Centre of Excellence:
Young People & Disasters

A Guide: Youth Participation in Emergency Management Planning



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What we mean by Youth Participation

Broadly speaking, to participate means to be involved in something, to take part meaningfully. The level of participation may be mediated through variables such as choice, context, capacity, resources and so on. The level and/or type of participation may not be the same for everyone; people may choose the level of their participation or whether to participate at all. For community organisations wanting to involve young people the key is to provide options, choices and opportunities to meaningfully participate.[1] The Centre of Excellence: Young People & Disasters (Centre) believes that young people have a right to participate in decisions being made about them and that when young people are involved in community decision making it adds value to those decisions.[2]

You can read through our full definition on youth participation here, but in summary **youth participation is about enabling young people as active citizens, involving young people in a range of activities, organisations, government and community structures and ultimately in decision making on issues that directly affect them.**

The United Nations state clearly that participation is a fundamental human right, enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and for young people under the age of 18 this is reiterated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. According to UNICEF, participation enables young people to "play a vital role in their own development as well as in that of their communities, helping them to learn vital life-skills, develop knowledge on human rights and citizenship and to promote positive civic action." Young people under the legal age of enfranchisement and majority (18 years) are excluded from the formal democratic process of electing governments based on their age. In addition, young people (and young adults over 18 years) are also often excluded from community decision making based on the false assumption that because of their age young people lack the knowledge, experience or capability to be involved in decision making. However, the UN recognises young people not just as rights holders but as "key agents for social change, economic growth and technological innovation."

Models of youth participation

The Centre in its work with young people draws on the many and various models of youth participation. One such model is Lundy's (2007) which the Centre recently used in a review of youth participation in emergency management plans across Victoria. That project informed this resource.

Lundy's Participation Model

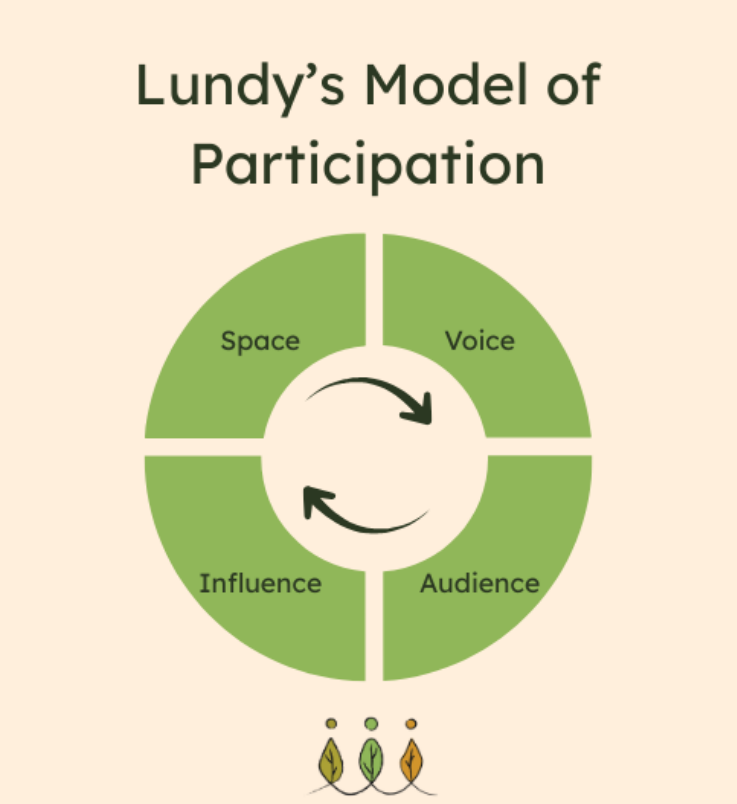
Lundy's (2007) model of participation is grounded in the UNCRC and focused on a rights-based approach to involving children and young people in

decision-making. The model suggests four critical elements that need to be in place for meaningful participation to occur:[3]

- **Voice:** Children and young people are able to express their views.
- **Audience:** Children and young people's views are listened to.
- **Influence:** Children and young people's views are acted upon as appropriate.
- **Space:** Children and young people are given safe environment and inclusive opportunities to form and express their own views.

Lundy's model helps us understand the elements that need to be present to uphold and deliver on Article 12 of the UNCRC with transparency and integrity. The four elements are interrelated and all must be present to enable participation and ensure it is meaningful.[3]

Figure 3: Lundy's (2007) Model of Participation (Image by the Centre of Excellence: Young People & Disasters adapted from European Commission)



Youth Participation in Emergency Management Planning

In line with the Guidance Note - Engaging Children and Young People in Local Emergency Management Planning, the Centre advocates for, and

provides evidence of young people's inclusion in emergency management planning, recognising that young people have rights to participate in decisions being made about them, but also that their participation can improve the quality and effectiveness of services for both young people and the broader community. [2]

Young people should be involved because they:[2,4]

- have a right to participate
- are experts in their own lives
- have valuable contributions that will improve services/programs.

Young people are not just impacted by disasters. They can also be agents of change, and as stakeholders in emergency planning, young people bring important experiences, energy and insight to community resilience.

By prioritising youth participation and giving young people a seat at the table, emergency management planning can become more effective and provide better services to the community that the plans represent.[2]

How to involve young people in emergency management planning

The following sections outline information on how young people can be involved in emergency management planning and provides some important considerations.

Committees or youth advisory groups

You could create structures like committees or a youth advisory group (YAG) or include dedicated positions such as a 'youth representative' on existing committees. These options create opportunities for young people to share their perspectives and contribute to decisions affecting them.

The benefits for young people and for organisations are well documented and include:[5–7]

- Young people developing leadership and professional skills that could include networking, public speaking and facilitation
- Young people developing a sense of purpose and building connections with likeminded people
- Empowering young people to take action on what matters to them
- Organisations improving services and better serving the communities they represent
- Strengthening relationships between organisations and young people

There are multiple approaches to involving young people through YAGs or committees, but the approach is ideally developed in consultation with

young people to ensure their needs are being addressed through the advisory group structure and focus. Despite the best intentions of genuinely involving young people, organisational constraints can often determine the structure and role of such groups.[5]

Below are some key considerations when setting up a committee or youth advisory group:[8–11]

- Consider the purpose of the group:
  - What will the role of the group be?
  - What is the group trying to achieve?
  - What is the benefit of involving young people? How will they be involved in the project?
  - What are the values that will guide the group?
  - How are the values or 'guiding principles' developed with young people?
- To ensure engagement and opportunities are meaningful, authentic and avoid tokenism:
  - Develop clear roles and purposes for the group, ensuring that young people haven't just been brought on as part of a 'tick box' compliance.
  - Provide professional development and upskilling opportunities Remunerate young people where appropriate. This recognises their expertise, values their contributions and may also enable participation barriers to be overcome.
  - Implement feedback loops and uphold transparency around decision making. If young people contribute their ideas, it's important to let them know how they are being used. If there are barriers or their suggestions aren't possible, make sure to let them know.
- To actively address power imbalances between workers/adults and young people:
  - Recognise and value young people's perspectives, knowledge, capabilities and experiences.
  - Support young people to lead parts of project development.
  - Provide opportunities for young people to have a genuine say in issues that affect them.
  - Enable young people to take part in opportunities that they want to take part in.
  - Provide genuine choices for their participation.
  - Support young people's agency with the resources, means and opportunities they may need to reach their potential.
- Prioritise a diversity of voices and representation:

        - Groups and structures should reflect a broad representation of young people.
            - Note: If a young person is participating as a representative of other young people and their experiences, they need to be informed and supported to do this effectively.
        - Young people acknowledge their intersecting identities, and the group should reflect this. This is about acknowledging a young person in a holistic way, moving beyond identity labels to think about how their experiences play out in systems that may structurally oppress them.
    - Ensure spaces are youth friendly, accessible and child safe (more on this below)

Consultations - focus groups and yarning circles

Beyond formal advisory structures, there are also other ways to include young people's views in emergency management. Some of the common ways are through consultations with young people, that may use focus groups and/or yarning circles.

Yarning circles

Yarning circles are a cultural practice and model that has facilitated exchanges of knowledge by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for thousands of years.[12]

Broadly, a yarning circle is a cultural communication and conversational tool/space used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people where decisions are made collaboratively and through inclusive dialogue of everyone present. It involves the sharing of one's own stories and the creation of new knowledge. It prioritises cultural safety and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of communicating.[13]

Yarning circles are a culturally safe alternative to traditional forms of engagement such as focus groups.

Considerations

Regardless of the opportunity or project, it is critical that spaces are culturally safe, promote self-determination, are community-led and respect cultural protocols.[14]

National Indigenous Disaster Resilience and Fire to Flourish developed a factsheet outlining the 'Dos' and 'Don'ts' of engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

Key considerations include:[14]

- Consult early and continuously
- Work collaboratively
- Demonstrate how projects/opportunities meet the needs and priorities of communities
- Maintain reciprocity
- Communicate clearly and regularly
- Remunerate appropriately
- Procure Indigenous services

Consultations and focus groups

Consultations and the use of focus groups are great ways to bring young people together to share ideas, experiences and information on issues they care about.

Key considerations:

- Ensure consultation times are accessible for young people:
  - Outside of school hours
  - Consider school and university holidays
  - Consider other regular commitments such as sports training.
  - Offer a range of times for young people to contribute
  - Ask young people what the best time to meet might be
- Support travel and accommodation where possible or reimburse the costs.
- Provide catering – food can be a big draw card for young people

An important note on consulting young people and tokenism:

To challenge tokenism, reflect on the following when consulting young people:

- Has a young person only been asked to participate and engage with the topics that relate to their identity, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land management or accessible emergency messaging for refugee and migrant communities?
- Is there potential for a young person to feel pressure to be a 'spokesperson' for their entire community? i.e. representing all the needs that young people may have.
- Are there assumptions in the questions being asked that a young person knows everything about their culture or community?
- Is there an expectation that young people will educate those running the consultation/focus group or the broader community?
- Is the young person being asked to share their experience without prior agreement or any supports in place?

Creating opportunities for young people to input into emergency management organisations are important but they shouldn't create an additional burden on young people by patronising, tokenising or compartmentalising their identity and experiences.

Co-design

There is no one accepted definition or way of undertaking 'co-design'. It can be thought of as an approach that takes participation seriously, working with communities and young people using a range of elements such as co-creation, co-production, co-delivery, co-management, co-evaluation etc., These are all ways of enabling active participation and engagement with relevant stakeholders, and ensuring inclusivity.[15]

Co-design is often place-based and values community-led approaches as core components of a project's success. It is essentially about prioritising the inclusion of those who will be the ones receiving a program/project/ service or event's intended outcomes, and embedding their voice, knowledge and experiences into the development of those services.[5,15]

There are areas of emergency management that can be co-designed with young people. Some examples include:

- Emergency management plans and/or sub plans could consider.
    - The development of a specific sub-plan or community plan with a focus on young people.
- Evacuation/relief centres that have youth-friendly and child safe elements.[16]
- Emergency messaging and information that is youth friendly
- Campaign messaging around fire safety for young people
    - For example, specific messaging for young people during festival, holiday or camping seasons.

If you're implementing co-design in emergency management initiatives, consider the following:[5,17]

- **Time:** Allow enough time for elements of co-design to be embedded in the project. True co-design does take time and resources, but the benefits make it worthwhile.
- **Feedback:** Allow time for feedback. Collect and integrate feedback from young people on services/programs/projects. Ensure they are informed about how their input has been used.
- **Peer-focused environments:** Consider who needs to be involved in the co-design process. This is particularly relevant for managing power dynamics – if the co-design space includes community members of all ages, young people may feel there are barriers to their full

participation and ability to be heard. Is it possible for some meetings/consultations to be focused only on young people. Could parts of the consultation be facilitated by young people?

- **Support expectations:** co-design should encourage young people to be creative in their thinking and brainstorming.
    - For example, a consultation with young people on how to improve evacuation centres to be more youth-friendly could include a 'blue sky thinking' activity. Eg Question "If we didn't have the constraints of logistics and what the centres must include, how could they be youth-friendly?"
    - The co-design nature of the consultation should allow for transparency of expectations and for young people to understand that not all ideas can progress, but that their ideas are still valuable and worth hearing. This can help with feelings of being patronised or tokenised and disillusionment in processes when young people are asked to co-design projects rather than being merely 'consulted'.

Co-designing emergency management services/projects/programs with young people can improve their intended outcomes and service delivery.

Child Safety

Emergency management and youth participation in emergency management must be child safe and must comply with relevant legislation, regulation, laws and guidelines regarding child safety. The Centre advocates for child safety across all aspects of disasters; prevention, preparedness, response, recovery, resilience, and risk reduction, as well as opportunities for young people to get involved with emergency response agencies and services, i.e. through volunteering and/or employment in a child safe way.

The Victorian Child Safe Standards are a set of rules for organisations to follow that aim to keep children and young people (under 18 years) safe and free from harm.[18] The Commission for Children and Young People oversee Child Safe Standards in Victoria.

Additionally, there are the National Child Safe Principles which provide a national approach to a child safe culture across all sectors of Australian society.[19] The National Office for Child Safety oversee the National Child Safe Principles.

What is the key difference between the national and Victorian standards? Victoria requires organisations to establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of

Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued (Child Safe Standard 1).



Figure 1 - National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

Creating accessible and youth-friendly environments

Accessibility

Access is a human right[20] and 'access needs' enable a person to participate, communicate or learn. Access needs aren't special requirements; they are the conditions, support and adjustments to participate. Often, you'll hear the term 'access needs' used in reference to the things a disabled young person might need to participate in your service, event or program. However, most people have access needs and ensuring environments are accessible will create safer, more inclusive spaces.

Examples of access needs include:

- Ramps in evacuation centres for people who use wheelchairs or other mobility aids.

- Fidgets being provided at relief centres, a fidget is a small tool or object that can keep people's hands busy, helping with anxiety, stress, concentration.
- Different options for lighting in emergency management consultations/focus groups/yarning circles.
- An Auslan interpreter and captioning for people who are D/deaf or hard of hearing when emergency messaging is broadcast.
- Charging stations and extra batteries at evacuation centres for cochlear implants.
- Laptops or notepads for people to use for different styles of communication and establish a space to charge multiple devices.

Additionally, we recommend exploring the work of Collaborating 4 Inclusion, specifically around Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DIDRR) including:

- Disability-Inclusive Emergency Planning (DIEP)
- Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (PCEP)

Youth friendly

Below are some suggested ways that spaces can be made more youth friendly. These suggestions can be applicable to a range of situations including relief centres or meetings/consultations on emergency management:[16]

- **Designated spaces for young people:** A dedicated space for young people means they can step away from any triggering conversations if need be. A dedicated space also means they can choose to be around their peers and people of similar age if need be.
  - For meetings/consultations, dedicated for young people.
- **Calm, friendly, inviting atmosphere:**
  - Different types of seating, i.e. bean bags and couches
  - Soft lighting
  - Music
  - Display visual signals of inclusion, e.g. Pride flag, Aboriginal flag, child safety information.
- **Activities:** Activities are a great way to keep young people's morale high and can help distract from the stressors of disaster.
  - Card and board games
  - Puzzles
  - Juggling balls
  - Colouring books
  - Scrapbooking materials
  - Mindfulness activities to help with stress and anxiety. This can be simple breathwork with calming music in the background

- **Fidgets:** providing different types of fidgets on tables
- **Inclusive considerations:**
    - Gender neutral bathrooms
    - Pronoun badges
    - Resources, signs and information that are age and capacity appropriate, e.g. written in Plain English
    - Multilingual emergency information and signage

Gender and Disaster Australia have developed factsheets on various cohorts and recommendations for emergency evacuation centres including; LGBTIQA+, multicultural, women, children and families, domestic violence, Youth and First Nations.

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