



action matters for young people

Boosting environmental participation
and leadership in 12-24 year olds



Office of
Environment
& Heritage



The Office of Environment and Heritage consulted with young people and representatives from over 70 environmental and youth organisations, schools, universities and local governments to find ways to boost participation and leadership of young people in environmental activities.

Although everyone had different motivations, there was common ground amongst the group in their commitment to 'make it easier for young people to get involved in the environment'.

This resource reflects the expertise of this group and provides advice to individuals and organisations who are:

- embarking on a program that involves young people in the environment, or
- enhancing an existing program through greater youth participation.

"This is such a useful resource. As the Boral Youth at the Zoo (YATZ) program coordinator at the Zoo, I have implemented many of these tips. We highly value the suggestions and ideas of our young volunteers in YATZ and provide them many opportunities to help us to design and run the program. They develop confidence, public speaking, leadership skills, and resilience, and they make friends for life."

Cate Webster, Taronga Zoo

Why

young people are important for the environment

The active participation of young people in decision-making helps them get involved in shaping their future. Their intellectual contribution, ability to mobilise support, and their youthful perspectives are refreshing and different.

- Young people are future leaders and are the generation who will be driving the next phase of environmental conservation.
- Young people will play an important role in making the world a better place.
- Volunteering and youth leadership have many benefits to the community and to the individuals who participate (watch this short [video](#) of young people talking about why they volunteer).

Action tip:

Tap into the energy of youth to generate excitement and momentum for your program.



why?

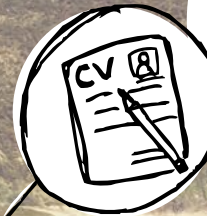
Good for community

increased sense of belonging and connectedness for young people



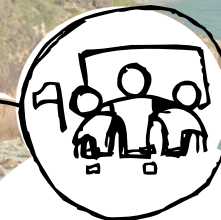
Good for individuals

young people develop vocational and personal skills and improve their job readiness



Good for environment

more people participating in local projects means more good work gets done, now and into the future



Good for schools

more opportunities for schools to develop student leadership and increase links with community

Good for health

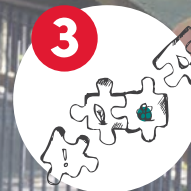
increased physical activity levels and time outdoors will improve public health



Key actions

1. Get the support of your organisation.
2. Promote the personal rewards.
3. Integrate environmental activities with other interests/ventures.
4. Involve young people in program design.
5. Appeal to a greater diversity of young people.
6. Get the right message across.
7. Ensure a safe and fun environment.

- For the full list of links, go to page 13.



1

Get the support of your organisation

Build a solid business case and generate interest and support from decision-makers in your organisation. Although the structure and content may vary between organisations, here are some ideas to help you get started:

- Identify strategic priorities in your organisation and link these to youth environmental engagement.
- Identify potential risks and come up with ways to manage them.
- Describe and quantify the costs and benefits to the organisation. Remember: benefits like added value can be both real and perceived.
- Develop an action plan, allocate resources, assign responsibilities, strategies and describe how to measure progress.

Action tip:

Convince your organisation of the value of involving young people.



2

Promote the personal rewards

Emphasise the personal benefits of getting young people involved by focusing on:

- enhancing **job skills**, employability and leadership – many young people also value formal, accredited qualifications
- opportunities to have fun, socialise and make new friends
- staying physically active and being outdoors
- fostering a sense of belonging, connecting with the community and improving mental health
- improving the appearance and environmental health of their neighbourhood
- doing something beneficial and meaningful for them, the environment and the community
- developing a deeper sense of belonging, responsibility and ownership.



'Employability wise, you just can't go past volunteering, especially in the environment, because you are doing something that counts on a worldwide scale as well as doing something for yourself'

Kate Field, OzGREEN

3

Integrate environmental activities with other interests/ventures

Combine environmental activities with other pursuits that young people are already involved with, including:

- existing interests and hobbies, such as filmmaking
- youth development and leadership programs, such as the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award
- activities organised by community youth clubs, Girl Guides and Scouts
- sports (teams/clubs/branches)
- community services, such as Surf Life Saving and religious groups
- school projects, curriculum/extra-curricular and community services.

'Every year in NSW, about 12,000 enthusiastic young people sign up to do a Duke of Edinburgh's International Award, which requires them to do some community volunteering. They are always looking for fun, meaningful work to do'

Bob Cresswell, NSW Office of Sport and Recreation





4

Involve young people in program design

- Encourage young people to design programs for other young people.
- Acknowledge the value of youth input and opinions, and explain how this can be structured to maximise results. (See tips for creating effective youth advisory councils and youth advisors).
- Plan around the needs of young people – this is likely to increase participation.
- Young people are effective recruiters of other young people.
- Consider incentives and rewards to sustain engagement and retain young people in your program (ensure they are the primary focus of your program).

Action tip:

Consult with young people, their parents, schools and youth groups before planning activities.

‘Cool Australia invited a group of young Australians who are leading environmental change in their schools and community to join Enviroweek as Youth Advisors. These individuals shared their experiences to supercharge Enviroweek’s secondary school program’

Jason Kimberley, Cool Australia

5

Appeal to a greater diversity of young people

'No one person can speak on behalf of all young people – they are as diverse as their backgrounds and interests. These are influenced by a wide range of factors: their social, and economic backgrounds; gender and sexuality; disability, geographic isolation, environmental and cultural influences; the things they like and dislike – just to name a few' (Participation Works – New energy, ideas and perspectives)

Recognise the differences and allow this diversity to influence your program planning and implementation; broaden your reach into new communities and increase the contribution of young people to the program.

- Research and tailor your program to recognise the diversity of the young people you are trying to target. Consult individuals and organisations with existing knowledge and experience of your target group.
- Be open and willing to adapt your program to better align with young people.
- Support your staff to increase their knowledge, skills and capacity for managing programs for young people.



Action tip:

In Greater Sydney, about a third of people speak a language other than English at home. Reflect this in your program targeting and you will reach more people.



Ella Weisbrot, Su Young Lee and Tess Corkish talk about their experiences at an Action Matters Youth Engagement workshop at Taronga Zoo

– Photos by Lisa Madden



6

Get the right message across

- Positive messaging is more effective – avoid negative or fear-based messaging. Check out this [summary](#) by the American Psychological Association and this [video](#) from Psychology for a Better World.
- Involve young people in the design and testing of communication channels. Ask them what works best for them in terms of technology and social media platforms.
- Keep in mind that communication channels change quickly and differ from one age group to another (e.g. early high school vs late high school).
- Wherever possible, make use of existing and trusted local voices and channels, including local youth leaders and groups, apps and websites such as [Go Volunteer](#) and [NSW Centre for Volunteering](#).



Action tips:

Environment contacts at schools, as well as teachers, are trusted communication channels.

These tips may help when reaching out to schools:

- Work through your local council, [environmental education centre](#) or [environmental educators' network](#) to find the best local contacts.
- Talk to others who successfully work with schools.
- Timing is important – avoid busy periods like report writing and exam times. Schools plan their calendars early, so you need a long lead time.
- Make it easy for teachers by providing curriculum-linked excursions, incursions or teaching resources such as [Sustainable Schools NSW](#), [NPWS incursions](#) and [Junior Landcare](#) teaching resources.

7

Ensure a safe and fun environment

- Outdoor activities like kayaking, bushwalking and rock-climbing can attract young people to get outside, grow their love of nature and their desire to care for it, but these activities can include certain risks.
- Emphasise the benefits of engaging with the environment and enjoying the time spent with nature, but ensure they acknowledge the risks and are mindful of their safety.
- Risk management documents and checklists can help you identify and mitigate potential risks. For information on becoming a child safe organisation and when a 'Working With Children' check is needed, go to the NSW Office of the Children's Guardian.

'Young people are passionate about the environment, but providing an exciting, fun and adventurous experience where they can connect with other young like-minded people has been the key to success for us'

Megan Rowlatt, Intrepid Landcare



Relevant links

Why young people are important for the environment

Children and youth in sustainable development: www.unep.org/documents/multilingual/default.asp?DocumentID=52&ArticleID=73&l=en

1. Get the support of your organisation

Children and youth in sustainable development: www.unep.org/documents/multilingual/default.asp?DocumentID=52&ArticleID=73&l=en

2. Promote the personal rewards

Job skills: www.seek.com.au/career-advice/3-reasons-volunteering-can-put-you-ahead-of-the-pack

How to involve young people in your project: www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/er_eval_how_to_involve_young_people_in_your_project.pdf

3. Integrate with environmental activities with other interests

Duke of Edinburgh's International Award: www.dukeofed.com.au

Guides: www.girlguides-nswact.org.au

Scouts: www.nsw.scouts.com.au/?gclid=CPIYqayTvMkCFYKXvAodSUgO4A

Surf Life Saving: www.surflifesaving.com.au/get-involved

4. Involve young people in program design

Creating effective youth advisory councils and youth advisors: www.advocatesforyouth.org/publications/1853

New energy, ideas and perspectives – How young people are creating change across the Commonwealth: www.participationworks.org.uk/files/webfm/CYF-Youth-Engagement-Approaches/index.pdf

5. Appeal to a greater diversity of young people

New energy, ideas and perspectives – How young people are creating change across the Commonwealth: www.participationworks.org.uk/files/webfm/CYF-Youth-Engagement-Approaches/index.pdf

Get young people involved: www.environment.nsw.gov.au/communities/young-people.htm

6. Get the right message across

American Psychological Association: www.apa.org/research/action/shaping.aspx

Psychology for a Better World: www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zExibEV_PY

Environmental Education Centres: www.environment.nsw.gov.au/sustainableschools/manage/EnviroCentres.htm

Go Volunteer: <https://govolunteer.com.au/Opportunity/SearchResults>

NSW Centre for Volunteering: www.volunteering.com.au

Environmental educators' network coordinators: www.environment.nsw.gov.au/sustainableschools/connect/envnetwork.htm

Sustainable Schools NSW: www.environment.nsw.gov.au/sustainableschools

National Parks and Wildlife Service: www.nationalparks.nsw.gov.au/education-services/in-school-education-programs

Junior Landcare: www.juniorlandcare.com.au/curriculumresources

7. Ensure a safe and fun environment

Spending of time in nature: <http://treeday.planetark.org/research>

Checklists: http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/insurance/insurance_article.jsp?articleId=1245#helpsheets

Office of the Children's Guardian: <http://www.kidsguardian.nsw.gov.au>

List of contributors, including:

- National Parks and Wildlife Service (Office of Environment and Heritage)
- Taronga Zoo
- National Parks Association of NSW
- Sea Life Trust
- Ocean Youth
- Dubbo Field Naturalist and Conservation Society
- Ozgreen
- Landcare Australia and Landcare NSW
- Greater Sydney Landcare Network
- Catholic Earthcare
- Take 3
- City Of Parramatta Council
- Canterbury Girls' High School
- Edmund Rice College Wollongong
- Western Plains Regional Council
- Bushcare's Major Day Out Inc
- Burwood Girls' High School
- Observatory Hill Environmental Education Centre
- Duke of Edinburgh's International Award
- Intrepid Landcare
- Botanic Gardens and Centennial Parklands
- Taronga Western Plains Zoo
- St Ignatius' College, Riverview
- Wambangalang Environmental Education Centre

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Over 70 environmental and youth groups, councils, government agencies and teachers working together helped create this resource



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