



GETTING YOUNG

PEOPLE

ON BOARD

GETTING YOUNG PEOPLE ON BOARD

How government can engage with young people through boards and committees

FOREWORD

The *Queensland Youth Charter: Queensland Government's Commitment to Engaging with Young People* demonstrates this government's recognition of the valuable contributions young people make to our State.

The values and beliefs that underpin this recognition, as well as the standards required to achieve best practise in involving young people in the business of government are outlined in the charter.

It is not enough to simply recognise the contributions of young people. We must also provide practical opportunities for young people to contribute to and enhance public policy.

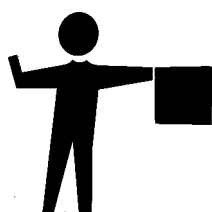
Traditionally the contribution of young people has not been actively sought in government decision-making. Securing positions for young people on boards and committees will assist in ensuring their active engagement in government decision-making processes.

Getting Young People on Board: how government can engage with young people through boards and committees outlines the advantages and benefits of recruiting young people to Queensland Government boards and committees, and provides suggestions for how to achieve this.

I recommend this publication to you as a resource when identifying opportunities to engage with young people through government boards and committees.



Matt Foley MP
Minister for Employment, Training and Youth
Minister for the Arts



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PURPOSE OF HANDBOOK

The purpose of this handbook is to resource the effective involvement of young people on governance structures – i.e. boards, committees and advisory groups. The handbook is divided into two sections with the first section outlining why young people should be recruited to Queensland Government Boards and Committees, and the second section provides suggestions about how this can occur.

This handbook is designed to be utilised in conjunction with the other resources in the Youth Participation Action Kit for Queensland Government Departments. Other resources include the *Queensland Youth Charter: Queensland Government's Commitment to Engaging with Young People*, *Two-way Street : how government departments can engage with young people through consultation*, and information on how to engage with young people through existing mechanisms. Referring to these resources will assist government representatives in harnessing the contribution of a diverse range of young people and ensure that the issues and interests of this large demographic group are represented across government.



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SECTION ONE

1. WHY INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE ON BOARDS AND COMMITTEES

A sense of responsibility to young people is not sufficient reason for structuring youth participation in governance, but it is the fundamental drive which underpins other motives for ensuring their engagement.

When decision-making affects young people, it is appropriate to support their right to participate in the structures and processes by which those decisions are determined.

Most people recognise the value of bringing a range of perspectives to decision-making processes, particularly in relation to problem solving and direction setting. Young people are often valued because of their ability to bring fresh perspectives to traditional ways of operating. As a result of being excluded from positions of power or influence, their point of view is usually that of the outsiders' as much as that of a young person.

Recruiting young people to a committee or board has many **advantages**. It can assist and support a board or committee to:

- Obtain a better understanding of **young people's issues and needs** to ensure that the department or agency does not overlook them.
- Increase **diversity of membership** and provide representative decision making, particularly if the board or committee has a significant youth target or interest in youth issues.

- Harness the specific **skills, knowledge, or expertise** held by young people.
- Provide young people with the **opportunity to develop valuable skills and experience** in governance and related procedures, which may lead to future leadership roles.
- Acknowledge that **participation is a fundamental right** for all people regardless of age.
- Encourage young people's involvement in the political process, to help mitigate the culture of mistrust often displayed toward young people, by **highlighting their capabilities**.
- Encourage young people to pursue careers in the public sector, as they will have a **better understanding of the workings of government**.

Young people can offer a creative and energetic perspective. Adults can benefit from working with young people at this level through experiencing the competence of young people; this may also enhance their own commitment and energy.

On being a young person on a board or committee...

"Being a young person on an Advisory Committee has made me aware of how difficult, yet important, it is to highlight the interests of a broad range of young people.

I've learnt to listen to the perspectives of others and am more aware of the expectations other members of my committee place on the contribution of young people.

On a personal level, I hope to develop my skills and knowledge of government processes, promote the ongoing and increased involvement of young people and earn a bit of extra money."

**Adam Barnes: Youth Representative,
Queensland Transport Planning Advisory Committee**



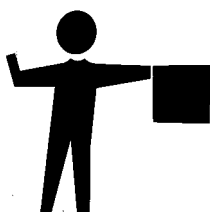
On working with young people on a board or committee...

"Young people are well equipped to look at issues rationally and we encourage them to consider their environments and help map out the future of their towns.

It's their input into the issues that affect them today, which will undoubtedly affect them and their families tomorrow.

After all, they are among the largest proportion of public transport, bikeway and cycleway users in Queensland!"

**Steve Bredhauer MP: Minister for Transport
and Minister for MainRoads**



SECTION ONE

1.1 The "Yes, it's a nice idea but..." Debate

It is often the case with new initiatives, particularly ones which challenge tradition, that it is put in the "too hard basket". The idea itself can be accepted, yet the practical aspects of implementing new initiatives become barriers in themselves. Some of the myths and benefits for including young people on boards and committees are explored below.

IT WON'T WORK BECAUSE....	BUT HAVE YOU CONSIDERED....
Young people are not really interested in the business of government.	Many young people have a very strong sense of social justice and a keen interest in the political process.
Meetings are too complicated and agendas too full to have to worry about a young person keeping up.	Many young people are avid learners. If the board or committee establishes sound induction processes which involve orientation, training, and mentoring, then younger board members will soon be able to contribute meaningfully.
Issues that are discussed are of a highly confidential nature.	Like all board members, younger members will need to be made aware of confidentiality requirements.
The business that this board or committee is concerned with would not interest young people.	Generally young people would not invest the time or energy in an issue unless it had the potential to have a significant impact on their lives. Young people are a diverse group and have many interests and skills. The key is to recruit young people who are specifically interested in the issue at hand. A sound selection process will ensure that the most appropriate young person is selected for the job.
Young people do not have the professional or life experience to be able to contribute meaningfully.	Young people may not have administrative or organisational experience, yet this is not always necessary for boards and committees given the role of Chair or secretariat. Young people have a great amount of energy, are aware of issues that impact on young people, and have a strong sense of commitment to democratic processes. They are often also mission driven and action oriented: keen to complete tasks and achieve outcomes.
Government is not really committed to the notion of youth participation.	The Queensland Government has identified the greater participation of young people in the political process as imperative.

There are many documented examples and cases, both nationally and internationally, where young people's involvement in governance structures has been successful. There are many young people who have gained invaluable experience on 'youth focussed' committees, including school councils, youth advisory committees, youth parliament, government roundtables, and the Queensland Government's State Youth Advisory Council. However, there are also many instances where young people have contributed successfully to other boards that are not solely concerned with youth issues. These include local government councils, committees of sporting bodies, community based management committees for non-government organisations and student bodies.

Generally it is accepted that boards and committees that have sound selection processes, provide induction and ongoing support, and actively encourage participation, find that the benefits of the involvement of young people outweigh initial concerns.



SECTION TWO

2. HOW TO INVOLVE YOUNG PEOPLE ON BOARDS AND COMMITTEES

2.1 The Role of Government Boards

Government boards have two broad roles. There are those which provide governance and those which provide policy and management advice. A detailed listing of the scope and functions of these boards can be accessed via the website, *Governing Queensland: Welcome Aboard, A Guide for Members of Queensland Government Boards, Committees and Statutory Authorities* at <http://www.premiers.qld.gov.au/>.

A highly desirable feature of government boards is that they are reflective of the community or industry that they are established to serve. This entails seeking a diverse group of members with consideration given to age, gender, and culture. Although, for this purpose, age is the common denominator, it is important to recognise that, like adults, young people will vary in maturity, ability, and experience. Therefore, using age alone as a means to define involvement or level of contribution is not appropriate.

On working with young people on a board or committee...

"All the young people I've worked with take their roles on Boards and Committees very seriously.

Young people are brave enough to say things others wouldn't. I strongly believe young people's participation in government decision-making shouldn't be limited to what we define as 'youth issues'.

We might have a more caring and friendly community if we were able to talk more across age groups and get rid of stereo types."

Paul Spooner: Community Organisations representative, State Youth Advisory Council



On being a young person on a board or committee...

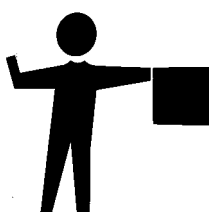
"I was 19 when I served as a student representative on the Dalby Agricultural College Board.

I met a lot of people who were very helpful and supportive of the younger generation.

Not only has it broadened my horizons but I also have a better understanding of the opportunities available to young people today.

Now I understand how important Agricultural Colleges are to the future of Queensland's rural industry."

Ann Dent: Marketing and Promotions Co-ordinator, Dalby Agricultural College



INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

3. INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

Meaningful involvement of young people on boards and committees relies on effective working relationships between all board members. This includes clear communication and decision making processes, as well as considering and addressing barriers to meaningful involvement.

To effectively involve young people on boards and committees, consider the following questions:

- What is the role and what are the expectations for young people on this board or committee and how does this role relate to the rest of the agency or department?
- How can the committee's role and function be structured to avoid tokenism and promote meaningful participation?

- How can support processes be structured to ensure that the young people involved will have or develop the skills needed to maximise their participation?
- What does the agency expect from this involvement and what can young people expect to gain from their involvement?
- What review processes can be established to identify the outcomes for the young participants, the board or committee, and related departments?

3.1 Addressing Barriers to Participation

There are a range of barriers that may affect young people's capacity to participate in formal decision-making forums. However with adequate thought and planning, these barriers can be overcome.

POTENTIAL BARRIERS	POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS
Large amounts of documentation and papers requiring substantial reading and comment.	Providing adequate time for meeting preparation and provision of appropriate resource material, i.e. lists of acronyms, background material.
Lengthy meetings and overly formal meeting procedures.	Ensuring meetings are time limited and that members have opportunities for some informal conversation.
Lack of skills, for example in committee-related roles and responsibilities, or budgetary issues.	Identifying appropriate training options for all board members.
Feeling intimidated by the status of some adults on boards and committees (e.g. Ministers, Chief Executive Officers etc).	Allowing opportunities for board members to be acquainted and delineating roles and responsibilities of members.
Lack of support.	Provide opportunities for involvement and implement a mentoring system.
Lack of information and knowledge of the industry, its issues and associated jargon.	Facilitating access to departmental orientation or induction seminars, providing sufficient background material, and implementing a sound induction process.
Practical constraints such as limited access to transport or departmental parking for meetings, or reimbursement of fares.	Providing remuneration for attending meetings, access to finances to travel to meetings.

Aside from these organisational barriers, it may also be necessary to consider attitudinal barriers some board members may hold in regard to young people's participation. A significant benefit of sharing decision-making power with young people is the opportunity to challenge negative stereotypes or assumptions about young people.



RECRUITMENT

4. RECRUITMENT

4.1 Young People and Statutory Responsibilities

The Queensland Government defines young people as being aged between 12 and 25 inclusively. Formally there are no restrictions with regard to the age of members of boards and committees. Due to the statutory obligations and legal responsibilities associated with many boards and committees, however, it is advocated that young people should be over 17 years of age at the time of recruitment. In some instances, the legislative functions of a particular board or committee will determine an appropriate age category; for example, if the board is concerned with aspects of the Corporations Law then members must be 18 years of age.

4.2 Selection

For effective board performance, individual members need to have a broad range of skills and personal attributes. Knowledge and understanding of accountability, strategic thinking, networking, and teamwork are core competencies of many boards. There are also additional competencies for trading, governing, and regulatory boards. No one member, however, needs all these attributes and it can be helpful to also focus on the collective capacity of the board.

There may be an assumption that young people do not have the required level of experience to contribute effectively on a government board. This assumption is misled. For young participants, as for inexperienced members of any age, governance skills and knowledge can be developed.

This knowledge base will grow quickly if the board is clear about the level of involvement expected from all members and the younger members themselves are committed and motivated.

4.3 Registers

The Department of the Premier and Cabinet maintains a Central Register of Nominees to Government Bodies. This Central Register aims to provide all members of the community with the opportunity to express their interest in being nominated for appointment to government boards. Nomination to the register is by application.

In order to complement government policy, it may be appropriate to appoint members with certain expertise or from certain target groups such as women, Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, people with a disability, or people from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The Queensland Cabinet Handbook states that the Register of Women, the Register of Indigenous Women and the Register of Multicultural Advisors, must be consulted.

If there is a failure to identify appropriate young people after accessing the available registers, other informal avenues may need to be pursued. It may be useful to access appropriate networks, peak bodies, or community based organisations. The Office of Youth Affairs can assist in identifying those networks. The Office of Youth Affairs has established relationships with young people and a range of organisations that can support departments, or boards or committees in the recruitment process.

On being a young person on a board or committee...

"Public speaking has just become a whole lot easier!
Now I'm going to try and make governments more aware of the benefits of listening to young people's ideas on how to solve their own problems and come up with their own solutions."

**Kim Irving: Member, South East Queensland North
Ministerial Regional Community Forum**



On working with young people on a board or committee...

"Young people provide the balance that helps we older board members think outside the square.
They always challenge us to be more expansive in our thinking and by getting involved on working parties, they have helped to implement positive change in our organisational processes."

Glenn Smith: Director, Dalby Agricultural College Board



INDUCTION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

5. INDUCTION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

All new board members need access to information detailing the links to relevant government departments and community organisations, the history of the board, current issues under consideration, minutes and past actions taken, clear description of roles and responsibilities of board members, and administrative arrangements including remuneration.

Ensuring that new members are familiar with the "culture" of the board may also be helpful. This could include acquainting the young person with the flow of the meetings, making certain they have an opportunity to meet members of the board prior to the commencement of the meeting, and advising the board in advance of who the new members are. Information about the board's decision-making processes, its linkages to other agencies, and a simple glossary of industry jargon and acronyms would assist new members.

5.1 Mentoring

Young people benefit from structured support in order to ensure that their participation is sustained and maximised. This can be facilitated through the implementation of a mentoring system, whereby an experienced board member is nominated to guide the young person. Mentors provide critical support by helping new members learn the terminology, by introducing them to the organisational culture, and by supporting the new members to build confidence to act as full partners in the group.

5.2 Requirements of Board Members

The role played by the chairperson can be critical in ensuring the involvement of young people during meetings and in structuring discussion to enable them to both learn and participate. The chair of the board, as well as other members, needs to be mindful that the young members may see them as role models.

Members should also acknowledge the diversity of young people. Adult members sometimes expect that young members represent the needs and interests of all young people. As with representatives from other target groups, there should be no assumption or expectation that one young person is able to be the voice for all young people. If this is a need of the board, perhaps additional younger members could be recruited or alternative consultation strategies explored, for example sub committees or once off focus groups that can provide a broader representation of the target group. Additionally, efforts should be made to ensure that young members are given the opportunity to be included in consideration of all issues, not just those affecting their age group.

Tokenism must be avoided. There is no reason why young members should not have equal voting status or the same rights as other members to substantially influence the decision making of the board.

On working with young people on a board or committee...

"I live on a cattle property near Theodore in Central Queensland. By working with young people to represent the environmental sector on my local board, I hope to have a positive influence in shaping the future direction of service and resource management in Central Queensland.

I also really enjoy getting to know the variety of people that are involved in different parts of my community."

Fiona Anderson: Member, Central Queensland Ministerial Regional Community Forum



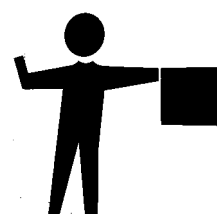
On being a young person on a board or committee...

"Being a member on this Forum has taught me so much about the State Government.

Now that I'm aware of the issues affecting my community and other communities in North Queensland, I hope to make a difference in someone's life.

That would fulfil my personal philosophy and make me extremely happy."

Christopher Church: Member, North Queensland Ministerial Regional Community Forum



EVALUATION AND REVIEW

6. EVALUATION AND REVIEW

For youth participation at this level to be effective for all concerned, a review process is recommended. It is critically important that the younger members do not perceive this process as a negative one. It is not about criticising performance, nor is it an examination. It is a review concerned with ensuring that the entire participation process is positive and beneficial for all concerned and involves opportunities for young people to also provide feedback. Ideally this process should be undertaken within the context of a broader evaluation of the performance of the board.

Given this, a review process for members should focus on the following:

- the degree to which specific governance related skills and knowledge has been achieved
- areas requiring specific developmental input
- the effectiveness of the different forms of support provided
- the degree to which the governance structures and processes have included and excluded young members and the potential for adapting any aspects of these to make them more user-friendly
- providing an opportunity for the young person to give general feedback and contribute to the board or committee's direction
- establishing a new set of outcomes for the young person and the board or committee, and a date to review their attainment.

On being a young person on a board or committee...

"I don't take my role in this organisation lightly. I'm really learning about the depth of commitment that goes into policy development. The young people of Queensland need representation and hopefully I will be able to have an influence and see action taken."

Cameron Ball: Member, Far North Queensland Ministerial Regional Community Forum



On working with young people on a board or committee...

"The calibre of students that come through to represent their peers is fantastic. They make our council complete.

In many ways, young people are the recipients of the services we are providing - their needs are many and varied.

And they certainly aren't shy about offering advice and different perceptions that other members wouldn't necessarily bring."

Craig Sherrin: Director, South Bank Institute of TAFE Business Council



CONCLUSION

7. CONCLUSION

The Office of Youth Affairs anticipates that this handbook will provide useful information and practical assistance in realising the Government's election commitment to increase young people's participation on government boards and committees.

Ongoing support is available through the Office of Youth Affairs to further assist boards and committees to:

- recruit young people to boards and committees
- support young people through the selection and recruitment process
- access relevant resource material specific to youth participation models and decision-making
- review and evaluate the progress and outcomes of young people's participation in governance.

For more information, advice, or support contact the Office of Youth Affairs in the Department of Employment and Training on 1300 55 59 54 or (07) 3224 8451.

On being a young person on a board or committee...

"My role as a Forum member is to raise and discuss issues of concern to the people of Central Queensland with Cabinet Ministers at quarterly Forums.

I have learnt a lot about the various ways Government Departments consult with the community.

During my time on this Forum I want to make a positive influence on the Government's provision of services to rural and regional areas of Queensland."

Brett Gibson: Member, Central Queensland Ministerial Regional Community Forum



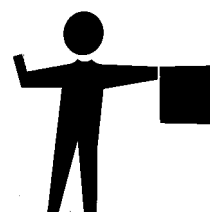
On working with young people on a board or committee...

"It is essential that young people are involved in any groups that discuss or make decisions about matters that affect them, their families, and their future.

They play an invaluable role in making our Advisory Council aware of their experiences during Years 11 and 12 and, subsequently, in their transitions from school to work, TAFE or university.

Not only have they provided practical advice about our information publications, videos, and community information program but, indeed, the young members of the Council have often provided the most useful and practical input to the Advisory Council's deliberations and decisions."

Professor Diana Davis: Chair, Tertiary Entrance Procedures Authority and TEPA Advisory Council



READINGS AND RESOURCES

8. READINGS AND RESOURCES

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