Civic Engagement and Young People

A Report Commissioned by the City of Melbourne

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Executive Summary

This report examines recent national and international literature on young people’s civic engagement, citizenship and participation, and explores practices in several Victorian local government areas. It acknowledges the importance of these issues for all young people and for the City of Melbourne (which commissioned this report), and the endorsement of such approaches by State, National and international policy directions.

LITERATURE

An extensive literature has emerged through the last fifteen years in particular, around youth participation, civic engagement and citizenship. This report summarises major trends in that literature, pointing firstly to the importance of understanding various interpretations of these terms and the reasons why institutions (including governments) support initiatives in these areas.

Possible outcomes of participation for young people have been well documented in terms of gains in knowledge, skills and connectedness (including in areas of civic governance), but outcomes for and impact on government (and the operation of other organisations) are less well known and questioned. Current research and discussion is beginning to explore the importance of organisational responses: bodies being willing to listen, to consider advice and to change – including making changes in their ways of operation – if active participation of young people is to be addressed seriously.

Similar issues are raised in the literature about civic engagement and citizenship in relation to young people, where strong connections are made to discussions of social capital. While concerns driving research and policy and program development began with reactions to the voting patterns of young people (low turn-out and commitment) and perceived civic disengagement (through ‘anti-social behaviour’), more recent literature has focused more on the capacity of government (at all levels) to respond to young people’s needs, on the trust that young people have in existing structures and processes, and on young people’s belief in the efficacy of their participation and action. Again, clarification of what we mean when we discuss citizenship (eg ‘minimal’ or ‘maximal’ views) and of the ways that young people are regarded and treated (as ‘clients’, ‘consumers’ or ‘citizens’) underlie these policy and practice directions.

There is particular concern expressed in the literature about...
issues of inclusion of diversity, with many approaches seen to privilege some young people while excluding others. Commitments to continue to address such issues and to explore effective practice are seen as essential.

In each of these areas, the literature provides some information about barriers to participation and engagement and about productive practices that address these. There are strong themes emerging from the literature around grounding action in local areas of importance to young people, the need for flexibility and mutual respect, the importance of trust and the clear delivery of outcomes, and the commitment of significant support including adequate resources.

Finally, the literature overview examines documented practices with local government that support participation and civic engagement. Various models and initiatives are identified and discussed. These reflect differing needs and intentions of local governments: consultation, advice, personal development of young people, community capacity building and so on. While there are many examples of Youth Councils or Youth Advisory Committees reported, the literature is cautious about investing sole responsibility for civic engagement in such mechanisms. Strong concerns are expressed about whether such mechanisms are inclusive, effective, meet young people’s needs and interests (or those of local government) and how they interact with the structures of local government. Where such mechanisms are working well, they depend greatly on strong commitment from elected members of Council, substantial pro-active resourcing (human and financial) and the strong perception by young people of achievement of relevant and appropriate outcomes.

Possibilities for civic engagement through ICTs (information and communication technologies) are examined briefly and, again, mixed responses are reported. Critical issues here too focus on the intentions of government for the recognition of young people’s active roles in the use of such technologies, and the broad or narrow understandings of engagement and citizenship in this area.

**OTHER LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS**

This study then examines civic engagement practices in eight local government areas in Victoria (and briefly looks at reported practices in two other capital cities). In each area, the study reports on statements of intentions, the structures in place, the power that young people have, reported outcomes, responses to diversity and inclusion, and resourcing implications. Interviews were conducted with Council staff and with young people, a small forum was held to share and discuss views, and supplementary interviews were conducted with some young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds.

A variety of intentions and (consequently) models for civic engagement emerges from this study. Councils were largely interested to:

- consult young people (either by adults or by peers; either individually or through group forums) in order to improve their own decision-making and practices;
- develop young people’s civic skills (through enhanced participation in local organisations, or through involvement in Council structures);
- enhance young people’s roles as active community members (through building opportunities for participation locally or through specific projects, including grant-making initiatives).

They addressed these intentions through a variety of mechanisms and these are reported and discussed in some detail. For example, where Councils placed a priority on improving their own decision-making, they adopted advisory mechanisms that consulted with and obtained input from some young people; where Councils were primarily concerned with developing the role of
young people broadly within their communities, they adopted developmental processes that addressed participation and engagement within local groups and organisations. In practice, most local government areas intentionally developed a ‘suite’ of mechanisms, and these were most effective when they were intentionally coordinated in a ‘whole of Council’ approach.

While half of the local government areas interviewed had some formal Youth Advisory Committee (YAC) structure, the powers and formality of these bodies varied. They seemed to be most effective when they had a clear role, and when they had substantial resources to allocate or to use to achieve their objectives. Young people’s reactions indicated positive individual gains, but concerns about whether they were being seriously consulted or effective in their work. This included expressed concerns about shaping the agenda, and about hearing results of advice. Workers also queried whether such mechanisms were appropriate for or provided access for marginalised young people.

All respondents reported that the effectiveness of the mechanisms adopted depended on the resourcing provided to support their operation, to engage diverse populations and to implement the outcomes of deliberations.

In summary, the consultations with other local governments indicate that:

- There is not, and cannot be, a single approach. Approaches adopted must reflect local needs and local circumstances.
- The implementation of local solutions must primarily meet young people’s needs around participation and civic engagement rather than the organisational needs of local government.
- The need for strengths-based or assets-based approaches locally are emphasised, both in terms of young people’s involvement, but also in terms of enhancing the capacity of existing local organisations and networks.
- Engagement must be inclusive of all young people. To ensure this, Councils need to maintain a focus on this as a principle and to develop, implement and monitor strategies to achieve it.
- There is a strong need for commitment of human and financial resources to develop meaningful participation and civic engagement of young people.
CONCLUSIONS

There is no one way in which to address issues of youth participation and youth civic engagement. Complex reasons for the disengagement of young people require complex and multi-faceted initiatives and structures to address the barriers.

The creation of some form of Youth Advisory Committee as the sole (or even first) step is challenged both by the literature and by experience. While some form of youth-operated structure (Youth Council, Youth Advisory Committee, Coordinating Group, Action Committee or other mechanism) may emerge, this needs to be considered as part of a more complex process of supporting participation and engagement for all groups, throughout a local government area (LGA).

It is important that meaningful engagement (as distinct from token involvement) be provided for the many groups of young people who exist within, or pass through a LGA. Indigenous young people, culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) young people, homeless young people, low socio-economic status (SES) young people and international students are traditionally the groups that all Councils have struggled to engage through formal structures. Yet there are also local, population-specific or issue-based initiatives that are engaging many of these young people on their own terms, in action around their needs and – in some cases – in active local decision-making about services.

This recognition provides a platform on which to base strategies across the whole of local government.

Young people themselves must play a central role in determining the nature of approaches and structures around civic engagement. In particular, they need to determine how they wish to approach local government with propositions, and how they wish to respond to requests from local government for advice. This determination will probably not happen through abstract discussions about governance or citizenship, or initially even through discussions about formal mechanisms; it will usefully occur as part of young people’s practical responses to mechanisms that meet their immediate needs. Amongst those are the needs to learn what other young people are doing and proposing, and the opportunities to work together for greater effectiveness.

The diversity of young people within any LGA is mirrored in groups and services that address young people’s identities and needs: agencies within specific population groups (Indigenous, CLD, low SES); agencies based in responses to specific youth needs (health, transport, recreation, educational, accommodation); place-based initiatives (such as Neighbourhood Advisory Teams). For some groups of young people, there are no appropriate agencies or services at the moment, and this provides opportunities for specific local interventions by local government and/or in association with other groups.

Agencies also have different orientations to and capacities for the development of active participation by young people and this can be addressed and enhanced.

This description provides a canvas upon which local government areas can draw its own initiatives around youth civic engagement based on principles of:

• Implementing a diversity of responses;
• Adopting measures to ensure inclusion of diversity;
• Flexibility of responses;
• Putting young people’s needs first and bureaucratic needs second;
• Building young people’s skills;
• Building the capacity of organisations that work with young people;
• Enhancing participatory approaches within these organisations;
• Increasing young people’s decision-making;
• Providing adequate resources to implement these initiatives.
The Challenge

The study aims to review international and national literature around youth participation, citizenship and young people’s civic engagement and draw on interviews with representatives from local government areas about the operation of existing models for youth participation and civic engagement.

CONTEXT: DEFINITIONS AND IMPORTANCE OF CITIZENSHIP

The proposal for this study noted that young people are becoming less inclined to engage in traditional forms of civic life and, as evidence of this, cited electoral data from the UK and USA, as well as research in Australia including initiatives such as the Discovering Democracy program and the Australian component of the Civic Education Study.

However there is also evidence that young people see issues of their citizenship and civic engagement in different ways, and this study was asked to summarise research in this area. Particular attention was to be paid to social, cultural and economic factors, as well as emerging opportunities for new civic relationships through information and communication technologies.

The City of Melbourne emphasises the importance of young people’s understanding of and ability to influence structure and processes of government in Australia – particularly from the Council’s view, those of local government. This implies the need for a deep understanding and experience of democracy and the nature and roles of citizens. Such ideas are also embedded within State and National policy frameworks that emphasise the importance of the active participation of young people in government and community decision-making.

KEY ISSUES FOR EXPLORATION

Many issues around the implementation of effective youth participation and civic engagement remain uncertain. Key issues have been identified for the continuing work of the Council. These include an improved understanding of ‘young people’s experience and understanding of citizenship, how this may be influenced by demographic factors such as age and cultural background, and effective methods of promoting and encouraging civic engagement’ as well as “the barriers to engagement and participation for particular groups”, so that the Council may provide “the most effective and sustainable avenues for involving young people in civic decision-making”. (Request for Quotation, 2006)

As a first step towards consideration of these issues, the Council has requested background information on concepts of youth participation, citizenship and civic engagement, and a scoping of issues arising from the experiences of other local government areas.
Strategic Context

STATE AND NATIONAL GOVERNMENT POLICY

Council policies and action are framed within the broader Australian and State Government policies and strategies relating to young people and participation.

Issues of community participation are prominent in Victorian Government policy. Current youth policy (though this is about to be reviewed and strengthened) with respect to young people’s participation is contained in the *Respect* document (Victorian Office for Youth, 2002):

“The Government recognises that the participation of a diverse range of young people in society encourages community connectedness and promotes the unique perspectives and needs of young people. The Government is committed to valuing the contributions of young people, listening to their views and providing them with genuine opportunities for involvement.” (Victorian Office for Youth, 2006: 6)

These commitments have been supported in Victoria by the development, publication and dissemination of the three-volume *Taking Young People Seriously* handbooks in partnership between the Office for Youth and the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (Youth Affairs Council of Victoria, 2004).

In reflecting on ‘progress made for young Victorian, 2004-2005’, the Victorian Government reiterated these policy commitments:

*The Government supports a youth engagement framework that ... includes purposeful engagement where young people take roles, address issues that are relevant to them, and influence real outcomes.* (Victorian Office for Youth, 2006: 6)

Saggers *et al* (2004: 14) note that most Australian States and Territories make similar commitments.

At a national level, the Australian Government has established a policy framework for young people's participation in joint declarations with the States and Territories through the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). These have included commitments “to promote the active participation of all young people in economic and social life” and “to listen and respond to young people” and a vision of an Australia where “young people’s opinions and contributions are sought and valued, and young people are encouraged and supported to take an active role in their local communities and the nation” (MCEETYA, 2002: 2). More recent policy notes that:

*Actively engaging young people in the design and delivery of public policies, programs and services that impact on their lives is common sense and is critical to their success. Including young people in decision-making also contributes to a balanced, representative and democratic community that ultimately benefits all Australians (MCEETYA, 2004: 2).*

INTERNATIONAL POLICY

At an international level, there has been renewed interest in the last decade about issues of youth participation and civic engagement. Some of this literature is summarised in the next section of this report.

At a formal policy level, we can point to the impact of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1990):

Article 12 of the Convention states that:

*States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child [and] for this purpose the child shall, in particular, be provided with the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative procedures affecting the child.*

Article 13 of the Convention states:

*The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or any other media of the child's choice.*

There has also been a detailed summary of international Youth Policy (De Kort, 1998) that identified various decisions about and endorsements of youth participation, and the European Commission’s White Paper (European Commission, 2001) that identified objectives of “greater participation by young people in the life of the community in which they live; greater participation by young people in the mechanisms of representative democracy; and learning to participate.” (Field and Harrison, nd: 4)
Issues of youth participation have a considerable history both in Australia and internationally. A substantial literature has developed particularly since the late 1970s. Similarly, while discussions of citizenship have occurred for many years, there has been renewed interest in Australia and internationally in the 1990s, particularly in relation to the role of education. Ideas around youth civic engagement are relatively more recent, driven at least in part by ‘voter apathy’.

It is not intended that this literature review should present a comprehensive picture of research and discussion in these areas, but it will draw attention to major ideas and more contemporary work. In doing so, it will draw attention to other compilations of research that can be followed up in greater detail.

PRINCIPLES OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY PARTICIPATION?

At its most basic, ideas about ‘participation’ have distinguished between two major ways in which the term has been used: ‘being there’ or ‘taking part in activities’ on the one hand, or ‘sharing in decisions about and implementation of policies and practices around key issues that determine that nature of the world in which young people live’ (after Holdsworth, 1985; Carey, 2004; also see McNeish et al, 2002: 32).

In this sense, youth participation is not about a specific project, program or initiative, but rather:

- a program strategy, even a public attitude that encourages youth to express their opinions, to become involved, and to be part of the decision-making process at different levels (Golombek, 2002: 8).

Other writers have recognised that definitions of participation apply practically more to the organisational contexts in which young people find themselves, arguing that young people are participating all the time and that concepts of ‘youth participation’ really categorise organisational responses to and containment of that participation (Reddy and Ratna, 2002).
There have also been numerous attempts to develop a specific framework for categorising the degree of youth participation in organisations, projects and approaches. Best known is the work of Hart (1992, 1994, 1997) in defining a ‘Ladder of Youth Participation’. This builds on earlier work around a ‘continuum of youth involvement’ (Westhorp, 1987; Kaplun, 1995; in turn building on the work of Arnstein, 1969) and has since been further developed and extended by de Kort (1999) and Holdsworth (2001; 2003) to form a set of indicators that can be used by and within groups to assess their responses to youth participation. De Kort presents a model that specifies the nature of organisational roles and sees participation as variable across these roles.

Shier (2001) develops a similar conceptual approach with five levels of participation, but also usefully specifies the levels of commitment of organisations in terms of ‘openings, opportunities and obligations’ (see Appendix A). These have also been referred to as ‘attitude’, ‘action’ and ‘accountability’. Howard et al (2002) provide further details of these approaches and their application, and a summary of this is also contained in Appendix A.

WHY IS PARTICIPATION IMPORTANT?

Evidence continues to emerge in the fields of youth studies, health promotion and prevention (eg in the areas of resiliency, health and well-being, morbidity etc) and education about the importance and value of participatory approaches in delivering improved outcomes for young people, either as individuals or as populations. (See for example Newmann, Wehlage and Lamborn, 1992; Lee and Smith, 1994; Australian Curriculum Studies Association, 1996; Benard, 1996; Barratt, 1997; Fashola and Slavin, 1997; Dwyer et al, 1998; MindMatters Consortium, 1999; Walker and Kelly, 2002; Kirby and Bryson, 2002; Hannam, 2002; National League of Cities, 2002; Holdsworth, 2003; Holdsworth et al, 2003; Cahill et al, 2006).

Howard et al (2002) develop a useful conceptualisation of reasons advanced in support of youth participation, arguing that the reasons for participation can be categorised as technical, pragmatic, educational, human rights, democratic and transformative:

Democracy demands all citizens take part in establishing the governance and key functions in society ... Opportunities for participation in shared decision-making, listening to different points of view, and weighing options and consequences can help build a critical appreciation for the democratic process.


Democracy demands all citizens take part in establishing the governance and key functions in society ... Opportunities for participation in shared decision-making, listening to different points of view, and weighing options and consequences can help build a critical appreciation for the democratic process. (UNICEF, 2002 cited in Thapa et al, 2005)

Participation also leads to more effective decision-making: better decisions are made if young people are actively involved in those decisions – and there is greater likelihood of successful implementation of programs if participants have an active role in making decisions about program directions. (World Bank, 2006; National League of Cities, 2002)

Others argue that the active and meaningful participation of young people in all aspects of their lives is a democratic right that underpins the development of peaceful, tolerant and productive communities. These ideas of rights are also linked to arguments around ‘youth development’ as effective citizens and to the construction of young people’s roles within society (Holdsworth, 2003; World Bank, 2006; National League of Cities, 2002; Mokwena, 2003; Thapa et al, 2005).

Technical reasons ... situations where the requirements of a project demand the involvement of a group of people [eg] ... are required to demonstrate their efforts to involve young people in government decision-making ... Such a stipulation can mean that project leaders include young people primarily so they can say they have. This can lead to tokenistic approaches to participation.

Pragmatic reasons ... for practical reasons, for example, ... [as] a key source of information [or] ... the specific skills young people have ... will be of benefit to the project ... When young people are involved in a project for pragmatic reasons, it is common for that involvement
to be superficial, and not based on shared decision making.

Educational reasons
... where young people have taken leadership roles [reports] often highlight the benefits to those young people and the skills and knowledge they develop as a result (eg Kirby 1999)...

Human Rights reasons
... people have a right to be involved in decisions which affect them. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child makes a strong call for children and young people’s participation as a fundamental democratic right...

Democratic reasons
... young people appear to be uninterested in engaging in the political democratic processes. Governments have also acknowledged the need to increase young people’s civics knowledge. ...However, democracy can be seen as a political system for running a country or, more broadly, as an attitude or philosophy that colours relationships between people. ... Participation is a means of such democratisation.

Transformative reasons
Intervening to improve children and young people’s participation is seen ... as one way of fundamentally improving a whole society [with] ... an explicit agenda of re-including the opportunities for expression that are otherwise removed as the dominant social discourses take precedence. In this way, they aim to fundamentally change society. They are transformative.

OUTCOMES OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION APPROACHES
To talk simply about outcomes of participatory processes is then a complex matter, for the preceding discussion points to a broad range of practices, developed for a variety of reasons, and implemented in various ways. Kirby and Bryson (2002) have extensively summarised the research evidence around young people’s participation in public decision-making and distinguish between evaluations of impacts (on public decision-making, the wider community and young people) and of processes (around which young people, how they participate, how they are supported and organisational contexts).

They indicate that evidence indicates that young people “are still having little impact on public decision making, although this varies across contexts and between different types of organisations”, that “there is some evidence that good youth participation work helps increase dialogue and relations between young people and adults, and between peers” and that “there is substantial evidence that good participatory work benefits the participating young people, but that token involvement may not.” (ibid: 5) They point to research around gains for young people in “confidence, self-belief, knowledge, understanding and changed attitudes, skills and educational attainment” as well as indicating that “undertaking participatory work can help promote the importance (and means) of involving young people in the community”. (ibid)

Similarly, a recent Australian study points to consistent results that young people regard programs more positively and report improved outcomes for themselves, where they also experience greater youth participation. (Holdsworth et al, 2005; Stacey, 2005: 11)

WHAT YOUTH PARTICIPATION PRINCIPLES EMERGE?
The reference to ‘good’ participatory work also implies attention to the nature of practice that supports achievement of outcomes, rather than attention to a one-dimensional understanding of impact. Many sources have attempted to establish sets of principles that underpin ‘good’ youth participation practices.

Firstly, several writers refer to the need for deep organisational commitment that may involve shifts in perceptions about young people and about organisational responsibilities: “...the involvement of young people may require significant examination of organizational capacity and shifts in attitudes.” (Thapa et al, 2005: 3)

View the young as active social agents to be understood in their own right, and focus on what youth can do, rather than what they cannot or are not allowed to do until they grow up.
Such attitudinal changes are towards a strength-based view of young people: “...a gradual paradigm shift from treating youth as problems to viewing youth as assets, resources, and competent members of a community.” (Thapa et al, 2005: 1)

The specific suggestions for practices that are advanced are then implications of those perceptual changes. Woollcombe (from Peace Child International), for example, reflects on ten values and principles that are seen to underpin successful practices:

- **Ownership:** the young person must feel that the work being done belongs to him/her;
- **An Enabling Culture:** affirming of the young person’s culture and life-style;
- **Real Power:** to influence decision-making;
- **Expectations:** of what young people can do that are realistic;
- **Honour Young People’s Forms of Expression:** style of language and forms of expression should remain untouched;
- **Support:** with adult experience, without threat, including encouragement to give difficult tasks to adult professionals;
- **Respect:** for young partners as a product of all the other principles, as the essential component of adult attitudes;
- **Openness and Communication:** all feel able and supported to be totally open to each other;
- **Time Alone:** with no adult present, preferably in small groups, to encourage participation by all and to produce unexpected ideas and strategies;
- **Democracy and Other Ground Rules:** knowledge of and adherence to democratic principles and established laws of fairness, respect for minorities etc.

(Kirby and Bryson, in summarising the research evidence around processes, point to a large body of practice-based conclusions about what is important in enabling inclusive and effective participation. Some of the items that emerge more strongly from their research survey are:

- Participation to be representative and reflect the views of young people as a whole, rather than just a small sample;
- Ensure that action or change will occur;
- Young people decide on the extent of participation they want;
- No one method of involving young people in decision-making is the best – a number of methods should be employed;
- Embed young people’s participation in organisational practice;
- Clear understanding of the purposes of participation;
- Development of group skills including cohesion and support;
- On-going worker support;
- Realistic timetables to enable participation;
- Providing feedback including explanations of constraints;
- Dedicated ‘champions of participation’;
- Provision of staffing and resources.

(drawn from Kirby and Bryson, 2002)

Strong themes about the need for adequate resourcing (in terms of time, staff and funds) appear throughout the literature about successful approaches:

- The level of support needed to sustain young people’s involvement is greater than that needed for adults. This requires substantial resources and dedicated staff time;
- The participation of young people should be scheduled early in the life of the project in order to allow young people enough time to develop the skills and confidence to become effective participants.

(Fitzpatrick et al, 1998 cited in McNeish et al, 2000: 44)
Finally, the International Youth Foundation’s study of ‘what works in youth participation?’ acknowledges that ‘every model of youth participation has to be adjusted to the local social, geographical, cultural and political circumstances, and there is no standard model that can be replicated everywhere.’ (Golombek, 2002: 44) However, this study continues to point out that there are some common conditions that emerge from their case studies and points to ten areas:

- A conscientious youth participation model must rely on an ‘in-my-backyard’ policy... tangible issues that affect [young people] directly and to which they have easy access...
- An open participation model needs to offer a flexible, wide range of issues and structures...
- A modern participation model needs flexible, action-oriented methods of action and real teamwork...
- A success-oriented participation model needs youth-oriented methods of work and communication ...
- Young people need immediate feedback about project results ...
- A youth participation project needs to be non-hierarchical and have steady one-on-one communication with decision makers...
- For youth participation to be continuous and steady, it needs a stable environment... (including) the chance to adapt and make use of this space ...

A sense of control (decision-making); a sense of bonding (working with others); a sense of purpose or meaning (doing things that make a difference).

(Phillips, 1990)

- Adults may serve the project as assistants and mediators ... all tasks to be delegated to older assistants should be solely determined by the young people ...
- Project assistants must create a participatory environment free of ideologies... call attention to stereotypes and prejudice when they emerge in discussions or when party politics affect the free-flow of democratic debate...
- Youth participation must be sufficiently and sustainably funded... (Golombek, 2002: 44-47)

Similar sets of principles have emerged in studies in health and education that address human growth, development of strong self-concepts and effective learning. For example, Walker and Kelly (2002) suggested that student motivation to learn depended on three key student needs:

- to feel in control of their learning (significant input to rules and procedures, establish learning goals and tasks, decide how to work);
- to feel competent (investigating and responding to issues of survival and quality of life, solving real problems, creating real products); and
- to feel connected with others (cooperative and collaborative learning, peer support, community linkages, mutual respect).

Earlier, Newmann, Wehlage and Lamborn (1992) similarly said that learners needed to have a clear purpose, be valued and be treated with respect and fairness.

Phillips (1990) summarised health research that pointed to three central and inter-related factors in the development of strong self-concept for young people, and this has since been further endorsed by many other writers. Here three interacting areas of ‘sense of control’ (ie decision-making), ‘sense of bonding’ (ie working collaboratively with others) and ‘sense of purpose/meaning’ (ie doing things that make a difference) underpin both individual development and also effective program approaches. These areas seem to be validated in young people’s definitions of important and effective program elements (see Holdsworth et al, 2003).

This provision of a smaller list of essential principles seems to be more useful than a longer list of specific actions (which, in any case, can grow from the key principles), and there is strong agreement emerging on the general areas identified in the preceding sources.
Challenges: Inclusion of Who and What

The literature clearly identifies that issues of participation and civic engagement cannot be homogenised, but that there are significant barriers to participation by particular groups, particularly for marginalised young people:

Young people's participation needs to be examined in light of the power relations in any society, and human endeavours to achieve equality (Prout, 2001). For instance, opportunities for disadvantaged youth to participate meaningfully in various activities and programs in society are often limited by the society's implicit or explicit power structures and systems (Hart, 1992; Smyth, 1999; Angwin, 2000; Prout, 2001, 2002). The struggle around whose views are represented is ongoing with the outcome usually being that smaller, quieter voices get "drowned out by the other's louder, more dominant, and putatively more epistemologically legitimate. (Shacklock & Smyth, 1997, p. 4)

Individual children have different interests, capacities and needs, all of which will influence their desire and ability to participate in different activities ... the interests and capacities of children change and develop as they get older. Participatory approaches therefore need to be age-appropriate. Imposing adult models of participation on children is unlikely to be successful; likewise treating children of all ages alike can patronise some and confuse others. (McNeish et al, 2000: 46)

Secondly, McNeish et al point out that theories of childhood and youth on which practices are based are culturally specific, hence approaches need to recognise the impact of gender differences, of culture and religion and of language, as well as taking into account experiences (of disadvantage, racism etc). Practices need to "allow for complexity: recognising that young people have a range of cultures and identities". (Heath and McLaughlin, 1993: 59 cited in McNeish et al, 2000: 50)

The second principle then involves the clear identification of specific barriers to participation that affect various individuals and groups of young people, and the development of appropriate participatory structures and processes that address these barriers.

Other sources have linked such struggles to issues about what topics are defined as 'appropriate' for meaningful participation and whether such participation becomes limited to safe or trivial topics. In other variations, the definition of 'youth issues' serves to further define the areas around which young people will be invited or allowed to speak and decide, and to exclude other areas as not being 'youth appropriate'. (see Holdsworth, 2005)
YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND CITIZENSHIP

WHY ARE ISSUES OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT IMPORTANT?

While international and general discussions around ‘youth participation’ have proceeded for a substantial time, the language of ‘civic engagement’ has been more specific and more recent. Such discussions have been driven by concerns (particularly in the USA and UK) around perceptions of disengagement of young people (in particular, though this forms part of a wider concern about all age groups) from civil society. In a limited sense of this concern, evidence is cited of fewer young people voting in elections (“...the indicator that gives the most obvious evidence to the consensus that young people are apathetic is that when that are mature enough to vote, they are not exercising that right” [Lewis, 2005: 3]), but concerns are also expressed about “the disengagement of many citizens from political processes, coupled with increasing anti-social behaviour”. (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister [UK], 2005: 1)

No other group is as disengaged from elections as youth. Voter turnout in the United States trails that of other industrialized societies and is particularly anemic among youth between the ages of 18 and 24. (Iyengar and Jackman, 2004: 2)

Concerns about civic engagement link closely with perceptions of a general decline in people’s involvement with social networks; it is necessary to “put civic engagement in the context of the literature from which it has evolved: the study of social capital” (Winter, 2003: 2) and see it as linked to issues of trust between people and in civic institutions.

Such discussions have traditionally taken a ‘deficit’ approach to young people, emphasising their lack of knowledge, skills, commitment and finally engagement. This has been particularly evident in discussions about civic knowledge and citizenship (see below) that has popularly characterised young people as not knowing about Australian political history or structures of governance (see the Discovering Democracy program). Similarly, discussions of social capital have particularly drawn attention to claims that there has been a decline in young people’s membership of community organisations. (Putnam, 2000)

However, a body of literature is now emerging that examines institutional structures, and view young people’s responses as rational and appropriate. This literature has begun by recognising that young people are interested in civic and political issues but disapprove of existing processes; they “willingly participate in various activities of political relevance but ... often in less traditional or unconventional forms.” (Lewis, 2005:5) Young people are seen as interested to make changes, but in their own ways:

Young people are likely to disapprove of the structures of adult political discourse... while at the same time they stress that there still is a strong interest in political and social topics. They seem to be tired of politicians, but not of political ideas...

Many local, non-institutionally bound youth participation projects are being implemented by local government agencies or foundations, or are being developed and led by active and visionary young people who are driven by the strong desire to make a change. (Busch, 2002: 42)

In examining the outcomes of a large-scale international study of youth citizenship and civic engagement, it was noted that:
It appears that trust in governmental institutions is a foundation on which participation can be built. Young people in a stable democracy have enough institutional trust to believe that their participation will not be a waste of their time (or potentially dangerous), even if they do not possess much sense of efficacy. (Torney-Purta et al, 2004:14)

Acknowledging this, several writers have then reflected on how those issues of trust are affected by the responses that young people experience from civic processes: “Ultimately the impact that these participatory initiatives will have, however, depends upon the degree and manner which young people believe their interests and concerns are being heard and responded to.” (Molloy et al, 2002: 6)

It is recognised that the exercise of power and decision-making is distributed unevenly within communities of young people. In particular, links are recognised between access to economic resources and access to civic participation:

those individuals who are disadvantaged economically – including disadvantaged youth –

... youth are concerned about problems in society, and reasonable numbers of them participate in activities designed to address those problems. These young people, as Galston notes, ‘characterize their volunteering as an alternative to official politics, which they see as corrupt, ineffective, and unrelated to their deeper ideals’ (2001: 220). This strong sense of generational identity and relatively robust levels of non-political participation are resources that organizations and programs can build upon. (Winter, 2003: 14)

And the same writer concludes that: “young people generally feel powerless and excluded from the political process” (ibid: 5).

Much of the literature is quite positive about possibilities for the development of active participation: “Simply put, young people feel important and part of something bigger then themselves – part of a community” (Evans and Prilleltensky, 2005: 6), but contrasts are made between local settings that encourage and build participation, and governmental settings that formalise local or wider decision-making: “While many settings provide children and youth with opportunities for participation, opportunities that develop political competence, power and self-determination are often limited.” (ibid: 4)

There has been stronger recent attention to the need for organisations to commit to examining their own structures and processes if they are serious about building young people’s civic participation: ”Organisations that want increased youth participation in decision-making must be willing to alter their processes so that youth can play an authentic role” (Lewis-Charp et al, 2003 – cited in Evans and Prilleltensky, 2005: 9). The US-based Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE) has drawn together a set of papers that take up the challenge to look at youth civic engagement from an institutional perspective: “what conditions deter young people’s involvement in politics and civic life? What reforms could enhance youth engagement?” and the authors conclude that, while recognising the need for young people’s increased skills and knowledge:

Research, policy and practice  
... should consider ... reforms of institutions that might make participation more rewarding and welcoming. The problem is not always inside young people’s heads; sometimes they are right to avoid participation in the processes and institutions that exist for them. (Levine and Youniss, 2006: 3)

The literature endorses the need for organisations to have a clear idea about their intentions in supporting increased youth civic engagement, and emphasises that “… if youth civic engagement is primarily about supporting the structures that uphold the status quo, we should proceed with caution.” (Evans and Prilleltensky, 2005:1)
WHAT DO WE MEAN BY CITIZENSHIP FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?

At the foundation of ideas about young people and civic engagement is a discussion and debate about the nature of citizenship. A recent overview study of ‘youth and citizenship’ in Australia (Manning and Ryan, 2004) for the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme (NYARS) concluded that the term ‘citizenship’ is “highly contested and can be understood in a variety of ways ... there exists no single agreed definition of the term.” (ibid: 2). Their research also indicated that this lack of a shared ‘coherent understanding’ on citizenship was reflected in interviews with young people (ibid: 7). There was most support for definitions of citizenship as “a set of rights and duties concerned with participating in society... about membership of a community, and participating in decisions which affect you.” (ibid: 5)

These contrasts have earlier been described as ‘minimal’ and ‘maximal’ perspectives on citizenship:

Minimal interpretations emphasise civil and legal status, rights and responsibilities, arising from membership of a community or society. The good citizen is law-abiding, public-spirited, exercises political involvement through voting for representatives. Citizenship is gained when civil and legal status is granted.

Maximal interpretations, by contrast, entail consciousness of self as a member of a shared democratic culture, emphasise participatory approaches to political involvement and consider ways in which social disadvantage undermine citizenship by denying people full participation in society in any significant sense. (Evans, 1995: 5)

As a variation on this description (but echoing very similar distinctions), other citizenship policy debates have identified the different perspectives that are held about the purpose of initiatives around citizenship:

• civic-individualism (citizenship as a ‘private good’ - an individualist approach that focuses on individual skills and opportunities, and that emphasises helping people to become volunteers and informed consumers; for young people, this emphasises the development of knowledge and skills);

• civic-republicanism (citizenship as both a ‘private’ and a ‘public good’ that focuses on political structures and processes and that emphasises direct political participation; for young people, this emphasises understanding of and participation in formal structures); and

• civic-pluralism (citizenship as a ‘public good’ that focuses on the nature of relationships within society and emphasises building a diverse but cohesive political culture; for young people, this emphasises active participation in various communities and development of democratic attitudes and values). (based on: Office of the UK Deputy Prime Minister, 2005: 1)

HOW ARE YOUNG PEOPLE SEEN?

When considering the nature of citizenship for young people, these differing definitions also reflect the ways in which young people are seen generally by both society and by local government. The nature of ‘youth and citizenship’ has received attention since the mid 1990s at least, with issues of Youth Studies Australia and Melbourne Studies in Education featuring perspectives and debates. Within the former, there were reflections on the political and educational implications of the minimal/maximal differences in the ways in which young people are seen:

If citizens are those of us with equal standing and protection within our community, with the right (and obligation) to vote, to stand for political office, to serve as part of jury and so on, then it becomes difficult to understand why citizenship should be viewed by young people as other than something that will happen ‘later’. This view of citizenship necessarily pushes us towards redundant pedagogies that focus on training people for future roles, rather than equipping them with skills and understandings that can and must be given expression immediately. It reduces young people to either non-citizens or, at best, apprentice-citizens. Neither status is likely to provide an appropriate starting point for learning.

If, however, our concept of citizenship goes beyond the legal status and focuses on the array of roles that individuals can play in forming, maintaining and changing their communities,
then young people are already valuable, and valued, citizens to the extent that they participate in those roles. This means recognising that eligibility to vote, serve on a jury etc derives not from citizenship as such but from a combination of citizenship and adulthood. We should still engage in debate about just what adulthood is and when it should apply, but this must not stand in the way of a recognition that young people must be understood as citizens. (Owen, 1996: 21)

These interpretations have direct implications for the nature of formal and informal education about civics and citizenship.

Education for citizenship in its minimal interpretation requires only induction into basic knowledge of institutionalised rules concerning rights and obligations. Maximal interpretations require education which develops critical and reflective abilities and capacities for self-determination and autonomy. (Evans 1995: 5)

In the latter journal, links were made between deferred citizenship and deficit approaches to current engagement:

One of the central features of a categorical concept of youth is its positioning of youth in relation to the future. However the ‘future’ for which youth are positioned from a categorical perspective is an ahistorical, static notion of adulthood, based on a supposed dichotomy between the categories of adulthood and youth rather than on an understanding of the complex continuities through the life cycle. Conceptually, the positioning of youth in this way obscures the experiences of young people by relegating them to a less significant realm than those who have reached ‘adult’ life. Young people are seen as ‘non-adults’, a group who are in deficit. They are citizens of the future, rather than citizens in the present. (Wyn, 1995: 45)

More recently, and in response to these concerns, it has been argued that youth participation approaches recognise young people’s current, and not just their future citizenship:

It is no longer feasible or wise to look at young people as citizens sometime in the future. Citizenship cannot be seen as something one acquires once one has ‘grown up’. The challenge is to create the capacity of young people to participate today. (Mokwena, 2003: 92 - cited in Stacey, 2005: 12)

In considering young people in relation to civic institutions, it is suggested that we make choices between four perceptions of young people:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceptions of Young People</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) young people as clients (non-citizen participation):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people are seen as willing or unwilling actors within situations defined by services. Their participation means ‘turning up’, ‘being there’ or ‘taking part’ in activities that those services design. Young people’s skills are seen as deficient: most or all of these young people lack the skills, motivation and experience to make decisions in these matters, so services implement measures to coerce or direct them or develop them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) young people as consumers (token or consultative participation):</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young people are seen as consumers of services and goods and, as such, have influence or indirect decision-making power through their exercise of choice in the marketplace. Therefore agencies want to hear what young people are saying in order to target their services and goods better to them. They therefore carry out market research or conduct consultations to find this out; sometimes a young person is put on a committee to facilitate this information gathering. However, the agencies retain the right to respond (or not) and to change (or not) in the light of what they are hearing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) young people as minimal citizens (deferred or apprentice participation):</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Young people’s citizenship is focused on its formal aspects (voting for representatives, deciding on policy etc) that are, in their full capacity, deferred to adulthood: young people are future or ‘apprentice’ citizens. Young people have direct or

Choices we make: Perceptions of young people as clients, consumers or citizens ...

ideas of ‘minimal’ and ‘maximal’ citizenship ...
indirect but limited decision-making power through the exercise of choices between options presented to them. Organisations involve young people principally in formal, representative decision-making forums about issues that affect them, both as a preparation for their ‘future citizenship’ (so this experience will increase their understanding and skills etc), and as identification of some as potential ‘future leaders’, as well as for the advice they can give (as above).

**d) young people as maximal citizens (full or ‘deep’ participation):**

Young people are recognised as citizens now, with skills and ideas, with valued contributions to make to the community – as all citizens are. Organisations and agencies support young people’s current citizenship as an inherent right, expressed through mutual respect and partnerships in decision-making on all issues that directly affect them individually and/or as members of the community. (drawing on: Holdsworth, 2003; Nabben and Hill, 2004)

**WHAT SHAPES CITIZENSHIP AND CIVIC IDENTITY?**

In parallel with the earlier discussion on youth participation, it is recognised that ideas about citizenship and civic identity are not homogeneous: they depend on background and context. For young people, their civic or social identity is shaped by age (see McNeish, 200: 46), by gender, by cultural norms and by personal experience (including issues of sexism and racism). It is asserted that there is an interactive relationship between these contexts and the impact of local initiatives on social and civic identity: “Only by engaging in society – and working to make it better – can youth come to terms with who they are, what they believe, and how they relate to others and to society as a whole... Social identity development is one of the crucial underpinnings for successful youth development in all domains.” (Winter, 2003: 11)

A less optimistic overview of the development of identity for refugee or migrant young people points to the nature and importance of clashes in values and lifestyles between generations: around individualist versus collectivist approaches, around gendered roles, around problem-solving methods and around loyalty or disloyalty (Selvamanickam et al, 2001).

There is a slowly emerging literature about the ways in which ideas about youth participation, civic engagement and citizenship may be culturally grounded. For example, much of the early literature on participation (such as Coleman, 1972), locates the imperatives for participation as a response to the changing nature of young people’s roles in families and societies: “a relatively passive role, always in preparation for action, but never acting” (ibid: 6). Young people are seen to be “shielded from responsibility ... held in a dependent status ... and kept away from productive work...” (ibid: 8) and these are seen to be socially created aspects of the roles of young people that need to be challenged.

However, these circumstances and assumptions vary. It has been pointed out that:

- refugee young people bring with them a diversity of understandings about participation in different cultural contexts. The degree to which young people are seen as independent thinkers, capable and deserving of greater participation varies considerably with social class, culture and gender. (CMYI, 2001: 4)

Both these cultural contexts and the refugee or migration experiences of many young people have a profound influence on appropriate practices. The same report notes that:

- Many refugee young people have lost a sense of belonging to a community and consequently different mechanisms are required in order to involve them in participatory processes (ibid: 3) ... Refugee young people have fled countries where political systems are dictatorial and people are persecuted for speaking out against government. For these

**Conflict may centre around a young person’s acculturation into the individualist values and norms of Australian society, which contradict more traditional cultural values and norms to which parents adhere.**

(Sevlamanickam et al, 2001: 22)
young people, adequate time and resources must be provided for them to feel comfortable about participating in political processes and youth and welfare services. (ibid: 4)

While there is yet very little literature on these issues, including discussion of concepts of participation and Indigenous people, what does exist does not seem to challenge basic ideas about the importance of participation. An Aotearoa/New Zealand Framework for Taiohi Māori Development (Keelan et al, 2002), for example, “emphasises the involvement of taiohi (youth) ... because sometimes it is easy to forget about involving them in decision making.” (ibid: 8)

Similarly, a report from the National Indigenous Youth Leadership Group (2005) identifies issues around ‘Cultural identity’, ‘Youth are Confused by Life’ and ‘Having a Say’ among its top 15 issues “affecting Aboriginal and Torres strait Island young people” (ibid: 3) and reports comments and suggestions from young Indigenous people about: “Give young people a voice on committees”, “Grass root youth organisation to make young leaders for our community”, “Have an Aboriginal youth council”, “Listen to what we are saying”, “An open forum for us young ones to express our views”, “Let some young leaders step up to the plate”, and “Older mob need to ask us what we want” as well as “More direction and less fighting amongst the elders”, “Bring respectful Elders who know their business to teach young ones”, “Elders and Aboriginal leaders keeping youth in touch with their culture”, and “Listen to our Elders”. (ibid: 5-9)

Rather, the literature draws attention to the interaction of cultural and linguistic background with gender, SES, migration experience including length of time in Australia and variation between cultural backgrounds, and the implications of this for appropriate processes – including operating with respect, engaging elders and being inclusive (see Keelan et al, 2002; CMYI, 2001, 2006a, 2006b; Cook et al, 2004).

**Conscious shaping of citizenship and civic identity**

A large study in the USA in the mid 1990s (Verba et al, 1995, cited in Owen, 1996) examined what factors (particularly in formal and informal education) influenced ‘pathways to civic participation’. It was discovered that the provision of actual civics courses did not have a significant influence, but that opportunities for participation (and therefore learning) in school governance were more important. Owen concluded that “It is how we run our schools, rather than what we teach in them, that will determine levels of active citizenship” but that “changing curriculum is difficult enough; developing genuinely inclusive and democratic systems of school governance even more so.” (Owen, 1996: 23)

Many other writers and researchers have emphasised the importance of active participation in governance for the development of skills and knowledge around civic engagement:

> If given active roles on committees, governing boards, and other decision-making bodies, young people can learn how to work effectively, take responsibility for important decisions, and find their voice and power. Through participation in social and civic affairs, young people have an opportunity to develop and expand their competencies. (Pancer and Pratt, 1999, cited in Evans and Prilleltensky, 2005: 8)

Such development is also linked directly to the notions of increased social capital that were outlined earlier:

> programs that effectively increase participatory skills, and that help participants to develop networks that facilitate and encourage participation will be most effective in increasing long-term civic engagement and the outcomes associated with that engagement. (Winter, 2003: 19)

**WHAT WORKS IN CIVIC ENGAGEMENT? - PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES**

Similar principles and practices are suggested to support effective civic engagement as were outlined around active youth participation. There has been other research directly addressing support for civic engagement and this suggests that:

- Adopt multiple strategies to promote civic engagement, keeping in mind the many and varied factors related to [young people’s] lives that influence their engagement in community activities, including family, school and neighborhood.
• Involve [young people] in activities, from the design of the program at the start to the evaluation at the end, so that [they] are fully engaged and do not find civic activities boring.

• Continue efforts over time to extend program effects. Promoting civic engagement is not a one-shot event. The effects appear to last while [young people] are involved in the program, but short-term evaluations show that these effects generally dissipate over time. (Zaff and Michelson, 2002: 4)

It is emphasised in various studies (including Verba et al, 1995) that civic development and engagement is enhanced through opportunities to exercise civic decision-making:

Youth participation acquires particular significance in democracy-building initiatives. When lack of confidence and apathy toward political processes is increasing worldwide, it is the new generation who must be educated about how to build a strong democracy. But active citizenship cannot be expected to happen overnight when a person reaches voting age: it must be learned ‘by doing’ through everyday experience: opportunities to participate in shared decision-making, listening to different opinions, weighing options and consequences. These are individual skills that help build civil society and young people’s commitment to the democratic process. (Golombek, 2002: 8)

WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?

Similar themes emerge from literature around youth participation, citizenship and civic engagement when considering what inhibits or stops young people’s effective engagement. These barriers again reflect researchers’ orientations towards deficits of young people or to systemic deficiencies.

In the 2004 NYARS report on ‘young people, participation and local government’ (Saggers et al, 2004), some of the features reported in several reports (NSW Department of Local Government, 1997: iv; Australian Youth Foundation, 2002: 4; Barnett, 2003: 18-20; NSW Commission for Children and Young People, 2003; Paterson, 1999: 45; Wierenga et al, 2003: 41) were summarised. Their list starts by noting that “often the structures and processes by which decisions are made have been designed by and for those who have very different interests than young people. This means that the culture of formal governance can be very alienating, unfamiliar, out of reach to many young people and produce or exacerbate barriers...” (Saggers et al, 2004: 106)

The barriers that they identified can be grouped as follows:

Characteristics of young people:
• lack of familiarity with adult decision-making systems;
• skill deficits in young people;
• cultural and/or religious differences;
• poverty and social disadvantage;
• lack of time and resources;

Characteristics of attitudes to or by young people:
• negative attitudes to and stereotyping of young people;
• tokenism;
• lack of trust by adults in the abilities of young people;
• ‘junior politicians’ using events as a platform for their individual interests;
• the idea that ‘young people can do nothing’ or the idea that ‘young people can do everything’;
• lack of reciprocity;
• focusing on an agenda that is driven by Council staff or members without input from young people;

Characteristics of structures:
• lack of clarity and sense of purpose;
• problems with sustaining membership and maintaining the involvement of experienced young people;
• excessive formality;
• relying too heavily on ‘articulate’ young people or students;
• lack of knowledge of youth issues by council staff;
• lack of transport options for young people. (drawing on and structuring a list from Saggers et al, 2004: 106)

Similarly, the recent study of Youth Advisory Committee approaches to youth civic engagement (Stacey, 2005) identified ‘barriers to good outcomes’ in four areas (here paraphrased), while also noting that these were often the ‘lack’ of the positive and supportive practices listed. While these
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND YOUNG PEOPLE

were specifically identified for Youth Advisory Committees, their generalisability is supported in much of the literature:

**Resources:**

- Limited levels of funding;
- Councils with no dedicated staff position that is focused on young people;

**Skills and attitudes:**

- An inconsistent understanding of the purpose of structures and the meaning of youth participation, and the skills involved in implementing both;
- An inconsistent recognition of the time, resources and skills required to support structures;
- Insufficient or no consultation of young people, or poorly conducted consultation processes;
- Young people being excluded from planning and decision-making on issues that affect them, or only being allowed to play an advisory role;
- Young people not being considered in whole of community planning based on assumptions that young people do not have the knowledge, skill, maturity or interest, when this is not always the case;
- A low commitment to accountability when young people make recommendations: receiving no direct feedback, no invitations for ongoing involvement, or no information on progress when it takes a long time to address a recommendation;
- Imposing models of practice on young people, rather than developing models of practice in partnership with young people;
- A requirement for young people to adapt to structures, language and meeting processes, without considering how the organisation could adapt to be more youth-friendly and inclusive;

**Support:**

- Lack of consistent, widely available or coordinated training for young people, program coordinators, and organisations;
- Insufficient opportunities for networking and information sharing between young people;
- Reporting tools that are unclear and cannot gather easily comparable information;

**Representation:**

- Difficulties in recruiting and maintaining young people, particularly those who are not in school and are over 18 years old;
- Difficulty in gaining a diverse representation of young people, which may be about transport, or the need to address racism and other forms of discrimination that are prevalent in our communities;
- Insufficient flexibility in how forms of engagement are structured and operated, or how they reach out to the wider community of young people. This reduces their relevance to young people who are not from the dominant culture, or their appeal to a broader range of young people who may want different levels of involvement.

(based on Stacey, 2005: 79-80)
Effectiveness Models for Youth Participation and Civic Engagement within Local Government

The international and national literature emphasises the importance of youth participation and youth civic engagement, and draws particular attention to the role and power of local community groups and of Local Government to support and develop this. For example, it is suggested that "...local government is an ideal setting from which to engage in youth participatory practice as the most local of governmental jurisdictions in the Australian political system" (Kiss, 2003 cited in Saggers et al., 2004: 102) Other reasons are also proposed for the particular role of Councils in this regard: they are seen to have a relatively strong resource base, provide on-going and secure institutional support for workers (in comparison to the community sector), and be significantly well-placed to develop partnerships and collaborative relationships (Saggers et al., 2004: 102-3)

Yet Australian studies that have examined practices within local government are dominated by descriptions of mechanisms for 'consulting with' young people, rather than of the development of broader examples of community participation. The recent NYARS study on the relationship between young people and local government (Saggers et al., 2004) reported on mechanisms for forms of 'participation by young people in local government' as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth advisory committee/groups</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth/Junior Council</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Forums/surveys</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Steering Committees/Working Groups</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ad hoc consultations</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web/e-mail</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Via peak bodies</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A similar list is provided in a NSW-based review of 'Young people's involvement in local government decision-making processes' that concentrates solely on describing local governments' methods of consultation with young people. (Paterson, 1999: 41) Here, reported mechanisms range across (% of Councils):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mechanism</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Youth Week</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indirect consultation by Council staff through agencies</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct consultation by Council staff with young people</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public meetings on specific issues</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-on-going youth committees</td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth meetings or forums on specific issues</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community consultative and other Council committees</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-completed surveys</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-going youth councils/committees</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representations at Council meetings</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Paterson, 1999: 43)
This study also reports Council ratings of effectiveness of these mechanisms (ibid), indicating that the most frequently used mechanisms are not necessarily those seen as most effective. (For example, ‘Youth Week’ is ranked sixth in effectiveness and ‘Focus groups’ are ranked as most effective.)

**ROLES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT RE YOUNG PEOPLE**

The descriptions of the work of local government with respect to young people that emerge from the literature, indicate complex and changing intentions and relationships (see Paterson, 1999; Nabben and Hill, 2004; Saggers et al, 2004). These intentions and relationships are reported to vary between Councils and within Councils; in particular, there are possibly substantially different understandings and intentions with respect to Council’s roles between Councillors and Council staff, and between staff of Youth Services and other Council departments or business units.

Overall, these intentions and relationships include:

- The provision of services to young people. These service activities provide a ‘broad canvas’ within which youth participatory approaches of various intensity can be located (ie to different degrees they enable and support young people’s local civic engagement);
- Consultation with young people through various mechanisms to enable improved decision-making or ‘checking’ of issues for relevance and appropriateness. Direct consultations (including surveys and focus groups), youth forums and youth advisory groups are prominent amongst those consultation mechanisms;
- Aspects of shared or influenced decision-making through voting and lobbying. In some ways, young people have similarities to other age groups in their power to shape individual and collective Councillor decisions; in other ways – specifically around most young people’s non-voting status – their power is limited and diminished. Some of the on-going consultative mechanisms have been established as structures parallel to or part of the normal advisory structures of Council;
- The development of inclusive and ‘reciprocal’ communities, within which young people are valued members. This also includes positively influencing the perception of young people within communities.

Over and above these ‘present’ needs and roles, it is recognised that local government has a particular role in the development of civic skills, knowledge and experience in young people. Much of the debate in the literature is around the means of this (experience versus information), the location of this (within local groups or LGA-wide), and the extent of this (whether for some interested young people, or for all young people). (See for example, Heylen and Gould, 2004, 2005; Nabben and Hill, 2004; Local Government Association of Queensland, 2005.)

It is recognised that the debate has been transformed “from whether to pursue youth-oriented political programming to how to effectively construct programs that introduce young people to politics and encourage their meaningful involvement in government.” (Glickman, 2004: 6)

**MODELS FOR YOUTH PARTICIPATION WITHIN LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

The intentions of Local Government around the engagement and participation of young people shape the initiatives taken. The current literature of practice substantially focuses on either (mainly adult-run) consultations or on forms of youth advisory committees (YACs). On the other hand, the broader international literature stresses the need for a diversity of approaches to reflect the complexity of local government relationships.

Recent studies of the operation of Youth Councils and Youth Advisory Committees, particularly in South Australia (Heylen and Gould, 2004, 2005; Stacey, 2005) and in the UK (Field and Harrison, n.d.)
have pointed to many positive outcomes. These initiatives were strongly supported by Councils that had implemented them (Heylen and Gould, 2004: 10) and were seen to have achieved outcomes in "involving young people in planning things in the local community for young people" and "giving young people a voice on things that are important to them" (Stacey, 2005: 8). The South Australian State Government has supported the development of YACs through grants to local Councils. There has been a similar commitment to promote the development of peer-elected Youth Advisory Councils throughout Western Australia in conjunction with local governments (Field and Harrison, n.d.: 23 citing www.yacs.wa.gov.au).

However, there was not uniformity reported in outcomes of these Councils, with some YACs operating very successfully, while others struggled. Even where successful models operated, they were seen to operate alongside and in strong interaction with other forms of participation and networks involving young people and the wider youth sector (Heylen and Gould, 2004: 10). In other cases, successes in terms of involving young people in "committees and strategic planning processes" were much more limited (ibid: 11) and it is concluded that "on the whole, it appears that young people's involvement in planning tends to be limited to issues defined as being 'youth specific' even when the YAC is interested in contributing to broader community issues." (Stacey, 2005: 5)

Stacey details four different models for organisation of YACs (Stacey, 2005: 60-69) and points to some of the factors that are significant in their positive implementation (see below).

Elsewhere, there has been a more critical response to formal Youth Councils, particularly when these are seen as the first or only strategy to be adopted. Such criticism is focused around the dominance of formal governance practices and on concerns about inclusion of diversity.

The NYARS report on local government reports that many respondents "were sceptical of formal governance structures and the idea that youth participation is necessarily about getting youth representatives involved in a formal governance structure or some mechanism that is mirrored upon adult organisations." (Saggers et al, 2004: 108) There was concern that the outcomes for young people could even be counter-productive:

Many youth councils are flawed and inappropriate participatory devices, often obfuscating the voices and interests of many young people (Matthews, 2001: 299 cited in Saggers et al, 2004: 105)

and

A number of informants suggested that there was a risk that reproducing parliamentary type events and structures can produce cynicism in young people and become the training ground for young people to become non-participants in the future. (Matthews, 2001: 314 cited in Saggers et al, 2004: 106)

As has been noted earlier, a specific focus on inclusion is required in order to support the participation of marginalised young people – whatever the approach used. The NYARS report cites specific initiatives in some areas around inclusion of specific groups but still notes that:

“Few if any of the young people we see will get involved in a youth advisory council ... these are for young people with much more advantage.”
(Front Yard, quoted in Saggers et al, 2004: 109)

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OTHER CAPITAL CITIES

Because the City of Melbourne has many different characteristics to other LGAs in Victoria, there may be useful comparisons with initiatives in other capital cities. However, the information available here is sparse, with little documentation of what is possible and appropriate in response to the particular needs of a capital. In particular, it would be useful to have some models of the civic engagement responses of capital cities with respect to ‘transient’ young people, or young people who ‘use’ the city ‘in passing’.

While the City of Sydney, for example, directly recognises such needs in saying that “a large number of young people visit the CBD area on a daily basis for recreation, entertainment, access to services, transport and employment” (City of Sydney, 2005: 6) policy responses are more in terms of service provision than of civic engagement. The Youth Strategy and Action Plan recognises that “young people need to be properly resourced to participate in community projects” and “the participation of young people in the community needs to be increased and they should be involved ... in decisions and processes that impact on their lives.” (ibid: 31) This plan endorses a ‘guiding principle’ that “young people will be encouraged to participate in planning and managing one-off events and/or ongoing activities held in public spaces” (ibid: 34) and commits to action around “training through youth programs... employ young people as trainees ... young people consulted on Social impact Assessments for major developments ... investigate alternatives to a Youth Advisory Committee that is, less formal and more event-based committees...” (ibid: 45-46)

In a Canadian example, the City of Vancouver has adopted a Civic Youth Strategy, which commits to “youth as active partners in the development, assessment and delivery of civic services which have a direct impact on youth, and in broad spectrum community consultations and initiatives” (City of Vancouver, 2006: 1). It also “promotes and supports youth-driven youth groups as a key consultation resource to the city to ensure that the voices of youth are heard” (ibid) and establishes core objectives around this for ‘all departments in the civic government’. Its ‘guiding principles’ are:

- **Strong youth involvement at the local level**;
- **Partnership in planning and implementation**;
- **Assistance and support rather than control and management**. (ibid: 2)

Implementation of the Strategy is coordinated by a partnership between representatives from the City’s departments with specific responsibility for the Strategy, the Child and Youth Advocate and Youth Advocate Monitor, community youth organisations, and young people. This group works in collaboration with “non-profit agencies, youth-related ethno-specific/multi-cultural services, cultural and arts groups, other levels of government and individual citizens including parents.” (ibid)

The City also employs a team of young people as a Youth Outreach Team, with a mandate to “increase meaningful youth participation in City decision-making” through providing expertise on youth engagement to other City staff, act as a bridge between the City and youth groups, guide and mentor young people’s access to the metropolitan system and bring staff and young people together to address issues or to work on projects of mutual interest. ([www.vancouveryouth.ca](http://www.vancouveryouth.ca))

This group coordinates a newsletter (‘Youth in the Hall’) that provides networking information about local youth councils, events, courses and other initiatives.

Defining a role in youth affairs does not mean that Councils will have to take on a whole new set of responsibilities. It is more about building youth needs and issues into existing strategic planning and funding priorities, and ensuring young people are listened to, heard and responded to as part of everyday Council business.

*(Heylen and Gould, 2005: i)*
WHAT’S REQUIRED FOR EFFECTIVE MODELS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT WITHIN LOCAL GOVERNMENT?

The NYARS study reports some general agreements on good practice in encouraging youth participation and civic engagement in local government and in local communities. It is suggested that good practice:

• is based on choice;
• has some tangible outcome for those involved;
• is related to important issues for young people;
• involves training, skills development and on-going support for young people;
• demonstrates to young people that their work is valued;
• acknowledges the contribution of young people;
• is adequately resourced;
• takes into account young people’s limited access to time, money, transport and social support;
• provides young people with a sense of ownership in decisions;
• is regularly reviewed;
• involves negotiation and being flexible;
• allows young people to communicate and write in their own words;
• provides young people with feedback;
• deals with a broad range of issues;
• ensures that events are held at venues accessible to young people;
• publicly recognises the contribution of young people;
• provides young people with food and drink; and
• has at least one councillor involved. (Saggers et al, 2004: 111-112)

Other studies point to the need to ensure inclusion of diversity including:

approaches to ensure the inclusion of:

• young Indigenous people, and young people from multi-cultural and/or non-English speaking backgrounds – involving community leaders in the process, ensuring venues are culturally appropriate and welcoming, and using interpreters;
• young parents – supporting child care arrangements and/or arranging to meet young parents where they gather for group activities; and
• young people with a disability – ensure easy and ‘front of house’ disabled access to venues, and involve carers where appropriate. (Heylen and Gould, 2005: 6)

There is specific mention made in research of the value of the active commitment and participation of the Mayor and Councillors in ensuring that civic engagement structures are effective. This is particularly noted in relation to YACs:

There are three factors that affect the strength of youth voice and leadership in a council through a YAC. Each factor by itself makes a difference, but the best results are achieved when they happen in combination:

• having a committed, knowledgeable, supportive and skilled YAC Coordinator – it also helps if there are other Council staff who understand the purpose of the YAC and support the YAC Coordinator in his/her role;
• strong leadership and support from the Mayor;
• a small group of interested and supportive Council elected members – two or three is enough to make a good start. (Stacey, 2005: 3)

This report also presents a simple representation of elements of a successful YAC Program within local government. While some of the elements here are specific to the South Australian context and to a specific structure, many have wider applicability:
The NYARS Report on local government and young people also notes a further criticism of formal youth governance structures:

*Young people are increasingly participating in social and community life through the use of virtual tools, multimedia and interactive technology... Traditional youth governance structures are time intensive, demand young people sit through much that is disengaging and boring, is dependent on travel to distant places and limits their contact to a small number of people. In contrast, participating in a chat site allows young people to choose when they engage, opens up more opportunities for contact, makes it possible to participate at one’s own pace, can allow them to ‘travel’ elsewhere to communicate with others and involves less imposed constraints by adults.* (Saggers et al, 2004: 109)

This is amongst several recent reports that have asked whether new information and communication technologies offer possibilities for increasing young people’s access to civic engagement. These point to criticisms of the limited ways that are offered to young people for their engagement – sometimes on-line, more frequently off-line – but that no choice is offered to young people about those ways.

This is seen to favour some groups of young people and to marginalise others: “The conventional approach to e-democracy, and most community engagement programs, can be characterised then as being

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**Resources**
- A dedicated YAC Coordinator position
- A Council that commits resources in addition to OfY funding
- Time, support and resources for YACs to develop a strong identity and foundation
- Sufficient state funding to acknowledge the higher costs involved in rural areas, or for reaching diverse young people

**Skills and attitudes**
- A committed, supportive, knowledgeable and skilled YAC Coordinator
- A small core group of Council staff who support the YAC Coordinator
- A core group of Council elected members (2-3) who support the YAC, including the Mayor
- A shared understanding of what full youth participation means that is reflected in the culture of Council
- YAC interest in a youth and a community orientation, and Council support when they do
- A proactive and youth-friendly approach to consultation and a commitment to partnership

**State support**
- A comprehensive training package for YAC members and mentoring opportunities
- Training, guidance and mentoring for YAC members, YAC Coordinators, Council staff and Council elected members
- Many networking and information sharing options for YACs at state and regional levels
- Consistent and regular support from and communication with the OfY, including face-to-face contact

**Representation**
- A well-known and respected YAC that is active in consulting with young people
- Broad representation of young people on YAC (eg people outside of school, cultural diversity)
- Good understanding of what a representative role involves for YAC members

(Stacey, 2005: 8)
Youth engagement in politics and community affairs has quietly been taking on new life and a dynamic new look, thanks to the Internet. Scarcely audible above the hubbub over piracy and pornography and the clamor of the media marketplace, a low-profile civic upsurge – created for and sometimes by young people – has taken root on the Net. Hundreds of websites have been created that encourage and facilitate youth civic engagement, contributing to an emerging genre on the Internet that could loosely be called ‘youth civic culture’. (Montgomery et al, 2004: 1)

largely ‘government centric’ – that is, they seek to engage only those young people inherently interested in engaging with government on discrete nominated topics.” (Lewis, 2005: 12)

However, many of these discussions also limit their own perceptions to youth civic engagement to ways in which young people can be consulted, seeing new technologies as ways to deliver information to young people, or to entice them into political campaigns. One report concludes that: “A synthesis of political content and interactive technology can engage youth... Civic educators and campaign organizers take note: this form of communication gets through to young people.” (Iyengar and Jackman, 2004: 12)

The use of ICTs then constructs young people’s civic identities: the ways in which young people see themselves as citizens, and the dominant definitions of citizenship (minimal or maximal) are reinforced by the assumptions made within these forms of communication and information transmission.

Some general cautions are offered by the OECD: “It is impossible to report on electronic engagement of citizens without discussing democratic engagement in general; technology is only an enabler, facilitating existing, or in some cases, new methods of engagement.” (OECD, 2003 cited in Lewis, 2005: 11) Similarly, while noting that “the extent to which online communities represent a new form of political participation and social activism is unclear” (Wyn et al, 2005: 4) and that “the literature also shows that a limited cross-section of young people are using the Internet as a site for civic engagement” (ibid: 6), it is also recognised that “levels of political engagement on the Internet reflect those of the real world.” (ibid: 4-5)

In particular, concerns are expressed about the same issues that face any form of youth participation or civic engagement, particularly about how to provide inclusive access to the means of engagement: there are concerns that reliance on technologies may further marginalise those without economic access to these means. (ibid: 4)

However, there are larger concerns with issues of power and control. If the possibilities for e-engagement and e-democracy are limited to young people’s roles in responding to electronic surveys, or browsing civic websites, such issues may be further hidden and distanced from young people. Here, as noted earlier, young people are seen again as consumers (ibid: 13) and there is the danger that they can either be ‘sentimentalised’ as “innocent and vulnerable’ and ‘requiring protection from the predations of the media and the markets that drive it” (Atkinson and Nixon, 2005: 400 cited in Wyn et al, 2005: 13) or ‘romanticised’ as “savvy, media-wise and entrepreneurial” (ibid).

On the other hand, if the e-possibilities are enabling for young people to be producers and to control their civic identity by creating media and by using ICTs for their own networking and organisation, fruitful directions may emerge.

It has been suggested that:

beyond informational use, the interactive capacity of the Web provides young people with opportunities to hone a variety of civic skills, including the following:

• develop and articulate their thinking on issues of public concern;
• share ideas with youth from different backgrounds, who may hold contrasting opinions;
• build the habits of initiative, analysis and independent thinking; and
• develop their own sense of being invested in civic issues and actively involved in the civic arena. (Montgomery et al, 2004: 13-14)
These possibilities have been seen as the development of “popular culture [that] can become a prominent political space for the negotiation and enactment of a new dimension of citizenship: cultural citizenship” (Dolby, 2003: 270 cited in Wyn et al, 2005: 15). This is seen to enable young people to construct “political identities and a sense of belonging” (ibid: 16).

Citing the work of Coleman and Gotze (2001) in addressing options for building social capital, and identifying key areas where new thinking is needed in the development of e-democracy, Lewis suggests that “while the principles outlined ... with their emphasis on mutual learning, connected citizenry, and shared responsibilities, offer a good start to online engagement with young people, the unique characteristics of young people provide an extra set of complications to the challenge.” (Lewis, 2005: 110)

Some of those complications involve recognising that young people are active participants in all sorts of ways – including in emerging technologies. As Reddy and Ratna (2002) point out with reference to more traditional forms of participation by young people, the complications may have more to do with adult perceptions, control and containment of that participation. Many young people are using ICTs in different ways, but these have, as yet, little engagement with civic systems and remain unrecognised as ways in which young people may experience greater civic participation. Do those in civic institutions view technologies as enabling or limiting diverse means of participation?

Other complications concern the ‘digital divide’ issues about access, with characteristics of regular Internet users (and hence producers) being “high weekly income, high level of education, employed, especially in professional occupations and living in cities rather than regional or rural Australia” (Vromen, 2005: 3 cited in Wyn et al, 2005: 16); “people who are politically active and engaged use the Internet to supplement this ...[but there is] no evidence that the Internet or the use of ICTs was the primary focus of political engagement.” (ibid)

At this point, discussions about social capital, connectedness and engagement are divided between “cyber-optimists, who argue that the use of the Internet and mobile phones help young people forming social networks, and cyber-sceptics who find that ICTs do not promote social connectedness, but instead contribute to the process of individualisation in society.” (Wyn et al, 2005: 19)
Key Findings and Learnings:
Practices in Local Government

The Literature provides a context for examining possible practices for enhancing youth civic engagement within Local Government. This project also drew on current examples of approaches within local governments within Victoria and elsewhere.

METHODOLOGY

Using the information presented by Nabben and Hill (2004) and the Centre’s own networks, the project identified approximately 12 Local Government Areas in Victoria for further investigation. Officers within these Councils were contacted and invited to take part in interviews. Approximately 30 interviews with Council personnel and with young people within eight of these Local Government areas were finally carried out, either face-to-face or by telephone.

The semi-structured interview schedule explored intentions, structures, powers and responsibilities, and experiences of diversity.

1. **Intention**

What does Council see as the purpose of youth participatory and civic engagement initiatives? How is this reflected in policy documents?

It has been suggested that possibilities include:

- Shared decision-making power – broadly based or within specific constraints
- Consultation with and advice from young people for more effective decision-making
- Development of young people’s civic (and other) skills
- Enhancing role of young people in building community
- Improving the image of Council
- Deflecting or avoiding future trouble – pacifying young people

Councils may have intentions in several of these areas; what are the main drivers of participatory initiatives?

It is suggested that the options and issues are:

- Are there formal or informal structures? – eg a formal committee that is involved in providing advice or decision-making
- IF consultation is a priority, are there informal or formal consultation processes including forums and summits
- Which young people are involved and how are they identified and selected?
- Do the mechanisms have direct or indirect links to Council? – ie only those set up by Council or all those in the LGA?
- If there are diverse examples, what coordination processes exist?
How does Council recognise or relate to these structures and roles?
What have been previous structures? What evaluations exist?

3. Power

What power do these structures have, including their relationship to Council decision-making and to work plans of Council staff? Specifically:
- What topics of conversation and discussion?
- Where do they come from?
- What powers do young people have within these structures?
- Who are young people reporting or responsible to?
- What is the role of Councillors and Council staff?
- What have been the barriers to participation (for young people and Council)?

Suggested possibilities have been:
- Advisory role: young people put views forward either in response to requests or on their own initiation;
- Decision-making: within what boundaries?
- Financial power: what opportunities are there to allocate money? Within what constraints? Do young people have a budget?
- Is the power local or widespread?: ie power to act within one’s own organisation, or more broadly across the LGA?

4. Outcomes for Young People and Councils

What outcomes have been noted to date?
What outcomes have there been for young people? for Councils?

5. Diversity and inclusion

Critical to any discussion of youth civic engagement are questions of which young people and whether approaches and mechanisms privilege some groups or lock others out from access to participation.
- Who gets to participate within these mechanisms? Which individuals? Which groups?
- Via whom?: who are the ‘gatekeepers’ who decide on access?
- How?: what are the mechanisms for enabling or disabling participation?
- Barriers and successes: what is known about successful practices for inclusion?
- What is the intention of Council?

6. Resourcing and support

What resources are available to support these initiatives?
- How effective have they been?
- What resources are necessary?

INTERVIEWS

Interviews were carried out with Council officers and involved young people. Their responses have not been approved as official statements of these Councils. Hence, the outcomes of these discussions are presented anonymously in Appendix B. The following descriptions draw on the major sections of these interviews to identify key findings that emerged across the group. Further, some comments from active young people are also presented in Appendix C.

1. Intention

While many Councils provided a generalised response about wishing to involve young people in decision-making at all levels, there were approximately five specific options for Council intentions identified in responses, which can be characterised as:
- “We wish to share decision-making with young people.”
- “Better decisions are made if those involved are consulted.”
- “We wish to enhance the role of young people within their communities.”
- “We wish to develop the skills of young people, including skills around and to enable civic engagement.”
- “We are required to enhance young people’s participation.”

All the respondents pointed to similar statements of intention adopted by their local governments. Strong common threads existed around skill enhancement of young people (particularly in areas of civic competence: “continued skill development”; “enhance participating young people’s leadership skills and their knowledge on the process of governance, citizenship and advocacy”), community strengthening (and the role of young people within communities: “young people feel involved and part of council processes”; “promote the value of young people as active members of the community”) and of effective decision-making (through consultation and advice: “Ready voices to call upon”). In many cases, it was also acknowledged that Councils’ intentions were to be
seen to be involving young people ie intentions associated with the image of Council, and that there were also intentions of enhancing the image of young people ("Raise the profile of young people") within local communities.

In some cases there were strong statements about the need for an integrated approach through commitments to youth participation and advocacy as underpinning all developments. In other cases, Councils were struggling with such ideas, particularly as far as what they meant in practice, with widely different perceptions of what ‘youth participation’ is being reported. In some cases, there were expressed wishes to go beyond ‘consultation’ into more active forms of participation, while other Councils explicitly identified enabling young people to “discuss and express opinions” as the extent of their commitment.

Most Councils drew attention to three to five year Action Plans (and in one case, to a 10-year Action Plan) where Council intentions were translated into service and development initiatives.

In three areas, there were recent or current moves to establish formal structures such as Youth Councils or Youth Advisory Committees when asked to identify youth civic engagement processes. All the Councils represented here had some group of young people in existence, whether or not they formally recognised it as a Council or Committee. Amongst the group, there was wide divergence of views from Council workers about such structures, with some indicating strong commitment, while other strongly rejected establishment of such a body.

Yet even where other mechanisms for consultation, discussion and recommendation existed, commitments to active youth participation had led to the formation of groups of young people who were steering such processes and mechanisms, and who then found themselves performing roles very similar to those performed by formalised structures.

The differences within the group centred around issues of whether such structures were the first or only mechanism adopted, and whether they were seen to be closed (or exclusive) groups or intentionally open (or inclusive) groups. That is, the distinction became one of whether these groups were seen to be mechanisms for providing advice to Councils themselves - in their own capacity, or whether they were seen to be managing processes for broader advice and participation. (Some of these issues will be further reported on in the next section.)

Half of the Councils sampled here have formal Youth Councils, Youth Voice Committees or Youth Forums (referred to from this point as YACs), with membership drawn by application from various areas of the LGA (either on a geographical basis, or from sectors). These YACs consist of between 12 and 20 young people who are appointed for one or two year terms. In some cases, out-going members of these YACs are involved in selecting and/or mentoring new members. These YACs have advisory roles to Local Government and sometimes consult with young people in exercising that role. (Further details about membership and selection mechanisms are contained in the case studies in the Appendices.)

Three of these YACs have specific budgets, and disburse finances to other young people through grant making processes.

One of the other Councils supports a series of decentralised Youth Committees, while the other three Councils support some form of youth-led consultative mechanism (summit, forum or consultations). In these cases, there are organising or follow-up action groups of young people that are supported by Youth Services. Each of these Councils focuses primarily on mechanisms for wider-scale consultation and participation with young people. However, some of these also report that specific Youth Committees exist within population group-based organisations or within specific services. These tend to be task-focused rather than general advisory groups.

In addition, some Councils organise specific consultations with young people around local topics. In some cases the existing structures...
(YACs) provide young people for these consultations (so a relatively small group continue to provide a ‘youth perspective’); in one case (not represented amongst these case studies), these consultations were carried out by departments of Council without any reference to existing structures or to youth services; in other cases here, the consultations are carried out by young people through the forum or summit mechanisms supported by Council (so a broad and changing group of young people may be involved).

Issues of power of these structures are reported in the next section; issues of diversity are reported in the following section.

**Relationship to Council**

Some of the YACs are supported strongly by local elected Councillors, who have played roles in their formation, who attend meetings, and who mentor involvement through advice on local government processes. (Other non-YAC structures have also reported strong and valuable involvement of and advocacy by local Councillors as a vital factor in the success of their approaches. In some cases, the Mayor attends the Youth Summit, and young people present recommendations and outcomes to Council.) However, some YACS highlight their ‘young people only’ nature, and the role of Youth Services as a conduit to or link with Council.

In all cases, no matter what structure has been adopted, respondents emphasised the crucial importance of the dedicated support from Youth Services to enabling such processes and mechanisms to operate. This is further reported in the section on Resources below.

“I know we are an ‘advisory group’, but I feel we need to get out there in the community more and send a positive message to other young people about volunteering etc.”

*(Young person on a Youth Council)*

**3. Power**

**Power to advise, influence or decide**

The power exercised by young people through whatever structure or mechanism is in place can be either direct or indirect. No Council reported (not surprisingly) that young people had broad decision-making powers through these approaches: such power is constitutionally and legally vested in elected local Councillors.

However various degrees of power were reported. Most directly, some bodies were delegated financial decision-making powers, particularly around grants to other young people. In these cases, the youth body was required to report formally to Council on its decisions.

Secondly, the decisions of young people (whether through Youth Councils, Advisory Committees, or forums/summits) were considered by Councils and influenced Council decisions. In various ways, respondents noted that: “As in the case of recommendations/advice of any other Council Advisory Committee, recommendations, proposals, comments or advice provided by the Youth Forum may or may not be adopted or implemented by Council.”

Young people presented directly to meetings of Council (even holding joint meetings in one case), or through Youth Services or the CEO (“feed into reports”), or in written reports (such as regular ‘monthly reports ... against youth strategy objectives, highlighting benefits to young people”). In some cases, Councillors took part in meetings of Youth Councils and forums, and this shaped their own understanding of and responses to issues.

Thirdly, some Councils reported that such decisions of young people shaped the work load of Youth Services staff and, in one case, there was a strong commitment that Youth Services were accountable to young people and to Council for implementation of young people’s decisions: issues raised by young people form part of the Strategy Plan for Youth Services.

**Power to shape the agenda**

The other aspect of power reported by Councils concerned the scope for or constraints on topics for young people’s discussion and}

“The Council hasn’t given us any problems to look after. Are we supposed to be identifying the problems ourselves?”

*(young person on a Youth Council)*
decision-making. In the first instance, how were discussion agendas shaped? Secondly, what assumptions were there about the appropriateness of issues to be considered?

Most Councils reported that agendas were set through some process of negotiation between Council staff and young people. Items for discussion were brought forward by Council for young people’s consideration and response, while young people could also raise items for consideration. In many cases, the items brought forward by young people arose from processes of research or consultation with peers.

Both of these processes were shaped by assumptions about appropriateness; what Councils referred to young people, reflected perceptions of what were ‘youth issues’; equally, young people’s choices of what to raise for discussion were shaped by those same assumptions. Respondents reported ‘traditional’ youth issues of recreation, entertainment, youth spaces, transport, education (‘leaving school early’) and youth health (specifically drugs and alcohol), as well as specific population issues such as young women’s programs. These were sometimes extensively researched and detailed, such as reports on ‘pedagogy, the impact of mass media on young people and recreation and leisure options for young people in public space’.

However, in only a few cases were there reports of broader community issues (such as social, economic or environmental directions) being referred to or raised by young people.

It was noted that issues raised by young people were often ‘deficit’ issues: responding to what young people ‘don’t have’ or to negatives about local provisions, rather than responses that sought to strengthen or enhance initiatives. “The only way that young people can use their power is to change injustice,” noted one respondent.

In some Councils it was noted that “If any issue which relates to young people is presented to Council, the Councillors send it to the Youth Council for their consideration. Some Council officers are more proactive and consult with the Youth Council before the issue is presented to Council.”

The role of a ‘consultation champion’ within the various business units of Council was seen as powerful, particularly when that person worked closely with Youth Services or with the Youth Policy Worker or Youth Planner.

Formal constraints on powers

Finally, some issues of control over actions of young people were noted. In one instance, final decisions on content of a website developed by young people and hosted by local government were made by Council staff (because of legal responsibility). In another case, it was noted that “If there are web links to sites that are inappropriate to have on a Council site there will need to be negotiation with the young people and the Youth Services so that the young people understand the limitations that being part of Council entails.”

In some cases, where young people formally represent Councils, it was reported that speeches or letters by the young people were prepared or vetted by Council officers in advance, or the Communications area of Council was required to approve posters. In other cases, there is greater delegation of final power to represent or decide matters, with an understanding that, on certain matters, young people may take and be responsible for their own actions.

4. Outcomes for young people and Councils

Respondents reported on-going benefits and achievements from their approaches to youth civic engagement and participation.

For young people, these benefits were both in terms of ‘being listened to’ and also around specific short-term outcomes. One Council acknowledged a “70-75% success rate” around issues raised by young people. Another said that the positive profile of young people in the area had improved, and that young people felt more “part of the community”. Some young people had joined other advisory committees.

Further, for the individual young people involved, there were outcomes around development of skill (meeting procedures, negotiating, writing) and personal characteristics such as confidence. Specific stories of such individual outcomes were provided in most cases.

Of some concern to Councils were practices in which these outcomes were consistently delivered to only a small number and narrow range of young people. Some Councils made attempts to develop a consistent group of young people to act as ‘youth representatives’, to take part in consultations, or to serve on other advisory bodies.
While this built the individual knowledge and skills of these young people in order to support effective participation, other Councils expressed concern about the small numbers involved, and that Councils might then hear only uniform or ‘safe’ voices. It was harder to discern documented outcomes for Councils. This does not mean that they don’t exist, but that they may be more abstract, long-term and involved with community development. Within the examples provided, there were examples cited of valuable input provided by young people to Council decision-making around issues such as town planning, graffiti policy, the development of a skate park, public transport, domestic violence initiatives, and access to public and private spaces in the LGA. One respondent reported that youth civic engagement measures were “a checking mechanism for council about what the issues are and what the concerns of young people are.” In another case, it was reported that “for Council there has been a perspective that they are supporting youth initiatives and that rate payers’ money is being well spent.”

5. Diversity and inclusion

There are varying degrees of diversity represented within these LGAs. Most respondents were aware of the need to address such issues in their approaches to civic engagement of young people: “We have really pushed for a cultural mix; previously groups facilitated by Council were almost exclusively non-CLD.” One Council stressed the importance of maintaining a policy and practice focus on this as an issue, and of persisting with actions aimed at ensuring diverse and inclusive participation.

In some cases, this meant taking specific initiatives or targeted strategies to ensure representation on committees or in forums; in other cases, decisions about the form of civic engagement approaches have been substantially shaped by consideration of inclusion and diversity – for example, feeling that a formal committee structure would not enable participation by some marginalised groups; conducting outreach research or consultations with specific ‘hard to involve’ groups.

In these cases, initiatives have involved:

• Employing a specific youth participation worker with responsibility for liaison with young people;
• Employing specific population group workers to liaise with communities;
• Providing outreach activities to ‘hard to involve’ groups and individuals;
• Approaching families to explain strategies, seek support, and include them alongside young people;
• Supporting young people to include their families;
• Specific advertising within press or locations directed to specific groups;
• Relocating meetings to more ‘youth friendly venues’;
• Accessing views of young people through focus groups and meetings within ‘safe’ locations (within services);
• Paying young people to participate;
• Providing appropriate facilities, food, transport, in-committee support etc.

It was also noted that the very ideas of formal civic participation might form a barrier to inclusive
CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND YOUNG PEOPLE

participation. This operates on several dimensions: firstly, groups of young people may have little understanding of or trust in government structures and therefore place a low priority on participation. This is shaped by the way that groups operate, the nature of business (including funding) and the constraints on independent decision-making of young people.

Secondly, it was suggested that all forms of engagement (particularly those involving some formal structures, but also including forums and discussions) can be seen by agencies and organisations as only appropriate for some young people (e.g. “schools tend to send their best kids”). Assumptions are then made about which young people are allowed to attend, or provided with positive options for participation.

Thirdly, it was suggested that local governments may “have limited and preconceived ideas of what participation is, thinking only of a Youth Council Model.” These comments were generally made with reference to Councillors, but also were applied to the views of some Youth Service staff.

In all cases, it was suggested that there is “a need to acknowledge that youth participation mechanisms are not one size fits all” and that an inclusive strategy must include a diversity of approaches.

On an individual level, inclusion of young people generally is also shaped by time issues (such as homework or work requirements), by personal or life issues, by economic issues (affording transport to come to meetings) and by the place and time of meetings.

Some of these were also noted as issues for participation by Council staff.

Cultural and linguistic diversity

Issues of appropriate responses to cultural and linguistic diversity are acknowledged both by local government workers and also by other community organisations and researchers. As part of this study, interviews were carried out with a small number of young people from diverse cultural backgrounds about their understanding and experience of participation. In particular, we were interested to discover whether ideas about participation were shaped, in practice, by culture and migration or refugee experience.

This small study indicates that, while ideas about active participation and civic engagement are endorse across and within many cultural groups, there are different understandings of the ways in which they emerge in practice, and different experiences and needs that must be considered. These ideas also interact strongly with gender (with males and females reported to be accorded different ‘participation rights’), with class (including access to resources and ideas), and with practices in specific societies and cultures.

Many of the comments by young people in Australia (see Appendix E) revealed strong intentions and commitments around participation, and identified similar supporting and limiting factors to those identified earlier in this report. However, further issues associated with migration or refugee experiences limited participation in practice: use of language, priorities in settlement, and access to information were all identified as barriers.

Current attitudes to participation were also shaped by young CLD people’s experience of opportunities for participation in their countries of origin. This could either mean that many young people regarded current opportunities positively (“we didn’t have much opportunity then; it’s great to have that chance now”) or were cautious about limitations and tokenism.

Other comments in this area have raised issues about the relationship between young people and elders within culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and within Indigenous communities:

• a concern about domination of conversations by elders, especially when governments approach them to speak about or for young people;

• fear of young people to speak publicly about issues: concerns about judgement on cultural

“I don’t think youth engagement was recognised or valued in my country of origin, not like in Australia; and if it was, it was mainly about boys.”

“From what I can remember there wasn’t much youth engagement. There wasn’t such a thing as a young adult; you were either a child or an adult.”

(young people from CLD backgrounds)
maintenance and maintenance of respect;

- the complex power relationships within communities: recognising diverse and inclusive views for all, not just for young people;

- needing to engage with community leaders as well as with young people;

- understanding of needs for and roles of youth services, and concerns about implications for cultural and family breakdown;

- shyness of young people in addressing youth or cross-generational issues in front of others.

Many young people in these circumstances are operating in several cross-cultural contexts and are developing personal and civic identities that must be appropriate to these circumstances. This addresses issues of confidence and pride, and of the development of strong and inclusive leadership skills. Active community participation is particularly valued within many of these communities (and many young people here spoke of participation as ‘community development’), with a recognition that young people will, through experience and discussion, take over leadership positions. The Māori word rangatahi, often erroneously used to mean ‘young people’, actually literally means ‘fishing net’ with the connotation of ‘when the old net is worn out, the new net is put in use’ (Keelan et al., 2002).

6. Resourcing and support

All the respondents noted the importance of adequate resourcing and support for whatever initiative was in place. In particular, the role of dedicated staffing to support youth participation and of civic engagement initiatives was seen as vital. Most of the Councils with formal structures had appointed full- or part-time workers to support those structures. Specific roles in enabling inclusion and diversity were also stressed.

In one LGA, some young people could not attend formal youth committee meetings. A youth participation worker visited these young people in their homes to gather their comments for presentation to the meetings.

The on-going nature of such resourcing was also stressed, with one respondent highlighting: “the financially stability of council to provide funds and support. It can’t be a one off thing but needs to be committed to every year.”

Where mechanisms involve young people in actively conducting consultations or forums, several local governments had established (or were in the process of developing) ways to build such resourcing into the core operations of Council eg “establishing an agreed percentage of any consultation fees or review funds undertaken by Council ... for youth-run activities as part of the ‘youth’ component of the consultation/brief.”

In addition, most of the initiatives had built in funding for training or mentoring of young people, particularly around local government procedures and requirements. Several held training events for YAC members. Other funding (including taxi fares) was provided to enable young people’s access to meetings and events.

Respondents also pointed to the need for allocation of resources (both funding and personnel) to operationalise young people’s proposals and to achieve outcomes from young people’s input. Young people expect that there will be action based on their advice, and Councils need to commit to the capacity to achieve that. Such action should also involve funding evaluations of initiatives. More generally, both Youth Services and other business units of Council need to be open to support and act on young people’s recommendations.

Finally, successful practices involved allocation of resources to development of appropriate meeting spaces.

“Don’t bother to set up consultative or advisory structures unless you’re prepared to commit resources to implement what you’re hearing.”

(Council Youth Services Officer)
CONSULTATION DAY

A brief forum brought together personnel responsible for youth participation and youth civic engagement from several Councils, including those interviewed in this research. As well as sharing information about initiatives reported in this document, they responded to some of the issues raised here.

A discussion paper was circulated in advance, and presented some of the information from this paper and suggested the following questions that formed the basis for the discussions:

1. Is it valuable to ask Local Government to be specific about why youth participation and youth civic engagement is supported? How can we elicit useful answers that go beyond broad statements of commitment?
2. Are the conceptual models for participations useful and accurate representations of ‘levels’ and ‘intentions’? In particular, is the designation and questions around the model of ‘Openings’/‘Opportunities’/‘Obligations’ as presented by Shier, useful?
3. Are the four areas of ‘intention’, ‘structure and membership’, ‘power’ and ‘diversity and inclusion’ the critical ones for any Local Government to address in developing its strategies? Are there other areas that need addressing?
4. How can young people have a direct or indirect impact on Local Government decision-making? How realistic is this?
   What can Local Government intend to do with regard to realistic decision-making by young people?
5. What has been the experience of formal Youth Advisory Committees? In particular, how inclusive and how effective have they been?
6. What have been the key strategic directions for various LGAs re civic engagement? What have been strategies to overcome barriers? What measures have been taken to ensure inclusion? What have been key outcomes ... and have they been evaluated?

While the discussion was not able to cover all of these points, the following responses were noted:

**Issue 1: Intention: is this important? how do we get useful answers?**

The discussion covered ways to get Councillors to consider their intentions: why young people should be involved? While it is recognised that Councils want to consult (or, more limitedly, to get agreement to decisions made elsewhere), many Councils don’t necessarily know what civic engagement might mean beyond that. Councils face a dilemma of what to do with the advice and expertise gathered round the table: from young people who work, live, school or play in the area. Some limited ideas are promoted, and the role of competition between Councils needs to be noted: if one has a Youth Advisory Committee, then there is pressure on other Councils to feel this is the appropriate model and to develop one.

It was agreed that there is a need to make intentions more explicit and thought out. Suggestions included getting Councillors to talk with young people about their platforms, and about how Youth Services could provide access for young people to these intentions. In one area, it was reported, the young Mayor drove the initiative for a Youth Voice Committee and encouraged Youth Services to involve young people.

We need to identify and list the benefits for Councils (including kudos in community, informed voting etc) as reasons for involving young people. These benefits need then to be linked into the corporate plan particularly around safe and strong communities.

It is important that there is commitment to the intentions as a ‘Whole of Council’ initiative, and not just a Youth Services initiative. Such initiatives can die off if they are just in Youth Services. Young people need to see results from the consultations with them, and this means links to other parts or strategies of Council. One story was provided of a Council (not represented here) where
consultation happened with young people by various Council Departments but not through Youth Services – so there was no overall coordination or knowledge of what was happening.

**Issue 2: Model of Levels of Participation**

It was agreed that the Shier diagram provided a useful conceptual model, both in terms of articulating the levels of participation and also in terms of the other dimension of ‘openings/opportunities/obligations’. It would be possible to use this model in different projects and to recognise that different initiatives might be at different places: in one example, the Council might be listening; in other areas, going much further: it’s not the same for all areas of Council. This needs to be written into it.

**Issue 3: Structures**

Experience with some form of Council Youth Advisory Committee etc was very divergent within the group, with some strong commitment, some questions and some resistance or refusal to set these up. It was pointed out that there were differences between Youth Councils (formal structures modelling Council, with the intention of providing some young people with access to experience in existing structures and approaches) and Youth Advisory Committees (that were less formal and more diverse structures that worked in various advisory ways). Other areas had experience with establishing annual or bi-annual youth forums or youth summits as mechanisms to engage young people in discussing and deciding on issues, and in presenting views to Council.

Some concern was expressed that neither widespread nor deep participation was really happening with Advisory Groups: most young people felt outside this structure. When forums were done at and through schools, one LGA had managed to get up to 3000 young people involved. When a Youth Advisory Committee or Action Group was a product of the Youth Summit approach and was then engaged with following up recommendations, there were reports of a stronger focus for the group, and greater commitment from young people.

**Issue 4: Elements of Various Approaches**

There was a universal acknowledgment of the importance of real youth participation and support in all these elements.

It was suggested that there needed to be further areas included around Outcomes for Young People and Councils and Resourcing.

**Intention area:**

The meeting stressed the intention of increased ownership by young people, and hence the extent of self-determination represented in any model. All questions posed to Council should be posed to young people. There is strong value in young people making direct presentations to Councils about overall principles, intentions etc.

**Structure/membership area:**

The importance of the inclusion of diversity was stressed. Structures should be enabling primarily for young people rather than for councils and organisations; ie they should be structures that young people want and which meet their needs.

**Diversity area:**

What works to ensure diversity?

One participant reported that, re CLD young people, it was important to persist with existing groups such as the Islamic school in a summit planning committee. Ensuring diversity can be difficult, and it is easy to move away from such a commitment. It was necessary to consciously maintain this as a priority.

The degree and nature of support was extremely important. Where young people can’t or won’t come to meetings, it was found useful for a central worker to go directly to support workers within agencies, or directly to young people in their homes to gather input and feed this into a committee. In other areas, having three representatives for each zone was suggested as important to encourage diversity, whether this was on the basis of geographical coverage or agency coverage (eg housing). The key was in the relationships with agencies and organisations; it was strongly suggested that discussions that involved these agencies needed to occur in advance of meetings.

Committees also need flexibility in membership and attendance: young people can remain part of a committee even if there are absences for some meetings.

The value of working with existing services and agencies rather than setting up a new layer of structures was emphasised. It was pointed out that the role of local support workers was vital to support inclusive participation, but there was also recognition that these workers can act as significant gatekeepers: if they hold ‘protective’ assumptions about particular individuals, they
can also contribute to exclusion. Hence the relationships between young people and youth workers within agencies is also extremely important.

**Issue 5: Resourcing**

Such approaches across any LGA are resource intensive in terms of worker time. Several areas indicated that they had one worker allocated just to these areas, with broad youth worker skills that would encourage young people to come to the table, then participate.

The questions were asked of any LGA embarking on youth civic engagement initiatives: does it have the relationships and structures in place to support this? What is the commitment of Council members? Where are such initiatives seen to fit in? (The value of the Youth Charter process was emphasised in terms of policy outcomes and in terms of processes involved.)

**Conclusion**

The following questions and issues were finally raised as important ones to be considered:

- How can we address questions of young people who are in a LGA for a short time (eg transitory, or short-term residents)? How do we balance this short-time involvement, with the need for gaining experience? It is suggested that a fixed, formal committee may not be an appropriate answer here, but something more fluid and flexible to respond to time-dependent patterns.

- How can international students be supported to develop civic engagement? Where does participation fit within their priorities? It was suggested that the key might lie in more local and grounded work supporting the needs of these young people.

- What’s in it for a youth agency that works with young people, to be involved in any centralised LGA initiative? It was suggested that there could be developmental outcomes, including possible peer education advantages in meeting with other young people.

- The LGA needs to invest in a worker to do the leg-work between groups and in support of any centralised initiative. Then it’s easier on agencies to commit to be involved in various ways. The structural role of a Youth Planner or similar policy position, might be a useful one to consider for all areas. In particular, the location of this position within a Planning Department, and its separation from the operation of Youth Services, was endorsed in areas where this occurred.

- There need to be immediate outcomes for young people in terms of seeing important achievements from their involvement. This might mean the creation of short-term projects (particularly with a fluid population) that can deliver outcomes quickly.

- There also need to be real and important roles for young people and these may involve control over brokerage or other funding.

- The participation of young people in ways that are requested or required by LGAs should also be recognised practically: pay young people to come together on committees for consultation. If young people are facilitated to come together for outcomes they want, issues of payment aren’t as important.

However, payment to young people wasn’t un-critically accepted. The experience of LGAs in providing some form of reimbursement to young people has exposed important issues that are still unresolved: reliance of young people on payment; the impact of payment on tax and income support; and tendencies for young people to become involved for the payment rather than for the issue. In some cases, alternatives such as the provision of generic vouchers (that can be used for food or entertainment at young people’s discretion), and of not telling young people about reimbursement in advance, have been tried.

In all circumstances, young people should be reimbursed for costs incurred in their participation: travel, child-care, meals and so on.

- There was general endorsement of the overall structure, content and issues raised within this discussion and strong interest in the availability of models to guide all LGAs.

**Key issues emerging**

In summary, the consultations with other local governments have indicated the need to have an intentional whole-of-local-government approach to youth civic engagement. It has also
indicated that there is not, and cannot be, a single approach. Approaches adopted must reflect local needs and local circumstances. Secondly, these consultations have indicated that the implementation of local solutions must primarily meet young people’s needs around participation and civic engagement rather than the organisational needs of local government.

Thirdly, the need for strengths-based or assets-based approaches locally are emphasised, both in terms of young people’s involvement, but also in terms of enhancing the capacity of existing local organisations and networks.

Fourthly, all respondents have recognised the need for engagement to be inclusive of all young people, but also the difficulties involved in ensuring that. They have pointed to the need to maintain a focus on this as a principle and to develop, implement and monitor strategies to achieve it.

Fifthly, these consultations have powerfully endorsed the need for commitment of human and financial resources to develop meaningful participation and civic engagement of young people.

Finally, the consultation meeting expressed strong interest in the outcomes of this research and in continued networking around practical strategies for the civic engagement of young people.
Discussion and Conclusions

This report has looked at the existing literature around youth participation and youth civic engagement. It has also drawn together examples of approaches adopted within other local government areas, both in Victoria and elsewhere, and gathered perspectives of local government workers and young people, particularly sampling views of young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

KEY LEARNINGS

Both the literature and the experience of other local governments indicate that there is no one way in which to address issues of youth participation and youth civic engagement. The reasons why young people may be disengaged, the mechanisms that deny participation and the processes that differentially lock some young people out from access to decision-making are complex. Therefore the initiatives and structures to address these barriers must also be complex and multi-faceted.

This study has emphasised that ‘one model doesn’t suit all’. In particular, the temptation to adopt a simple solution such as setting up some form of Youth Advisory Committee as the sole (or even first) step is challenged both by the literature and by experience. It may well eventuate that some form of youth-operated structure (Council, Advisory Committee, Coordinating Group or other mechanism) emerges, but this needs to be considered as part of a more complex process of supporting participation and engagement for all groups, throughout a LGA.

The groups specified within this report – Indigenous young people, culturally and linguistically diverse young people, homeless young people, low SES young people and international students – are traditionally the groups that all Councils have struggled to engage. Yet there are also local, population-specific or issue-based initiatives that are engaging many of these young people on their own terms, in action around their needs and – in some cases – in active local decision-making about services. This recognition provides a platform on which to base a LGA-wide strategy.

It is also noted that young people themselves must play a central role in determining the nature of approaches and structures around civic engagement. In particular, they need to determine how they wish to approach local government with propositions, and how they wish to respond to request from local government for advice.

This determination by young people will not happen in most cases through abstract discussions about governance or citizenship or
initially through discussions about formal mechanisms; it will usefully occur as part of young people's practical responses to mechanisms that meet their immediate needs. Amongst those are the needs to learn what other young people are doing and proposing, and the opportunities to work together for greater effectiveness.

As noted above, the diversity of young people within a LGA is mirrored in the groups and services that address young people's identities and needs. There are agencies that are based within specific population groups: agencies of and for Indigenous young people, culturally and linguistically diverse young people, young people with diverse sexualities, international students and so on. There are also agencies that are based in responses to specific youth needs: health-based agencies, transport groups, recreation groups, educational groups (including schools) and so on. Thirdly, there are place-based initiatives such as Neighbourhood Advisory Teams (and their working groups) within Neighbourhood Renewal that may or could involve young people. Some of these agencies are directly supported by local government (or through branches or departments of local government); others exist within the LGA, but are funded and supported from other sources.

It is also apparent that, for some of the groups of young people identified in this report, there are no appropriate agencies or services at the moment. However the identification of such gaps opens up possibilities for the development of agencies and services, or for the emergence of organised groups of young people around population, needs or location.

The existing agencies also have different orientations to and capacities for the development of active participation by young people. In some, young people already have significant and inclusive decision-making or advisory roles; in others, young people are more distant clients or consumers of services. How these agencies respond to issues of participation marks very different understandings, opportunities and capacities. However, it should be noted that commitments by local, state and national governments mean that all these agencies operate within a policy framework that supports increased participation by young people.

This study strongly suggests that there are important principles that should underpin initiatives:

- **Diverse responses**: not putting all the civic engagement eggs in one organisational basket;
- **Inclusion**: recognising the diversity of understanding, experiences and needs of young people and responding with a commitment to diversity and inclusion;
- **Flexibility**: recognising the fluid and changing nature of young people's needs and responses;
- **Young people's needs first**: developing coordinating mechanisms that address young people's needs first, and bureaucratic needs second;
- **Building young people's skills**: enhancing the capacity of young people to make real decisions within their own environments;
- **Community capacity building**: building on the existing resources and strengths of agencies;
- **Enhancing participatory approaches**: identifying and addressing gaps in the creation and development of effective local participation;
- **Young people's decision-making**: young people's active control and decision-making about the determination of those initiatives;
- **Resourcing**: adequate resourcing of any initiative to ensure its success.
AN INTEGRATED AND INTENTIONAL APPROACH/MODEL

It is important that Councils develop integrated youth participation and civic engagement strategies that infuse all they do. As such, the following individual elements might form part of what Council does – but never the whole.

The statement of intention to youth participation is important; equally important is the statement of intention about integrating various elements into a complex ‘Whole of Council’ strategy.

Emerging from the literature review and from discussions with ‘youth participation’ workers and active young people in local government reported in the previous section of this paper, some initial categorisations of ways in which young people are and can be participants within local government has emerged and these provide elements that can be part of Council’s work at any one time.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MODELS EMERGING FROM PRACTICE

These descriptions remain fluid and will continually be in the process of refinement as we learn more about how they operate. They are listed here as:

- Individual consultation mechanisms;
- Group consultation mechanisms;
- Formal bodies; and
- Community-based mechanisms.

**Individual consultation mechanisms:**

**Element 1: Adult-run consultations and research**

Council as a whole (through Youth Services) or individual Council Departments conduct consultations with young people around specific proposals and projects. Sometimes this is contracted out to ‘market research’ groups, or conducted in-house. The intention is to obtain information from ‘clients’ in order to improve service provision.

Apart from issues of intention here, there are also questions about which young people (and the methods of access to young people), the nature of ‘top of the head’ responses, and the individualisation of the processes.

**Element 2: Youth run consultations and research**

Council commissions young people to conduct consultations around specific or general issues. There is often identification of a core ‘working group’ of young people within the LGA to carry out this process, often supported by Youth Services. In some cases, teams of young people go into schools and conduct discussions with individuals or with groups of students – either about a specific issue, or of a general ‘search’ nature.

The responses from these consultations are then compiled and presented to Council. Sometimes this approach is used in association with other mechanisms such as a Youth Forum or Youth Summit to obtain broader feedback and responses from young people.
Group consultation mechanisms:

Element 3: Forums, summits and roundtables

The Council, through Youth Services, sponsors a regular Forum, Summit or Roundtable of young people to consider issues young people regard as relevant. Young people are identified from various areas of the LGA, through schools, youth organisations and existing initiatives and invited to attend. In some cases, the Forum/Summit is steered and organised by a group of young people (eg from the previous event); in other cases, Youth Services initiates a process in which young people progressively take over roles.

Issues before the Forum/Summit are either ones presented by Council/Youth Services or other local organisations, or are arrived at through a ‘search’ process amongst young people (eg participants are asked to bring possible issues along, and these are progressively refined to create the final agenda).

Outcomes of the Forum/Summit are presented in the form of a report to Council and formally considered there; in some cases the issues and outcomes form the outline of a work plan for Youth Services; going even further, some Youth Services are accountable for achievement of outcomes on the issues generated by the Forum/Summit. In other cases, continuing or short-term working groups of young people are formed from the Forum/Summit to continue discussions and action around the issues – these can be action groups in their own right, or steering groups to Council staff.

Element 4: Youth Advisory Committees – around youth issues

Many Councils set up some form of Youth Advisory Committee (YAC), with membership drawn from young people within the LGA. Models of direct election by young people, self/other nomination and appointment by Council, and voluntary membership have all been reported. Similarly, representation is reported on the basis of geography (local areas), existing organisations, sectors (education, churches, work etc), specific interests and so on.

These YACs vary in degree of formality, with some patterned on City or Shire Council processes (Junior Mayor, formal rules of debate etc) while other are more informal gatherings of participants. The YACs generally have limited advisory powers, with issues raised either by Council or its officers for comment by young people, or raised by young people for proposal to Council. Many work through individual Councillors or Council officers with a particular interest or passion in this area.

A recent evaluation of such bodies in South Australia concluded that outcomes were mixed, with some seen to be working well (advice considered seriously, high degree of satisfaction from participants, strong trust and mutuality) while others were much more tokenistic. Outcomes depended on the intentions of Council and the dedicated support of key individuals.

The international literature reflects similar patterns, with positive outcomes noted, but also substantial concerns raised, particularly when such Committees are adopted in isolation as the sole youth participatory mechanism of Council. In particular, strong concerns are raised about the access to such mechanisms by marginalised young people, and the domination of Councils by already advantaged young people, even those with specific political ambitions.
**Formal bodies:**

Element 5: Youth membership of advisory committees – about broad issues

Councils establish various advisory mechanisms within the broad community. Access of young people to these advisory groups is addressed by some Councils, usually in association with other mechanisms. Young people with appropriate backgrounds, skills or expertise are identified and appointed to bodies that consider and advise Council in non-youth-specific areas.

Element 6: Youth Grant-Making Bodies: with final or near-final decision-making power

Some Councils have vested YACs with some delegated financial decision-making powers. This may also happen within an advisory capacity, with YACs allocated a budget that is formally dispersed by Council, but on the sole advice of the YAC.

In some cases, specific grant-making functions are defined, with funds either from Council or from an external body or foundation. The YAC then determines criteria (perhaps within constraints set by Council or other bodies), calls for submissions and then determines allocations. Usually these grant-making functions are exercised around ‘youth specific’ areas ie grants are only available to young people (perhaps through and auspice body) or for youth-related activities.

**Community-based or de-centralised mechanisms:**

Element 7: Arts, social research and action (youth-related or broader), health, enterprise/economic and similar

Various organisations, projects and programs operate within the local communities. While some of these are service related, increasingly there is attention paid to youth participatory approaches within these organisations and programs. This might include local decision-making committees or advisory groups of young people, action teams, youth-run activities, and so on. They are likely to be diverse in nature, but specific in membership.

Several LGAs have particularly noted the role of FreeZa as an example here, and have pointed out that participation that starts with music production and management could, with resourced networking, provide a platform for linking young people to broader local issues.

In particular, these community-based groups may address the needs and concerns of various population groups within the LGA (eg Indigenous young people, students, homeless young people, CLD young people) or specific issues (eg environment, diverse sexuality, recreation). It is argued that such initiatives provide the most realistic and appropriate forms of active participation of young people – in areas that matter to them, in association with others of similar interests and needs, in a context in which effective participation in decision-making can be experienced – that is, in areas in which young people can exert power and control.

However the relationship of these young people to Council is, perhaps, the most distant. In such groups and programs, they are positioned as recipients of funding or petitioners for change. Most negatively, the relationship between young people and Council may be antagonistic and based on complaints, demands and requirements.

Element 8: Coordination of sponsored or mapped participation initiatives: via membership of other organisations and sectors

Building on the above, opportunities exist for Councils to play a coordinating role between local examples of participatory structures. However few examples of this can currently be cited. In such an approach, young people who play strong decision-making roles within their local groups and programs, whether these are directly funded and supported by Council or simply exist within the LGA, would be invited to be represented at a regular (perhaps quarterly) youth coordination gathering. The prime purpose of such a gathering would be to share information between young people about local initiatives, and to enable coordination where appropriate.

The young people themselves would increasingly lead the coordination by determining frequency, time and location of meeting, the agenda and possible outcomes. While it would primarily have a function defined by the young people (who are all active within their own spheres), support for the gathering by Youth Services would also enable issues to be taken to Council where appropriate, issues brought from Council (to be considered or not by the participants) and other mechanisms (such as Forums/Summits, youth grant-makers, consultation and research) to be integrated with local initiatives.
CONCLUSION

The intention of local governments around civic engagement of young people needs to occur on two levels:

- Firstly, Councils need to make clear statements of their intentions about youth civic engagement that distinguish between their developmental role (of communities and of young people individually) and their requirements for advice to improve their own decision-making.

- Secondly, Councils need to signal their intention to take a developmental approach to youth civic engagement across the LGA as a whole, and not simply within the City or Shire Hall. This recognises that civic engagement happens within local organisations and through the capacity of all young people to influence, affect and decide at all levels within the LGA. This implies statements about intentions of working towards the inclusion of all young people in effective and significant action; formal decisions are part of this, but not the sum of this.

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Appendices

A. CONCEPTUAL MODELS OF CHILD AND YOUTH PARTICIPATION

The following models for youth participation stages or concepts have been suggested in recent years. Others references cited in the text add some other examples here.


Hart’s original ‘ladder’ has been presented in many different ways. Here is one representation with respect to young people who are students in schools:

2. **DE KORT (1999)**

It should be noted that the categorisation of ‘levels of participation’ remains contentious, with some argument about whether ‘shared decision-making with adults’ or ‘self-mobilisation’ is the highest level (Broadbent et al, 2003), and about whether, in fact, such attempts simply define a structure of adult perceptions and constraints of youth participation:

*The Ladder of Participation by Roger Hart is often used to represent levels of children’s participation. However what it depicts are not levels of children’s participation but the varying roles adults play in relation to children’s participation. It denotes the control and influence adults have over the process of children’s participation. It also indicates adult responses to children’s participation.*

The term ‘Ladder’ is a misnomer as it implies a sequence, whereas in reality one level may not necessarily lead to the next level; for instance, manipulation of children may not lead to children being used as decoration as a natural next step. (Reddy and Ratna, 2001).

Such ideas of organisational ‘responses to participation’ are addressed both by de Kort and by Shier (2001) in the next model outlined.

De Kort wrote a summary of policy and concepts around **Youth Participation** for the United Nations. In this he continues to identify five levels of participation (after Hart):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of Participation</th>
<th>Elements/indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1: Non Participation</strong></td>
<td>Adults are in full control and make no effort to change the situation. Adults define and implement policy without any youth input. Adults’ agenda takes precedence over that of young people. There is information giving, but no information sharing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Various nuances include:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Manipulation:</strong> young people may be engaged only for the benefit of the adults and may not even understand the implications.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decoration:</strong> young people may be called on just to embellish adult actions, for instance through song, dance and other entertaining activities.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2: Passive Involvement</strong></td>
<td>Minimum effort is made to inform and involve young people. There is a lack of important information sharing. Young people are listened to but only superficially.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tokenism:</strong> young people may be given a voice merely to create a youth friendly image for adults.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3: Influence</strong></td>
<td>Young people are consulted and involved, and taken seriously. Young people have a sense of influence that can encourage the development of ownership. Information sharing in a two way flow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-stages include:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assigned but informed:</strong> adults take the initiative to inform young people. Only after that, young people decide whether to become involved.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consulted and informed:</strong> young people are extensively consulted on projects designed and run by adults.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4: Partnership</strong></td>
<td>Collaboration: young people have increasing control over decision making. Adults and young people form meaningful partnerships with negotiation on and delegation of the tasks. Adults-initiated, shared decisions with young people: initiators such as policy makers, community workers and local residents frequently involve interest groups and age groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5: Self Mobilisation</strong></td>
<td>Empowerment: transfer of control over decisions and resources to young people. Young people are in full control and may choose to seek adult assistance, if necessary and desired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nuances of this:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth-initiated and directed:</strong> young people conceive, organise and direct projects themselves, with out adult assistance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Youth initiated, shared decisions with adults:</strong> influence is shared between young people and adults as the final goal of participation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However, De Kort then also identifies nine organisational areas and establishes criteria within each against each level of participation. This extends Hart’s one-dimensional continuum or ladder into a more complex two-dimensional structure or grid - with each cell of the grid described by an indicator.

These levels are then expressed in a table:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisational Areas</th>
<th>Non-participation</th>
<th>Passive involvement</th>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>Partnership</th>
<th>Self-mobilisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ANALYSING NEEDS AND SETTING OBJECTIVES</strong></td>
<td>Adults design and execute the project and might inform young people as the target group</td>
<td>Young people are consulted in the early stages but ignored later</td>
<td>Young people are consulted and involved in the execution of the project, but the objectives are set by adults</td>
<td>Young people are consulted, define the objectives of the project and execute it together with adults</td>
<td>Young people plan and execute the project and can choose to involve others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION</strong></td>
<td>Young people are not informed or consulted</td>
<td>Information is easily accessible and youth-friendly (one-way information)</td>
<td>Regular consultative meetings are organised (two-way information)</td>
<td>Meaningful exchanges occur between young people and adults (collaboration)</td>
<td>Young people inform each other and possibly adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DECISION-MAKING</strong></td>
<td>Young people are not consulted</td>
<td>Young people are consulted but not taken seriously</td>
<td>The views of youth are listened to and acted upon on a regular basis</td>
<td>Young people play an integral part in the day-to-day running of the project</td>
<td>Young people have power over the allocation of resources and the direction of the project, but can seek the assistance of adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ADMINISTRATION</strong></td>
<td>No young administrators</td>
<td>Young people occasionally help by doing menial tasks on a voluntary basis</td>
<td>Young people are structurally involved in administrative activities ranging from book-keeping and typing to conducting research and collecting data</td>
<td>Young people take a significant role in the project, and their feedback is sought</td>
<td>Administration is effectively controlled by young people, possibly aided by adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVITIES</strong></td>
<td>Designed and run by adults</td>
<td>Young people are consulted in the design</td>
<td>Young people partly design and run some of the activities</td>
<td>Young people design and run activities in cooperation with adults</td>
<td>Young people design and run all activities, possibly aided by adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ADVOCACY</strong></td>
<td>No involvement of young people</td>
<td>Young people are present at public campaigns, but are not involved as organisers</td>
<td>Young people are encouraged to provide input on running a campaign</td>
<td>Young people take a significant role in forming organisations or unions or participating in public rallies and campaign or contributing to policy papers and public debates</td>
<td>Young people handle advocacy issues, possibly aided by adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SERVICE, SUPPORT AND EDUCATION PERSONNEL</strong></td>
<td>Support is provided only by adults</td>
<td>Young people are consulted on support-, service- and education-related issues</td>
<td>Young people are occasionally consulted or made counsellors or educators of other young people</td>
<td>Young people from the target group are trained to become counsellors or educators of other young people and work alongside adult counsellors or educators</td>
<td>Young people are the only counsellors or educators available to the target group, possibly trained or assisted by adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EMPLOYEES</strong></td>
<td>No young employees</td>
<td>Young people are employed in jobs not related to project objectives</td>
<td>Some young people are employed as experts in a peer-related project</td>
<td>Young people are employed as experts and may be managers</td>
<td>The project is effectively managed by young professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MONITORING AND EVALUATION (M&amp;E)</strong></td>
<td>Undertaken by adults only</td>
<td>Young people are involved in M&amp;E</td>
<td>Young people are involved in M&amp;E and its outcomes</td>
<td>Young people design M&amp;E tools and work with adults</td>
<td>Young people initiate, design, execute and report on projects, possibly aided by adult experts</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This framework has subsequently been used by others (e.g., Wierenga et al., 2003) to provide a tool for reflection within organisations, and as a framework to examine the work of programs. In this work (particularly Holdsworth, 2003) there is recognition of a third dimension: that there can be different responses to this framework from different people within a program, and this enables the useful comparisons of responses from adults and from young people, or of responses from different groups of young people (along lines such as gender, ethnicity, location, class etc.). Such developments recognise that perceptions of youth participation depend on who is responding and respondents’ different experiences, and that the discussions and action resulting from the comparisons of different perceptions are as important as the characterisation of a ‘level of participation’. Holdsworth (2001; 2003) then takes this further, suggesting that it is less important to see this tool as characterising a sense of ‘absolute truth’ about the level of participation, than to use it as a starting point for discussions between participants about their different perceptions and what can be changed. This introduces a time-dependent variable, where changes in responses over time - in response to those discussions - are the most important aspect of the tool’s use.

3. SHIER (2001)

Shier built on the work of Hart in particular, to simplify the number of ‘Levels of Participation’, but then to identify organisational readiness to address action at each of these levels. These organisational responses were characterised as ‘openings’ (readiness or in-principle commitment), ‘opportunities’ (procedures in place) and ‘obligations’ (formal requirements in place):
B. EIGHT CASE STUDIES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT APPROACHES

These case studies have been drawn from interviews with youth service workers in eight local government areas in Victoria. Because the descriptions are drawn from interviews and have not been formally approved by the Councils involved, there are presented here anonymously and as our descriptions of their initiatives.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA A:

This is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Victoria, with a diverse population. The Council’s 10 year youth strategy (2001 to 2011) informs their service delivery and work with young people and articulates the Council’s leadership and co-ordinating role in relation to the establishment of groups of young people and service providers who will develop local responses to community issues. It says, *inter alia*: ‘The Council will listen to young people and ensure that the views and needs of young people are taken into account in Council activities and policies.’ The strategy indicates that this will occur in a range of ways including the facilitation of a range of ‘youth participation’ based programs through youth services.

The council has had a long-term interest in promoting young people’s civic engagement. Council Officers indicate that participation provides the opportunity for young people to feel involved, a part of council processes and continue their skill development. They also see initiatives in this area as raising the profile of young people and of ensuring that there are ready voices to call upon.

The core of the Council’s Youth Participation approaches is located in Youth Committees attached to three Youth Information and Resource Centres. Each of these Centres maintains a reference group or committee that is responsible for providing feedback on that Centre’s planning and provision of events, activities and programs for local young people. The membership of these committees is drawn from each Centre’s users and local schools, and is reflective of the population groups in each area of the municipality. Committee activities depend on the group that some choosing to take on a role organising National Youth Week events such as festivals and BBQs while others have chosen to address local youth issues and undertake personal development programs through their meetings.

In parallel with these Committees, Council is funded through the Office for Youth’s FreeZa program to organise drug and alcohol free music-based events for young people aged 13 years and over. The youth committee members, aged from 12 to 25 years, plan and implement up to six events per year. This model provides for young people to develop, market, implement and evaluate events themselves.

There are also other local civic engagement and education initiatives that highlight the achievements and skills of young
people in the community. These include the annual Australia Day Study Tour Award for young people in Year 10 (or equivalent age) who are studying or have a keen interest in law, politics and journalism. Young people are nominated then selected to receive an Award to participate in the Study Tour to learn about local, state and federal government. A Youth Ambassadors group is the young people’s arm of the Council’s sister city committee, in which young people become involved in civic and community related events and take on representative roles on awards selection panels in the community, speak at the Council’s Citizenship ceremonies, learn about Council and the diverse community, and participate in the annual sister cities conference.

The Young Leaders Program is a bi-annual leadership program for Year 10 students, which aims to equip young people with skills to enable them to participate more actively in the life of their school and community.

Once young people have participated in these programs they are often asked to participate in council consultations (either as focus group participants or facilitators) on issues affecting young people, or in other civic programs (such as sitting on selection panels for various community awards.) Through targeted Focus Groups, Council carries out consultations with groups of young people on a range of issues. Participants at these consultations include young people from the FreeZa organising committee, Youth Ambassadors, Australia Day Study Tour or Youth Information Centre Committees, as well as members of the community. The Council’s Strategy calls for options to promote young people’s participation and civic engagement through new information technologies be explored, and also projects an increase in the number of forums, conferences and workshops for young people. The strategy also requires that all Council reports or planning documents state how they affect young people. Council also requires its business units to provide reports against a range of customer service related objectives, with Council officers being asked to develop briefings for Councillors on various topics. Monthly reports are prepared against the objectives outlined in the youth strategy document, and this provides opportunities for young people involved in the Council’s programs to provide feedback against these objectives directly to Council.

A recent focus for Council has been the participation of young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Youth Services has identified that, for many CALD young people, family approval can be a significant barrier to their participation in community activities. If parents or community elders don’t understand the concept of youth services, the activity or the benefits to the young person, it may be difficult to get them to agree to the young person attending a program. Youth Services has successfully adopted a strategy to include parents wherever possible across several programs. This includes workers calling parents to discuss their concerns and parents being invited to attend events organised by young people, or to be in the audience at presentations. Council has also employed a multicultural worker.

Council Officers report that this approach has had a range of positive outcomes for both Council and young people. It has raised the profile of young people in the community and provided Youth Services and Council with increased knowledge of issues affecting young people. Young people have also benefited from their involvement by developing their interpersonal, communication and IT skills. In many cases these skills have enabled young people to undertake further study, gain employment or take on other leadership roles in their school and community.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA B:

This Council is one of the few Local Governments that has a specific ‘youth participation strategy.’ This strategy was drafted early in 2006 and has yet to be formally adopted by Council, but it articulates the Council’s belief about the need for a suite of approaches: “no one leadership or participation group is able to reflect the diversity of age, interests and needs of young people” in the local government area.

Council believes that each of its programs needs to have elements of youth participation practice, although there are a number of specific programs that are designed to provide young people with an opportunity to further develop their skills and confidence and promote civic engagement. The principal example is that of the Youth Summit.

Each year the Council hosts a youth summit that is organised by
local young people in partnership with youth services. The summit involves Year 10 students from local schools. These students are supported to carry out research on issues affecting young people within their school communities and then to bring these issues to the summit planning process. Young people take active roles in the summit planning, in facilitation of discussions on the day and in presenting the summit findings to other young people and to Council. Recently, the planning group has decided to develop a large focus (such as ‘multiculturalism’) to unite and structure issues being considered at the summit.

At the conclusion of each summit, the students formally decide on the issues on which they believe Council (with young people) should take action during the following year.

Some of the young people who assist in organising the summit are recruited through an OnTrack Leadership Program. This is a committee of young people who meet regularly to identify local issues affecting young people and plan community projects to address these issues. The group also acts as a reference group for Council and for other organisations seeking to consult young people in the area.

The Council is also funded as a FreeZa event provider, supporting a group of young people to implement a minimum of six music events each year. The group has considerable power in that they are responsible for a budget of $20,000 and manage events themselves.

Youth participation in the LGA is often seen as vehicle or event driven, in that young people will often be undertaking work towards the delivery of an event or will utilise a medium such as radio or photography to express their views.

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA C:**

This Local Government Area employs both a Youth Planner and a Youth Services Coordinator. They start from the assumption that “Young people have a lot to offer. We want young people to be part of the community rather than just say they are... Young people are a valued part of the community who have skills to offer. They can have an input into the decision-making in the municipality and be included in decision making at a strategic and an operational level. They are not just to be consulted; we must have something that leads to tangible outcomes.”

Council did not really know what youth participation could entail but wanted to go beyond ‘constant consultation’ to something with a tangible outcome. A young mayor was very supportive of youth initiatives. The Council’s Youth Team presented a multi-faceted model involving a Youth Voice Committee, youth-run events and provision of youth-directed brokerage funds; the Council agreed to support this.

The Youth Voice Committee involves 12 young people selected at a neighbourhood level from three zones in the LGA - four from each zone. The young people include secondary students, single mothers, young people involved with housing agencies, CALD young people etc. The youth program worker recruits these young people through schools, they then submit an application that is supported by a teacher from the school or worker from an organisation, and new young people are chosen each year by staff. The retiring members become mentors of new members who undertake a three-day intensive training around committees and procedures, team-building, needs assessment, definition of terms, conflict resolution and so on. A Youth Participation Officer (three days a week) resources this process. A Councillor is part of the committee, but this is currently being reviewed.

The Youth Voice Committee sits within Youth Services and is responsible for brokerage funding, National Youth Week activities and small projects. The Youth Planner sits within Social Planning and Development (within the Corporate Planning Department). This separation of location and function - between ‘outcome-based’ and ‘strategy-based’ roles - provides opportunities to ‘champion’ the YVC for inclusion in forthcoming strategies and corporate projects.

The Committee is also trained and supported to research, design and implement a Brokerage Funding Program with $15,000 to disburse. Submissions were called for ‘youth-led’ projects within the LGA, with a priority on art/culture. The young people on the YVC mentor the programs through to fruition. The YVC reports to Council on the programs that are being supported by the brokerage funds.

The young people learn how to conduct research in their local area. They are provided with a proforma to take back to their schools, agencies and friends and from this, a list of priorities is compiled on current youth issues and concerns.
The young people on the YVC are also involved in local advocacy and support for other young people. They have made presentations to Council and been part of a community consultation process on behalf of young people about a local drop in centre. They have discussed drug and alcohol issues, safety, public transport, recreational options, youth friendly spaces and youth led activities.

This is a flexible model of participation that allows for young people to negotiate with youth service staff how they would like to participate. If the young person is unable to attend meetings the Youth Participation Worker can go to the young person’s home and then feed their input back into the committee.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA D:

Youth Services at this Council has developed and supported a DART (Discussion Action Representation and Thought) program over the past seven years within the context of Council’s key strategic objective of Community Development and Support.

The key intentions of the DART program are youth participation and advocacy. These are intrinsically linked to the Council’s Key Service Goals for Youth Services:

1. Advocacy
2. Youth Participation
3. Youth Development
4. Service Coordination and Support
5. Information and Referral Support

These service goals were further endorsed during Council’s service review of Youth Services in 2004-05 from which a three-year action plan was approved.

In the DART program, youth forums are organised at schools within the LGA, which each involve hundreds of young people who express, listen to and discuss their thoughts on issues they decide. These forums are organised and facilitated by young people drawn from these schools. Representatives from the forums continue their participation as members of the organising DART Boards, which collate and present outcomes to Council and other bodies. In April 2006, young representatives from DART (Boards) presented to a Council meeting on their 2005 findings in three major issue areas: pedagogy, the impact of mass media on young people and recreation and leisure options for young people in public space. These presentations were well received by Councillors. Council’s Youth Services is currently considering the key recommendations from those issues.

DART has been widely accepted within the Council as a significant consultation tool in accessing the views of young people. On that basis, a number of DART forums have been held that had direct and specific input into Council business of the day, such as the development of a masterplan for a local Reserve and local Activity Centre community consultations.

Council’s Youth Services is undertaking the development of a Youth Participation Protocol for approval by Council in the near future. This document will acknowledge the benefit of engaging with young people in Council business, and outline a number of strategies to achieve this. DART will be a major tool by which Council will articulate this commitment. One key recommendation by Youth Services, and to be further negotiated, is the financial resourcing of DART–related activities that require youth input. It has been suggested that an agreed percentage of any consultation fees or review funds undertaken by Council should be set aside for DART activities as part of the ‘youth’ component of the consultation/brief.

Youth Services is revising its current resources to ensure its capacity to accommodate this major policy shift in the future.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA E:

This LGA has established a Youth Council, which consists entirely of young people aged 12-25 years. This body has been established as a recognised advisory committee to Council. The role of the Youth Council is to ‘ensure the needs and views of young people are represented and that young people have an opportunity to be active in local decision-making processes.’

The Council is committed to implementing increased measures to ensure the active participation of young people in all facets of community life. Amongst its key themes are a commitment to continued participation by young people in consultations and local decision-making processes, and
increased promotion of young people’s positive profile within the community.

A maximum of twenty young people are chosen to sit on this committee at any one time. The group meets regularly and is facilitated by Youth Services staff. Councillors have no direct representation on the Council. Young people chair the meetings and are responsible for rotating the role of minute taking, while Council Officers assist in disseminating information and catering for their meetings. Council Officers also act as a conduit between the Youth Council and Council. For example, if a Councillor or Council business unit wishes to consult with young people, they must first take the issue to a Council officer.

The Council has historically been very supportive of the Youth Council, hosting joint sittings and referring numerous issues to the group for their consideration, but this is constantly under review with the election of new Councillors.

The Youth Council spends much of their time as a ‘reference group’ for Council, responding to requests for feedback on various proposals made by a variety of Council business units. If any issue relevant to young people is presented to Council, the Councillors send it to the Youth Council for their consideration. However, some Council officers are even more proactive and consult with the Youth Council even before the issue is presented to Council so that they have an opportunity to help shape the proposal before Council, rather than simply commenting on an existing proposal.

While the Youth Council has control of its own budget and has equal standing to any other advisory committee in Council, they ultimately make recommendations to Council that Council may or may not choose to adopt.

The Youth Council also takes responsibilities for organising an annual ‘youth issues forum’ which serves as an additional consultation mechanism for both Council and the Youth Council. The Youth Council members also consult informally with their peers before they comment on proposals before them, however there is no formal process through which this occurs outside of the forum.

There have been many outcomes of the group, including representation by young people in the discussion of issues affecting the local community including town planning, the development of a skate park and domestic violence initiatives. Young people and workers see the group as safe and supportive, with the opportunity for young people to have a ‘real say’ with ‘no adults pushing agendas.’

Some Youth Council members have gone on to undertake other advisory roles or be appointed to various boards and committees of Council, and some people locally see the group as a training ground for future involvement in local government politics.

Barriers to young people’s participation in the Youth Council have included their understanding of local government processes and their capacity to balance participation in the Youth Council with school, work and family obligations. For Council officers, one of the barriers is the need to hold the group meeting at times appropriate to young people but at times which often fall outside a Council officer’s normal hours of work.

The City Council believes one of the strengths of this group is its diversity in gender, age, cultural background, education and experience. While Council Officers report that no specific strategies exist to ensure this diversity (and say that they are ‘just lucky’ that the group is made up the way it is), there is a range of mechanisms through which Youth Council nominations are promoted, including local media, service providers, schools and cultural groups. Each member of the current Youth Council advises that he/she found out about the group through a different means.

Council is currently considering how they may be able to facilitate the participation of more socially isolated young people and has employed a ‘Youth Participation and Policy Officer’. One avenue being investigated includes the implementation of student action teams.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA F:

This LGA has had an established Youth Forum since 1999. It provides opportunities for young people in the area to discuss and express opinions on issues related to the community and young people. It is also expected to enhance participating young people’s leadership skills and their knowledge on the process of governance, citizenship and advocacy through a process of mentoring provided by Councillors.

The Youth Forum acts as an Advisory Committee to Council by considering and advising on
matters as referred by Council as well as on issues which the Youth Forum considers as important. The Youth Forum may comment on local, state, national and global issues including State and Federal Government policies and act as a collective voice for young people in the area.

The Youth Forum is comprised of 20 young people appointed by Council. Membership is open to young people aged between 15 and 25 years who live, study and/or work within the LGA. Selection of the members is made by calling for nominations through an expression of interest process from eligible young people. There are advertisements in local newspapers and promotion within all local secondary schools. Each secondary school is requested to nominate a maximum of two young persons to represent specific school communities. During this selection process, efforts are made to maintain the area's cultural diversity. Upon the receipt of nominations, Council officers present a report to Council recommending the formal appointment of the Youth Forum members. When there are more than 20 nominations, Council selects 20 nominees on the basis of qualification, interests and cultural/linguistic mix. Usually a member is appointed for a period of one year and may continue for a maximum of two consecutive terms. However, those members interested in serving a second term must nominate themselves when the new nominations are called for and will be considered along with the other nominees.

The primary responsibility of the Forum is to advise Council on issues referred by Council and any other relevant matters that affect the local community and may include:

a) provision of a forum for discussion of issues that affect the lives of local young people and the community;

b) contributing to the formulation or review of strategic plans or policies as requested;

c) provision of comments on the development of proposals, policies, plans or strategies upon request; and

d) represent the LGA at regional, state and national levels as appropriate.

As in the case of recommendations/advice of any other Council Advisory Committee, recommendations, proposals, comments or advice provided by the Youth Forum may or may not be adopted or implemented by Council.

The Youth Forum meets twice during each school term, but may decide to hold additional meetings as required in consultation with Council officers (given that adequate resources are available). A Council officer, in consultation with Youth Forum members, develops meeting agendas. The first meeting of each year is an orientation meeting where both incoming and out going members attend and provide new members with information on meeting procedures and the roles and responsibilities of the members.

In order to provide the opportunity to as many members as possible, chairing and minute-taking of the Forum meetings are rotated among the members. A Council officer types and distributes the minutes.

One Councillor is in attendance at each Forum meeting in a mentoring role to provide participants an understanding of Councillors' roles and responsibilities towards Council and the community. Council officers, representatives of organisations and other individuals are also invited to make presentations to the Youth Forum on specific topics/issues as appropriate. All meetings of the Youth Forum are open to the public. However, only members of the Youth Forum are allowed to speak and vote at the meetings.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA G:

This Council indicates that it wants to show that it is serious about young people and hearing their voices as part of their community. Some of the Councillors, especially the younger ones, are keen to be part of the processes.

This LGA has operated a biennial youth summit for ten years. The summit is advertised through schools, agencies and the local paper. Young people from every school in the LGA are specifically invited to the summit and 8 to 10 of them come from every school, and from are a variety of year levels. In addition, young people who use the local Community Health Centre also attend in that representative capacity.

It has been noted that alienated and marginalised young people do not come to the summits, so access to the opinions of these young people is gained through focus groups. Young people (connected to agencies such as the Salvation Army and a refugee program) are paid to take part in these groups.
At the summit, participants break into eight different groups to explore issues. These issues are identified by an Action Group formed from the previous summit. In the alternate year, before the summit, the Action Group conducts research with young people within the LGA to identify the issues that are then taken to the summit in the next year. The young people from the Action Group survey young people in their own schools in order to find issues that are important to them.

Recommendations are made from each youth summit. For example, 67 recommendations around 8 issues emerged from the last youth summit. The Council considers the recommendations from the summit; those that are adopted are then developed into a Strategy Plan. The Action Group then implements this over the next two years. The Strategy Plan also forms part of Youth Services' planning and workload for the year, and the Unit is accountable, through its Manager, for its implementation.

The Action Group is also able to take other initiatives around the issues, such as producing an e-mag (that will appear on the Council website) eg around a safety audit on public transport. A youth worker supports the Action Group and provides a bridge between Council expectations and the expectations of the young people. The summit is used as a mechanism by which Council checks on the issues and concerns for young people.

Each Youth summit has been evaluated through a workshop debriefing process with community agencies at the summit. Young people also fill in evaluation forms. Over 10 years of summits, structures and processes have changed. With a much larger group of young people (300) there were issues about 'crowd control', and with a smaller number of young people, there is now more action. However, schools still tend to send their best students and summits tend to attract young people with higher skill levels. Marginalised young people (those in refuges, unemployed young people, and students from KDE campuses) do not feel comfortable coming to the summit, so focus groups have gathered these young people's opinions instead.

Measures are taken (such as provision of prayer rooms and halal food for Muslim students) to encourage inclusion and diversity. Sometimes this can be challenging for all groups – including students and staff - for example when discussion moves from religion and cultural issues to SSAY and disability.

New participants are encouraged in the Action Group and the role of the youth worker is vital in facilitating their participation.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA H:

A Youth Council was established in this LGA in 2003. Its major role is to increase the range of services and activities available for young people of the region. In addition, the Youth Council manages a Youth Community Connections initiative, established with external grant funds of $45,000.

Council policy states that:
• “Council will provide a link between young people, Council and the community;"  
• “Council will advocate for the provision of quality services and resources for young people;"  
• “Council will promote the value of young people as active members of the community through increased participation in community programs, initiatives and decision making processes; and  
• “Council will provide a leadership role in developing partnerships between stakeholders to provide a sustainable future in the LGA.”

The Council’s policy provides a rationale that:
• “Young people are a quarter of our population;"  
• “Half of the defined young people live in small towns of less than 200 people;"  
• “The well being of the community relies on retaining young people in the district as valued active members of the community;"  
• “Council will ensure the integration of youth in the Council decision making process.”

Through its guidelines for involvement of young people, the Council makes a commitment to:
• “include young people in all aspects of planning that affect their lives;"  
• “listen to the needs, opinions and ideas of young people, and provide opportunities for them to participate in Council processes and the community;"  
• “consult with young people about services, resources and strategies."  

Youth participation is seen as a priority area of Council, with a major focus being on enhancing the role of young people in community building. The youth
The Council meets once a month from 4–6 pm centrally at the Council offices. Attendance at the Youth Council is strongly supported by Council funding, with taxi fares provided for some young people to facilitate this. Youth Council meetings are fairly informal but each meeting has an agenda and minutes are taken.

The Youth Council is responsible for the Youth Community Connections program and for running youth events. Youth Council members also attend leadership programs and represent young people from the LGA at conferences.

Youth Community Connections is a program that administers grants (of up to $4000) for projects designed and delivered by young people in the LGA to increase the opportunity and access for young people to entertainment, youth services and transport, as well as for developing leadership skills within young people. The Youth Council assesses the applications, and decides on six grants per year.

The Youth Council also organises updating grant guidelines each year, advertising the program around the shire, the program’s website, designing the logo and promotional material, assessing grants and modifying grant budgets, and providing feedback to grant applicants.

The Youth Council presently has 16 members. It is open to young people from 12 to 25 years of age, though at present the age range is 14 to 19 years. Productive conversations are seen to be enhanced by the narrower age range. The young people are recruited widely throughout the LGA on several occasions and come from organisations such as schools, TAFE and local services. There are also young workers and unemployed young people on the Youth Council.
C. YOUNG PEOPLE’S COMMENTS ON CIVIC ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

In consultations with young people and in evaluations carried out on the approaches adopted by local government to enhance civic engagement of young people, the following comments from young people have been identified:

A) INVOLVEMENT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF STATEMENTS OF POLICY

“I am pretty happy with how [the document] is laid out and its content. Considering it was put together by a group of people that didn’t previously know each other, I think we have done really well in representing all of us and young people in general... It would be good for this document to be as widely used as possible. I think it should be put on council websites, presented to councils by the Mayors/CEOs and also used as an induction document.” (young person)

“Young people ... talked to me about their concern that the document would just become a dust collector. They understand that council will formally accept and agree to work from the document but they didn’t know apart from this what [it] would mean for them.” (youth worker reporting young people’s comments)

“We enjoyed the opportunity to speak directly to Mayors, CEOs and Councillors.” (young person)

B) INVOLVEMENT IN A SUMMIT/FORUM PROCESS

“I enjoyed being involved in the organisation and being able to decide what we wanted at the summit.” (young person, area 1)

“I learnt more about what goes on at Council.” (young person, area 1)

“I learnt more about what is actually going on in [the LGA] and what facilities we have available to us.” (young person, area 1)

“Our ideas are actually going to be heard.” (young person, area 1)

“I enjoyed contributing and having something to do with what was going on.” (young person, area 1)

“The best things were the fun activities and being able to question to presenters ... I think next time voting for the best school and community issue should be done differently – too easily rigged.” (young person, area 2)

“For me, the best things were the talking in the circles – the workshops. It could have been explained (before the summit) about what the summit means, and how it would progress.” (young person, area 2)

“The activities at the end and the chance to be able to ask questions and express my opinion... The most useful thing for me was to speak up, and our voices being heard; I learnt how to speak up and give my opinions.” (young person, area 2)
C) INVOLVEMENT IN YOUTH COUNCILS/YOUTH ADVISORY COMMITTEES

“I’m not aware of any Youth Council or other group in our Council area. There’s good participation in some groups, but not with Council. I wrote to Council suggesting a Youth Committee, but I have had no response.” (young person, consultation discussion)

“The Youth Council has given me the opportunity to participate in a range of events which have helped me to develop great friendships and leadership skills.” (young person, Youth Council)

“Being on a Youth Council has opened up so many different avenues for me. I’ve learnt so many things and met really interesting and motivated people. I now feel able to achieve anything I set my mind to.” (young person, Youth Council)

“With the support of the Youth Council we have been able to create opportunities for local bands to perform in various venues in [the area] and beyond! We are continuing to make the community more aware of the talents [the area] has to offer.” (young person, Youth Council)

“The Youth Council means that I have more opportunities and options to be part of and do different things that contribute to my community.” (young member of a Youth Council)

“The best thing about the Youth Council has been building up my confidence, learning leadership skills, learning how to work effectively as a team, learning more about my community and having a say on young people’s issues.” (young member of a Youth Council)

“I’m still trying to realise what the exact purpose of the Youth Council is for – it seems to be advisory, but we haven’t provided much advice thus far.” (young member of a Youth Council)

“I know we are an ‘advisory group’ but I feel we need to get out there in the community more and send a positive message to other young people about volunteering etc.” (young member of a Youth Council)

“The Youth Council is about being able to be part of the community in more ways then just a citizen: learning about Council and behind the scene stuff; being a part of other committees on Council is great as well.” (young member of a Youth Council)

D) INVOLVEMENT IN A GRANT-MAKING PROCESS

“Having $15,000 provided us with the opportunity to have a real impact in the community.” (young person on a grant-making committee)

“There are no opportunities to participate in the local community when you’re in tertiary education. [The committee] provides access to participate.” (young person on a grant-making committee)

“Having committee members contracted as ‘trainers’ for the incoming committee was important. But we needed more time in the development of the grant processes and for workshopping those ideas.” (young person on a grant-making committee)

“The advertising needs to be broader to get a larger variety of young people.” (young person on a grant-making committee)
D. WESTERN REGION YOUTH CHARTER

The following Youth Charter was developed by young people from six local government areas in the western suburbs of Melbourne. It has been presented to the Mayors and CEOs of these LGAs for consideration and endorsement.

“We are the young people that have come together from the Western suburbs of Melbourne, including the Cities of Maribyrnong, Brimbank, Wyndham, Moonee Valley, Hobsons Bay and Shire of Melton. Even though we all come from diverse backgrounds we have created and agreed with what is in the youth charter in collaboration. Through our experiences, we have come together to share our concerns and ideas to create this youth charter. With it we hope to get our ideas across to councils and see young people valued and make an impact!”

- Western Region Youth Charter Working Group

VALUES

The value statements below were created to help Council understand young people’s views, opinions and vision. Understanding young people’s values is an important part of recognising them as valued members of the community.

• Young people belong to a diverse range of cultural, ethnic, religious and sub-cultural groups. Though all are different, all are entitled to be respected, consulted and included in decision-making.
• Young people’s participation requires an ongoing involvement until the end result is reached.
• Young people are entitled to be treated in a positive way as equal members of society and as valuable contributors to the community.
• Young people are the future. We should be recognised, valued and nurtured as we have a lot to offer.
• Young people’s contributions should be recognised.
**PRINCIPLES**

Young people have identified the following as the most important principles when working with them:

- Young people are entitled to be consulted about events, problems and issues that affect them.
- Value and include young people in the decision-making process.
- Respect young people and their diversity.
- Accept what young people have to say.
- Treat young people as equals.

**STRATEGIES – HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN**

**Before you begin**

- Recognise that young people want to have a voice and want to make a difference and we can contribute and impact on wider community issues.
- Encourage more communication especially on issues relevant to youth.
- Make sure that you need young people’s input and you can use the information young people provide. Ensure the decisions are not already made before you ask us.
- Allow young people to be involved in the process so young people are working with and for young people.
- Young people are motivated to be involved in different ways. These can include seeing a result, meeting new friends, being recognised for their contribution and incentives. Consider what will motivate and reard the group you are working with.

**Promotion**

- Come and speak with us at common youth hangouts such as skate and BMX parks, schools, universities, on the street or at shopping centres. Be yourself with us and be open to new ideas.
- Target the right group of young people for the project to make sure it is relevant and worthwhile. Approach different groups of young people in a way that suits that group. Identify the best process for each group.
- Keep us up to date with clear information using casual language. Communicate information through schools, flyers, email, media, mail outs, in places we hang out and by young people networking and letting people know.
- To promote young people’s groups consider a taster workshop – Create an expo of all groups available for young people to get involved in. Young people can meet other young people in these groups and find out what they are about.
WHEN WORKING WITH US

To support young people

- Tell us why we are being involved and the purpose.
- Never rush the process. Get more results over time and provide ongoing consultation.
- Ensure young people feel comfortable and are addressed and treated properly. Provide a safe environment with no bullying or intimidation by peers. Make sure communication is friendly and encouraging. Consider creating a less formal setting perhaps in a youth oriented area and create even numbers (or groups) of young people when working with adults.
- Value young people’s opinions and take them seriously.

To encourage and make it easier for us to be involved

- Promote the event widely to all young people and provide an agenda so we know that is going to happen. Provide clear information on issues and make sure the topic is relevant to the young people you are working with.
- Be flexible and open to requests. Be creative by using different techniques (eg young people may respond better to having their say recorded on video camera rather than filling out a survey).
- Young people are more likely to be involved if people they know are involved or if it is youth led.
- To assist young people to participate consider providing transport and covering any costs. Provide recognition, food and incentives as motivation.
- Get feedback from us so you can include suggestions for the next time.

To make it fun

- Make sure the topic is relevant to the young people you are working with. When creating an agenda consider how to create an atmosphere that is not structured or ‘lecturing’. Consider including recreational activities and more participation. Less talk and more action will make it more exciting.

Afterwards

- Provide feedback so we can see the results by providing follow up meetings and promoting results through newsletters or media.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that each Council of the Western Region adopt the Western Region Youth Charter and develops ways in which to ensure the document is used throughout the organisation.

It is also recommended that each Council provide opportunities for more communication and involvement between young people and Council Mayors and CEOs. For example, a meeting with youth representatives who can discuss current issues with them would allow young people to feel heard and the Mayors and CEOs to be directly in touch with young people in their community.
E. CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE YOUNG PEOPLE

As a component of this study, some young people from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds were interviewed about their experiences of participation and civic engagement.

SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICS
The 16 young people interviewed varied in age (15 to 24 years) and cultural background (from Somalia, Eritrea, Lebanon, Palestine and South Africa). Approximately half of these young people were active participants in organisations such as sporting or other recreational clubs or youth organisations; the other half didn’t participate in any type organisation.

There were more females than males in clubs and organisations that were not sport-related, reflecting a general trend amongst young women from CLD backgrounds for low participation in sports. More young women than young men were members of youth reference committees and roles that required long term engagements: of those young people interviewed who were on committees, only one in seven were male.

NATURE AND HISTORY OF PARTICIPATION
Also all of the young people interviewed wanted to participate actively, and saw this as a form of community development. However, they said that they would need to find the right club or organisation. In particular, males had a lower commitment to youth organisations, but attended one-off events.

The length of time spent in Australia also contributed to CLD young people’s willingness to participate in community development. Few of the CLD young people interviewed said that they joined any kind of a youth organisation within the first couple of years of arriving in Australia.

For those young people who had become active, this was usually in ethnic or religious specific organisations. These were familiar groups, that provided security and support. All of the young people who participated in some kind organisation said that they and their contributions were valued by the organisation. Even those who weren’t currently active in an organisation believed that they would be valued and drew upon responses to previous short-term involvement.

INDICATORS OF VALUE
Common indicators of being valued were being acknowledged and encouraged, receiving personal thanks from those who benefited from their assistance, receiving positive feedback in general, and seeing implementation of their suggestions.
REASONS FOR PARTICIPATION

Young people said they took part in order to make friends and socialise, to work with a group of people who share the same ideas, to have their ideas heard, to have their ideas implemented, to belong and to feel they were contributing time and skills, and to gain personal skills such as being able to plan an event, communication skills and networking skills.

REASONS FOR NON-PARTICIPATION

Those young people who were not active participants said that this was because they did not find an organisation that attracted them, the organisations didn’t have the same goals as the young people, they didn’t feel welcomed, they were too busy studying, they didn’t know what was available, they wanted to but never got round to it, or they couldn’t be bothered.

MEANINGS OF ‘YOUTH PARTICIPATION’ IN AUSTRALIA COMPARED WITH COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN

None of the CLD youth interviewed in this study directly attributed their participation or lack of participation to simply their cultural or parental views on participation. However, some mentioned attitudes that compared the importance of participation with other outcomes:

“Although CLD communities in Australia do not discourage the participation of young people in community development, the young people feel pressured to go into more ‘prestigious’ professions and not (be involved in) community development.”

All respondents said that they felt that they could participate more as young people in Australia than they could in their countries of origin, and all said that they believed there would be more progress in the original counties had there been more youth participation encouraged and welcomed by government. The nature of the participation in the country of origin that was reported by young people was very superficial eg a youth day where young people got together in a poorly managed oval with music etc. They reported such attitudes as:

“I don’t think youth engagement was recognised or valued in my country of origin, not like in Australia; and if it was, it was mainly about boys.”

“There weren’t youth facilities. Attitude and policies, where youth is concerned are different to Australia.”

Some of this points to differences in the status of young people – the ‘construction of youth’ – in different societies, or to more specific instances of political control of young people’s participation:

“From what I can remember there wasn’t much youth engagement. There wasn’t such a thing as a young adult; you were either a child or an adult.”

“In order for youth to be a part of community development they have to have the same ideas as the government, which is the only way youth can get involved.”

There were no reports of any long-term changes (such as the policies of the governments of these young people’s countries of origin) that were influenced by young people.

YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN MAINSTREAM ORGANISATIONS

The respondents felt that organisations such as local Council and mainstream youth organisations in Australia do not involve or encourage CLD young people enough. These CLD young people felt that, when they were formally invited to participate such groups, this was done out of obligation to grant requirements, rather than as a genuine regard for the importance of participation by CLD young people. These CLD young people would like to be involved more, to help both their immediate communities as well as the broader community:

“I don’t think my culture influences my participation on the grand scale; sure it would be nice to go to culturally informed functions and so on but if I don’t go, who will teach?”
The Australian Youth Research Centre is located within the Faculty of Education at The University of Melbourne. It was established in 1988 in response to a recognised need by the youth affairs sector for relevant and up to date research on the issues facing young people today.

The aims of the AYRC are to:

- conduct relevant, coherent and reliable research on young people in Australia, with a state, national and international focus;
- assist with the development of policy and the implementation of initiatives based on research findings;
- develop strong links with the youth affairs sector, with particular attention to helping to identify and address the sector’s research needs;
- facilitate communication between educators, researchers, policy makers and youth workers;
- support the research activities of university staff and post-graduate students who have a specific interest in youth affairs; and,
- enhance the professional development of staff and students by assisting them to be informed about the broader context of young people's lives.

The AYRC has particular expertise in research on education, transition pathways, social justice, gender equity and employment issues as they affect young people.

The main AYRC activities are:

- undertaking research and publishing the outcomes in a manner accessible to policy makers and the youth sector;
- providing information and policy advice to governments and other organisations;
- assisting and encouraging individuals or groups who work with young people.

AYRC activities involve:

- undertaking small projects for groups lacking the capacity or opportunity to do so themselves;
- providing a base for post-graduate students wishing to undertake Masters or PhD research on topics related to young people and the youth sector;
- enabling academics to participate in established AYRC projects, and/or undertake their own research on youth related issues;
- maintaining a youth sector resource library;
- publishing series of Working Papers and Research Reports;
- conducting public seminars and conferences on a variety of issues relevant to those working in the youth sector.