

## Engaging children and young people

### Engaging children and young people in research and evaluation

#### BEFORE YOU START

The following questions should be considered when determining whether the participation of children and young people in your project is appropriate:

- What is the purpose of engaging children and young people?
- What will you do as a result of their involvement?
- What will they gain from participating?
- What is realistic within your project resources?

Regardless of the role they will play in the project, children and young people should be provided with clear information about:

- the purpose of the research or evaluation
- the value of their input
- what they will be asked to do
- how their information will be used.

**Resource:** In *Lancashire's Children and Young People's Charter*, young people developed a checklist for organisations considering engaging with children and young people and how to ensure this process is meaningful for them.

*The content of this fact sheet stemmed from a Family and Child Evaluation Community of Practice session. This resource is intended to assist staff who are planning to engage children and young people as participants in research or evaluation, or as co-designers. It provides considerations for key project milestones when engaging children and young people, and guides the reader to additional sources of information.*

#### 1. Why involve children and young people in research and evaluation?

Children and young people are often the direct or secondary beneficiaries of programs, policies and services, and are thus expected to benefit from evaluations. Their participation in research and evaluation, either as partners or participants, seeks to ensure these programs, policies or services are effective and appropriate to meet their needs, as well as empower them in the process.

There are numerous benefits to engaging this cohort more actively in research and evaluation, including:

- Benefits to the researcher or evaluator:
  - Addressing and equalising power imbalances between young people and adults.
  - Ensuring the research or evaluation addresses the most pertinent issues to this cohort.
  - Asking children and young people to identify research or evaluation tools appropriate for recruiting and collecting data from their peers.
  - Building rapport and mutually respectful relationships between researchers or evaluators and young people.
- Benefits to children and young people:
  - Empowering children and young people to have a voice.
  - Promoting learning and capacity of young people in evaluation and research methodologies.
  - Strengthening young peoples' commitment to a program or service.
- Some of the barriers or challenges to engagement can include:
  - Young people are not willing or are unable to engage.
  - Adults may not see the value of young peoples' involvement/ views or want to share power over the research or evaluation process.
  - The research or evaluation process may require special expertise that young people aren't perceived to have.
  - Ethical considerations may make it difficult to engage children or young people for the purpose of evaluation or research.

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### 2. How can I contact children and young people to participate?

When approaching children and young people to participate, it is critical to explain the purpose of your research or evaluation and what will be involved. Children and young people must perceive the research or evaluation to be relevant to them in order to participate.

Depending on your target population, you may access children and young people through schools, early childhood education centres, advocacy agencies or community services.

Where possible, you should also seek to engage the voices of children and young people who are often marginalised and aren't readily accessible. You may consider engaging 'gatekeepers' such as case workers, youth workers or community organisations who have already built relationships with children and young people, to facilitate access and participation.

#### DCCSDS Office for Youth: Queensland Youth Strategy eHub

The Office for Youth has established a youth digital engagement hub under the *Queensland Youth Strategy: Building Young Queenslanders for a Global Future*.

The **eHub** enables young people to engage online with projects and actions under the Strategy. It contains a range of tools including forums, surveys, idea walls, events, polls and social media feeds.

### 3. What role should children and young people play?

The degree to which children and young people are involved will vary depending on the purpose of your research or evaluation and children and young peoples' interest and ability.

The role that they will likely play should be determined in advance, particularly to consider the appropriateness of their involvement, and any resource, training and time commitments.

Children and young people are often involved as:

#### Leaders



- Having a say in the design and purpose of the research or evaluation.
- Children and young people may require training and support to fulfil this role.

#### Co-researchers

- Collecting data from their peers.
- Children and young people may require training and support to fulfil this role.
- Involving them as peer researchers may elicit more honest responses from participants.



#### Participants



- Identified as key stakeholders or users of a program or service who are able to provide useful information.
- Researchers and evaluators will still need to ensure children and young people's perspectives are reported accurately.

**Participation Works** provides a series of activities to introduce children to evaluation concepts and provide an opportunity to learn and practice skills needed for evaluation

There is increasing recognition that the voices of children and young people should be considered when designing or conducting research and evaluation with or for them.

**Participatory evaluation** seeks to engage stakeholders more actively in the evaluation process. This may occur during the design, data collection and analysis or reporting stage of a project.

If adopting this approach, you will need to consider what level of involvement will be the most effective use of children and young peoples' time. For example, consider whether the project is led by children and young people with the support of adults, or the project is led by adults who have engaged children and young people as consultants or a steering committee to guide decisions.



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### 4. What are some methods or approaches I can use when engaging children and young people?

Researchers and evaluators should seek to use data collection methods and tools that are appropriate for their target population.

Your choice should consider the age, background, literacy levels and capabilities of the children and young people you seek to engage.

Additional consideration should be given to:

- the nature and sensitivity of the program or topic
- timeframes and resources
- level of training required for staff or young people.

Where possible, you should seek to involve children and young people in the selection of methods to ensure these will be relevant to your participants.

While structured approaches such as surveys can collect broad information on topics, exploratory approaches can provide insight into the views and perspectives of children and young people that may otherwise not be apparent.

*Save the Children and Cambridgeshire Children's Fund have developed a list of data collection **methods and tools for engaging children and young people** with case studies describing how these can be applied.*

Following data collection, it is important to provide feedback to children and young people to update them on the progress of the research or evaluation and what will happen next.

This may also be an opportunity to acknowledge the value of their input and demonstrate the impact of their participation.

While the channels for providing feedback will likely depend on the specifics of each project, there is an opportunity to ask children and young people how they would like to receive feedback.

### TIPS FOR ENGAGING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

- Listen to what the children and young people say.
- Avoid using jargon or academic language.
- Pilot your research or evaluation tools with children and young people.
- Be flexible in your engagement strategy – your research methods or questions may not match children and young peoples' priorities.
- Use researchers and evaluators that are skilled in working with children and young people.
- Make sure everyone gets a turn to speak.
- Use child-friendly and accessible spaces.
- Activities should be enjoyable and inclusive.
- Use a variety of methods and keep activities short.
- For group work, provide opportunities for children and young people to get to know each other through icebreakers.

### 5. How can I feed results back to children and young people?

When feeding back results, you should consider accessible and creative ways to present the findings and use child-friendly communication channels and language.

Products can be made child-friendly and accessible by involving children and young people in selecting appropriate reporting products, co-writing sections of a report or producing a young person's summary.

Some examples of creative reporting products made for children and young people include videos, cartoon clips, social media posts and child-friendly reports, such as:

- Mission Australia produced a YouTube clip to share the key results from their [2017 Youth Survey](#).
- The CREATE Foundation created a young person version of their [Go Your Own Way evaluation](#) report.
- The CREATE Foundation also released infographics (for their Report Card) and newspaper articles (for the Family Matters Report) through Facebook posts.



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### 6. What ethical issues should I be aware of?

All research and evaluation should uphold high ethical standards in order to protect and respect participants, although there are some additional considerations for engaging children and young people as participants or partners. Care should be taken to acknowledge vulnerability and potential risks for children and young people as a result of their involvement in the research or evaluation.

To consent to participating in research or evaluation, children and young people should clearly understand the purpose and nature of their participation. This information should be provided to them in a way that is meaningful and child-friendly.

The ability for children and young people to provide informed consent will depend on their maturity and capacity to understand what they are consenting to, rather than their age.

You may additionally consider involving a parent, carer or guardian in the consent process, although this may not be appropriate in all circumstances.

As a guide, researchers and evaluators should:

- Ensure participation is non-burdensome, in a location and time convenient for children and young people.
- Balance the potential risks to children and young peoples' participation with the benefits.
- Have clear processes for dealing with instances where a child or young person discloses information that needs to be reported.
- Seek to equalise power imbalances between children/young people and adults.
- Provide children and young people information about the research or evaluation and their role, and give them an opportunity to agree or disagree to participate.
- Ensure participation is voluntary and participants understand how to withdraw.
- Communicate how confidentiality will be protected.
- Outline how the findings will be distributed and how they can access a copy of the findings.
- Provide participants with access to support.

### ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Alderson, P. & Morrow, V. (2011). *The Ethics of Research with Children and Young People: A Practical Handbook*. Sage.

ARACY (2009). *Involving children and young people in research*

Australian *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*

Big Lottery Fund (2005). *Engaging young people in evaluation and consultation*

Children & Young People's Commissioner Scotland. *7 golden rules for participation*

Kellett, M. (2011). *Engaging with children and young people*

Ministry of Youth Affairs. (2003). *Youth Development Participation Guide: 'Keepin' it Real' – A resource for involving young people in decision making*.

New South Wales Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People. *Australian youth participation resources*

Wilkinson, J. (2000). *Children and Participation: Research, monitoring and evaluation with children and young people*. Save the Children.

Unicef (2005). *Useful tools for engaging young people in participatory evaluation*