



Connecting Young People in Local Communities



A Guide for the Development of a Local Government Youth Charter

September 2004



Present and future: connecting young people in local communities

Foreword

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) commends this guide to all councils and we encourage councils to develop a Youth Charter. A charter for your municipality builds on existing youth initiatives and is an effective way to acknowledge young people's contributions in your local communities

A Local government Youth Charter identifies important fundamentals of participation and decision-making in all areas of council activity and contributes to effective relationships with young people at a local level.

This guide has been developed through consultation with young people and councils across the state, under the guidance of a reference group comprising representatives of the Municipal Association of Victoria, RMIT University, the Office for Youth and metropolitan and regional councils. Special acknowledgment is made to all councils and shires that participated in developing the guide, particularly the young people and council officers involved.

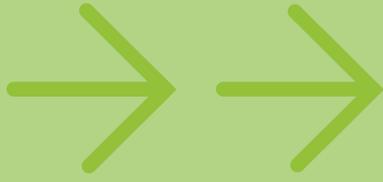
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Purpose of a charter

Adopting a Youth Charter is a visible way that your council can acknowledge the importance of young people and the unique contributions they make to their community. A charter displays your council's commitment to affirming young people as valued community members and engaging them in decisions that impact on their lives and their community.

A Youth Charter can act as a 'compass' – enabling councils to work more effectively with and for young people. It encourages councils to put young people on the agenda and respond to their needs in council planning, policy, advocacy and service delivery activities.



Using this guide

This guide to developing a Youth Charter is divided into three parts.

Part one – Statewide framework – identifies some important fundamentals of participation and decision-making that should apply to all councils in embracing a ‘best practice’ approach.

Part two – Working locally – poses a series of questions and ideas for councils to respond to and does not seek to be prescriptive about the approach councils should take. This will ensure that a Youth Charter is locally relevant and aligned with other council policy frameworks. This process should be informed through consultation with young people and council to ensure that all key stakeholders understand and support the way forward.

A guide for putting it all together is included in **Part 3** – Making your charter work, which outlines the important requirements and implementation steps for councils who choose to adopt a Youth Charter.

Part 1 — Statewide framework

Scope — what a Youth Charter can achieve

Councils who participate in developing a Youth Charter acknowledge and celebrate the unique contributions that young people make to all aspects of community life. Young people’s participation is enriching and important to council planning and service delivery functions across economic, social, cultural and environmental dimensions.

A Youth Charter:

- acknowledges that young people have a right to active citizenship through a visible and valued presence in their community, and participation in decision-making that affects them and their communities;
- affirms that council has a leadership role with young people in the community – to advocate to all levels of government and community, ensuring that young people’s needs are addressed;
- develops connections between young people and their neighbourhoods and communities – young people’s involvement is essential to a strong community;
- helps ensure better decision-making in response to young people’s diverse needs; and
- supports a whole-of-government approach to youth issues.



Values — the way young people see themselves

The following statements have been derived from extensive statewide consultations and the direct views of more than 300 young people.

- Young people are diverse and have individual potential.
- Young people have a fresh outlook, are open minded, accepting and have new ideas.
- Young people are entitled to be given responsibility and opportunities.
- Young people are entitled to be treated equitably, with the same human rights as other members of the community.
- Young people's participation requires a mutual and supportive relationship between young people and the community, based on respect and acceptance.
- Young people are concerned about the future, and can contribute to both local and global issues.
- Young people are willing to express their own opinions to decision makers, help develop solutions and be accountable.

These values can underpin and inform each council's commitment to working with young people as part of the local community. Young people may identify values and issues unique to your municipality, and councils are encouraged to tailor a charter to their local communities.

Principles — working with young people

Councils impact on the lives of young people through a variety of local government roles, such as providing information, advocacy to other agencies, planning, and direct delivery of some services. Councils can demonstrate their commitment to young people through actively and visibly promoting young people as an integral part of the community. By working with young people to understand the range of youth perspectives on key issues, councils will ensure local responses are appropriate.

Adoption of the following youth participation principles is recommended when developing a Youth Charter.

Empowerment: young people having greater control over their lives through participation.

Purposeful engagement: young people taking on valued roles, addressing issues that are relevant to them, and influencing real outcomes.

Inclusiveness: ensuring that all young people are able to participate.

(Office for Youth and YAC Vic, 2002)



In developing this guide, we consulted young people who identified a number of specific strategies to achieve these principles. The young people considered the following strategies critical to enabling meaningful involvement and participation.

Strategies identified by young people

- Value the opinions, views, skills and knowledge of young people.
- Include all young people, embracing their diversity as an asset.
- Allow young people to make mistakes, but also assist them to develop new knowledge and strategies to avoid making similar mistakes in the future.
- Enable young people to contribute to the agenda.
- Communicate information in a timely way that is relevant to young people, i.e. through email trees, SMS, youth newsletters, community arts and the media.
- Be clear about the process, and what will happen with ideas and recommendations.
- Provide feedback on the outcome of decisions.
- Provide ongoing opportunities for involvement with relevant support and training, i.e. networks, committees, forums, mentors and debriefing.
- Provide relevant, practical resources to support a diverse range of young people to participate, i.e. transport, attendant carers, interpreters and expenses.

These principles and the associated strategies can underpin and inform your council's Youth Charter. Young people may identify additional strategies unique to your municipality, and councils are encouraged to tailor a charter to their local communities.

Part 2 — Working locally

When developing this guide, young people identified important, local-level key issues. Addressing these issues can provide council and other local organisations with the basis for building relationships with young people in their community.

These issues are provided as a guide about potential opportunities for council engagement. It is anticipated that each local council will, in partnership with young people, determine specific local priorities and actions.



Issues identified by young people	Council opportunity	Local council response (to be completed)
Want to feel part of the community.	<p>Involving young people in decision-making across all relevant areas of council activity.</p> <p>Support for local events and amenities that reflect and promote young people's involvement in the community, i.e. festival, cleanup days, community gardens and graffiti walls.</p>	
Expect to feel safe and welcome.	<p>Support young people's visibility in the community.</p> <p>Involve young people in decisions about designing and planning of spaces and places.</p> <p>Promote young people's value and their contributions.</p> <p>Communicate positive images of young people.</p>	
Want a sustainable local community that is diverse and provides employment, education and recreation options.	<p>Advocate for pathways to local employment and educational opportunities.</p> <p>Support the retention of schools and local recreation services, through advocacy and planning roles.</p> <p>Recognise that young people contribute socially, culturally and economically to their community.</p>	
Provide opportunities to get together and make friends.	<p>Provide opportunities for young people to make connections in their local community through participation in activities and community events.</p> <p>Provide places and spaces that are welcoming, accessible and inclusive of young people.</p>	
Expect a progressive, innovative and open culture and a sense of civic pride.	<p>Recognise that young people can and want to make unique social, cultural and economical contributions to planning their community.</p> <p>Involve young people as council ambassadors.</p>	
Want services that are relevant, accessible and youth focused.	<p>Involve young people in determining the services that are needed.</p> <p>Involve young people in the management of relevant services.</p> <p>Consider issues of cost, distance and transport when providing services and opportunities for young people.</p>	



Part 3 — Making your charter work

In developing a Youth Charter we encourage you to adopt the values and principles, as outlined in the previous sections, as the basis for your Youth Charter. A council's response to Part 2 – Working locally - should reflect the municipality's priorities, and assist in developing a local-level implementation strategy.

Councils are encouraged to undertake the following implementation steps:

1. Localise your charter

Develop your council's response to the issues identified by young people. This will involve talking to young people, council and other stakeholders about the most appropriate processes and strategies to address the issues identified in Part 2 – Working locally. The approach you choose may be influenced by council's past experiences with civic and youth participation; your resources, time available and geographic spread; and your municipality's demography. You should also ensure effective involvement of young people from diverse backgrounds.

2. Formally commit to your charter

A Youth Charter should encompass council's planning, advocacy and service delivery roles to ensure an integrated approach to youth issues.

3. Develop a strategy to put your charter into operation across council

Developing a Youth Charter is an evolutionary process and does not commit councils to new responsibilities or resources. A Youth Charter may, however, commit your council to working differently with young people.

In the first instance, it is about a whole-of-council commitment to embed your Youth Charter in other policy frameworks and processes by building youth needs and strengths into existing council structures, processes and functions. A key example of this would be to integrate a charter into council's community plan (or other equivalent plan).

Some other broad strategies may include:

- considering the position of youth services within council (is the service strategically placed to inform all youth-related decision-making across council, and does council facilitate young people's input?);
- considering young people's views, needs and potential contributions in council planning processes such as land use, social planning, strategic planning, and recreation planning; and
- establishing multidisciplinary planning teams on relevant issues.

4. Ensure processes are in place for gaining and integrating the views of young people

Establish strategies and processes for involving young people. Be clear about the purposes of involving young people and ensure that the strategies are underpinned by the values and principles adopted by your council, such as those suggested in this guide. The *Taking Young People Seriously* handbooks are also good references to assist you in identifying sound strategies.



Strategies could include:

- establishing a youth leadership program;
- promoting youth involvement in grant making – determining grant allocation and being proactive about letting young people know about grant opportunities;
- establishing formal mechanisms such as parallel youth planning committees;
- developing partnerships to address youth issues – with government, other councils, the community, business enterprises, and young people, i.e. bring groups together and develop integrated strategies; and
- creating a strong, youth-focused network with other councils to share information and strategies about approaches to linking with young people.

A Youth Charter should be a dynamic document, with the responsive element in Part 2 – Working locally – to be reviewed regularly to reflect council's changing needs, demographics and priorities. As Youth Charters gather momentum across the state, and the benefits of a youth participation approach become more apparent, we encourage councils to share knowledge and experiences.

Councils should regularly review and evaluate their Youth Charter for the impact it has on making improvements in young people's outcomes. In your evaluation, you may like to refer to the Department for Victorian Communities' publication: *Indicators of Community Strength in Victoria* (available at www.dvc.vic.gov.au).

Useful resources

Case studies of Youth Participation in Local Government due for publication in December 2004 – MAV & RMIT University.

Youth Affairs Council of Victoria *Taking Young People Seriously* handbooks can be found at www.yacvic.org.au

Office for Youth resources on youth participation can be found at www.youth.vic.gov.au

Department for Victorian Communities, Strategic Policy and Research: *Indicators of Community Strength in Victoria*. www.dvc.vic.gov.au

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