CASE STUDY:

The British Youth Council

The British Youth Council, www.byc.org.uk

London, United Kingdom, Commonwealth region: United Kingdom

About the organisation

The British Youth Council (BYC) is a UK based youth-led organisation with a mission to represent and empower young people throughout the United Kingdom and around the world. Its vision is a world where young people are respected and able to inform and influence decisions that affect their lives or that they feel passionately about.

Since beginning more than 50 years ago, the BYC has empowered thousands of young people through volunteering experiences, skills development and leadership opportunities. Each year, the organisation trains 1500 young leaders, and gives a voice to around 250,000 young people who take part in their consultation programs.

How they do it

BYC is an entirely youth-led organisation, with its young members electing 13 people, aged 16-25, to its Board of Trustees each year at its Annual Council Meeting.

These trustees are responsible for the direction of the organisation and setting its strategic direction, shaping its activities and acting as ambassadors for BYC in the media and at events. Young people interested in becoming trustees are invited to apply. They are then screened through an interview process, with successful applicants asked to stand for election at the conference.

BYC is working to create a world where all young people are respected and able to influence and inform decisions that affect their lives, and they apply this principle internally through their youth governance model, ensuring it stays true to its vision and values.

Along with this, the BYC also uses regular surveys and ballots to make sure its messages and campaigns are aligned with the opinions and attitudes of its young members. They realise how essential it is that young people are the driving force making the organisations actions meaningful and effective.

CASE STUDY:

The Australian Youth Climate Coalition

Australian Youth Climate Coalition, www.aycc.org.au
Melbourne, Australia, Commonwealth region: Pacific

About the organisation

The Australian Youth Climate Coalition (AYCC) brings together over 70,000 young Australians and many major youth organisations to build a generation-wide movement to solve climate change. It seeks to educate, empower, inspire and mobilise young Australians to meet the challenges of climate change.

How they do it

AYCC was established in 2007 to mobilise and empower young people across Australia to take action against climate change. The group is entirely youth-founded, youth-led and youth-run, meaning young people have complete control over the organisation's direction, strategies, campaigns and internal processes.

Since then, the group has expanded and now has branches in every Australian state, with over 100 local groups across the country. 400 volunteers engage young people through regular educational stalls, events and petitions. They bring about political change through lobbying politicians, building alliances and other activities.

AYCC's state-based branches are a hub of connection and friendships, and all of AYCC's activities are developed with the knowledge that, to be mobilised, young people not only need to be inspired and educated, but also to feel connected.

"Young people are the most innovative, passionate and committed – and in history, it's been movements led by young people who have made most big changes."

*Jem Bamford,
Director of Operations, Australian Youth Climate Coalition*

According to the AYCC, it is young people who have the most to lose from climate change, and the most to gain from finding solutions. They focus on engaging young people and creating a culture based on positivity, youth, passion and energy.

2. Community forums

A community forum is a meeting that brings together members of a community to discuss a particular issue or idea. Community forums are often held to gather new ideas to address problems, or to seek input and ideas from members of a community about plans, ideas or initiatives. The community forum is a method that has been used for centuries. And yet community forums remain one of the top ways to engage young people in discussions, and to gain their input into projects and activities, and they are used by young people in projects and organisations around the Commonwealth.

Despite the massive growth of technologies like the Internet and social media, face-to-face community forums remain one of the most effective ways of directly engaging young people. They also allow new young people to make contact with your project or organisation.

Community forums can serve many purposes - from providing education and training opportunities, to providing a space for young people to workshop ideas. They offer a really versatile approach that allows young people to get deeply involved in a project or issue.

But they also have their limitations.

Community forums can be expensive to run due to the costs involved, such as hiring venues, providing food and transport, and other running costs.

They can also take a lot of time and energy to organise. When organising a community forum, it is important to think about issues of access, which were highlighted earlier.

CASE STUDY:

VYBZING Youth Outreach Program

Caribbean Development Bank, www.caribank.org

St. Michael, Barbados, Commonwealth region: Caribbean

About the organisation

The Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) is a regional financial institution established in Kingston, Jamaica in 1969. The Bank was established to support the economic growth and development of member countries in the Caribbean, with special regard for the needs of the Less Developed Countries (LDCs) in the region. It also provides resources to help reduce poverty.

How they do it

The annual VYBZING Youth Outreach Program is about youth development in the Caribbean. It is a vital part of the CDB's annual Board of Governors' Meeting, providing young people with the opportunity to discuss and share their views on social and economic issues that affect their lives with their peers, and with staff of the CDB.

Young people from the meeting's host country are invited to participate in various activities including the Youth Challenge, the Youth Forum and Youth Presentation to the Bank's Board of Governors.

Young people are given opportunities to express their views and develop new skills. They are encouraged and supported to be creative. The Youth Challenge, for example, uses audiovisuals and various media tools. Young people interpret a development theme and apply their own innovation and creativity to respond to the Challenge.

Your organization allowed us to truly voice our opinions by providing a listening ear and a forum from which we, as the youth of the nation, could collaborate to engage in meaningful discussion to bring about positive change"

Young participant, VYBZING Conference 2012

The Youth Forum then brings together a range of regional and international speakers to engage the young people and to give them an avenue to be active participants in the development process.

Finally, the Youth Presentation at the Closing Ceremony of the CDB's Annual Board of Governors' Meeting has been highlighted by many young people as a "once in a lifetime experience", giving young participants the opportunity to be heard by national, regional and international leaders, with young people presenting the summarised recommendations for action that were developed during the forum. The event emphasises youth empowerment and participation in the development process. It encourages communication among young people and with the CDB. VYBZING lives its motto, which is to "inspire, inform and engage".

3. The Internet and social media

The growth of new technologies such as social media (including Facebook and Twitter) and the increasing availability of cheap and easy access to the Internet in many countries have created fantastic opportunities for engaging young people. The Internet has given us new ways to communicate with each other, and the ability to do so on a scale never seen before.

Young people can now come together and form new communities, share ideas and information and run campaigns online, beyond the barriers of things like geography, race, social position and age. In recent years we have seen a huge rise in the use of large-scale online activism – with organisations using email and social media to quickly mobilise huge numbers of people around particular causes.

Young people have grown up with this technology and generally feel really comfortable interacting and communicating online. Projects and organisations that tap into these online communities, or that successfully create their own, can have a big advantage when looking to engage and involve more young people.

However, it's important to remember that even the most successful online engagement activities cannot replace many of the benefits of meeting face-to-face – especially as young people in some parts of the Commonwealth still don't have easy access to the Internet.

CASE STUDY:

Youth Awareness Resource Network (YARN)

Youth Awareness Resource Network (YARN), www.yarnaaustralia.com.au
Sydney, Australia, Commonwealth region: Pacific

About the organisation

Youth Awareness Resource Network (YARN) is a youth-led network made up of student groups across Australian universities that meet to provide a space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous students to meet, build relationships, share stories and learn about Australia's Indigenous cultures and histories.

The network's founder, Warren Roberts, convened the first meeting of YARN when he was a student at the University of New South Wales in Sydney. During a class discussion in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subject, he asked some non-Indigenous students if they "were just saying positive things about collaborating with Australia's First Peoples to get a good mark, or if they really were genuine about creating change in their communities?"

The group agreed to take meaningful action around reconciliation, and following the class a group of seven students met at a cafe for the first meeting of YARN. Since then, the network has extended to ten campuses across Australia, with 300 students participating in YARN-led discussions.

How they do it

YARN takes an integrated approach to using online technologies. YARN uses technology to enhance its engagement of young people, rather than to drive the "core" of its youth engagement.

YARN uses Facebook groups to keep members up-to-date with events and activities, which take place in universities as well as outside in the community. They have a Facebook group for each campus, along with an umbrella page for the organisation.

According to YARN, these Facebook groups are a great way to keep large groups of interested young people up-to-date with what is happening around their campus. Anyone is free to join the Facebook groups and receive updates about upcoming events. However, the organisation realises that online groups have limited ability to foster the personal relationships that sit at the core of YARN's work. Instead, YARN relies on the power of the conversations that take place at the actual events to build relationships and create change.

Rather than using just one method of engagement, YARN has learnt that different methods can be used together to complement one another.

4. Activist campaigns

Young people have a strong history of involvement in activist campaigns, and have emerged as leaders on a wide range of issues throughout the Commonwealth. Lots of young people are interested in, and care passionately about, social and political issues, and are committed to creating change in their communities and in the wider world through issue-based activism.

There are many examples of this: whether it is the Scottish Youth Parliament making a stand for marriage, or young people in India turning their back on a history of ethnic violence, and instead paving the way for a more peaceful future.

Young people bring valuable new skills, ideas, energy and technology to campaigns. Engaging more young people in a campaign can have really positive effects, like helping to build momentum and bring about change. It also helps to give young people new opportunities to be part of the change they want to see in the world.

However, as with the other methods of engagement outlined above, there are some risks and downsides in involving young people in activist campaigns. Young people are passionate about changing their communities and their world, and they have a lot of energy to give – so it is really important that they see their contributions are making a difference. Young people will stop being involved in a campaign if they feel their contributions are not being properly respected, or that they are tokenistic.

CASE STUDY:

Love Equally Campaign, Scottish Youth Parliament

Scottish Youth Parliament, www.syp.org.uk

Edinburgh, Scotland, Commonwealth region: United Kingdom

About the organisation

The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) is a democratically elected voice of Scotland's young people. It is a young people's parliament, designed by young people, led by young people for the benefit of young people. It is committed to ensuring young people are heard by the decision-makers of Scotland and members are determined to campaign on the issues that matter to Scotland's youth.

They do this by holding national youth elections during which young people elect their Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs). These MSYPs are then responsible for deciding the organisation's policy. In 2011, nearly 85,000 young people voted in the youth elections. Using this mandate, the SYP then agitates on behalf of Scotland's young people for political change, campaigning on issues such as marriage equality, lowering the voting age, and establishing a living wage.

How they do it

Love Equally is a campaign intended to pressure the Scottish Government to legislate for same-sex marriage. It was the Scottish Youth Parliament's top priority campaign for 2011-2012.

The campaign was decided on by the MSYPs, and driven by the views of young Scottish people, who overwhelmingly believe a modern Scotland should recognise same-sex relationships. The campaign was massively successful, with the Government receiving the largest ever response to its consultations (thanks in part to the efforts of the MSYPs) and announcing plans to bring forward same-sex marriage legislation.

The SYP credits this success to a number of different campaign techniques and tactics that they used, including petitions, consultations with large numbers of young people, media events and protests. The campaign was launched at a media event outside the Scottish Parliament, which featured a same-sex marriage ceremony, complete with wedding guests and young people from the SYP. Throughout the campaign, the SYP

continued to use the media, hosting press conferences with partner organisations at important moments. As a result of these efforts, Love Equally received outstanding media coverage with over 50 mentions of the campaign and almost constant coverage of the issue.

While this was going on, MSYPs worked hard to engage young people in their communities at events and festivals all over Scotland. Initially, this outreach consisted of MSYPs asking young people to sign a petition asking the Government to bring forward a public consultation on marriage equality by 6 months. They then turned to empowering young people to make submissions once the consultations began.

"I lived and breathed love equally, using every spare minute I had to convince members of the public to support same-sex marriage and sign the consultation and my enthusiasm and determination paid off as I managed to gain hundreds of responses. Love Equally taught me a lot about people, society and also myself. I am very proud to be a part of the campaign."

Terri Miller, 17, Edinburgh

One month and 2500 signatures later, the group had their first victory: the consultation was brought forward. As soon as the consultation opened, the group's focus shifted to enabling young people to respond positively to the consultation. Two MSYPs, along with the SYP's participation team, developed a "How-to" guide about running consultation events. The guide was distributed to MSYPs across the country to assist in planning events in their local areas. When the consultation closed, over 50,000 responses had been received, around half of which originated from the Scottish Youth Parliament and their partners.

This effort was enhanced through partnerships with other like-minded organisations such as LGBT Youth Scotland, NUS Scotland, Equality Network and Stonewall Scotland who agreed to work with the SYP to coordinate campaign efforts, with each organisation circulating a simple and accessible online survey amongst their own networks.

With the consultation closed, the SYP kept the pressure on lawmakers with MSYPs meeting directly with Members of the Scottish Parliament to lobby them on this issue. They also organised the Love Equally March, in which over 1000 marchers from all over Scotland came together to publicly demonstrate their backing of the campaign.

APPENDIX 1:

Your youth engagement strategy

Feel inspired? Motivated? Do you have an idea and want to change the world? Want to get started right away?

You can use this tool to map out the barriers you might face when it comes to implementing each of the principles in your project, organisation or cause, along with the strengths and weaknesses of each method of engagement as they relate to engaging young people in your activities.

This should get you thinking about ways to make your activities a positive and powerful experience for young people. You may also begin to consider new pathways to engaging young people you hadn't previously thought of.

Good practice principles and methods for engaging young people

Principles	Barriers	Solutions
Access		
Diversity		
Empowerment		
Rewards & Recognition		
Positive & Motivating Culture		

Ways to engage young people

Methods	Strengths	Weaknesses
Starting a youth-led organisation		
Hosting a public forum		
Using the Internet/ social media		
Launching an activist campaign		

APPENDIX 2:

Case Study Contacts

If you'd like to get in touch with or learn more about any of the organisations, campaigns and projects mentioned in this booklet, here are their contact details:

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