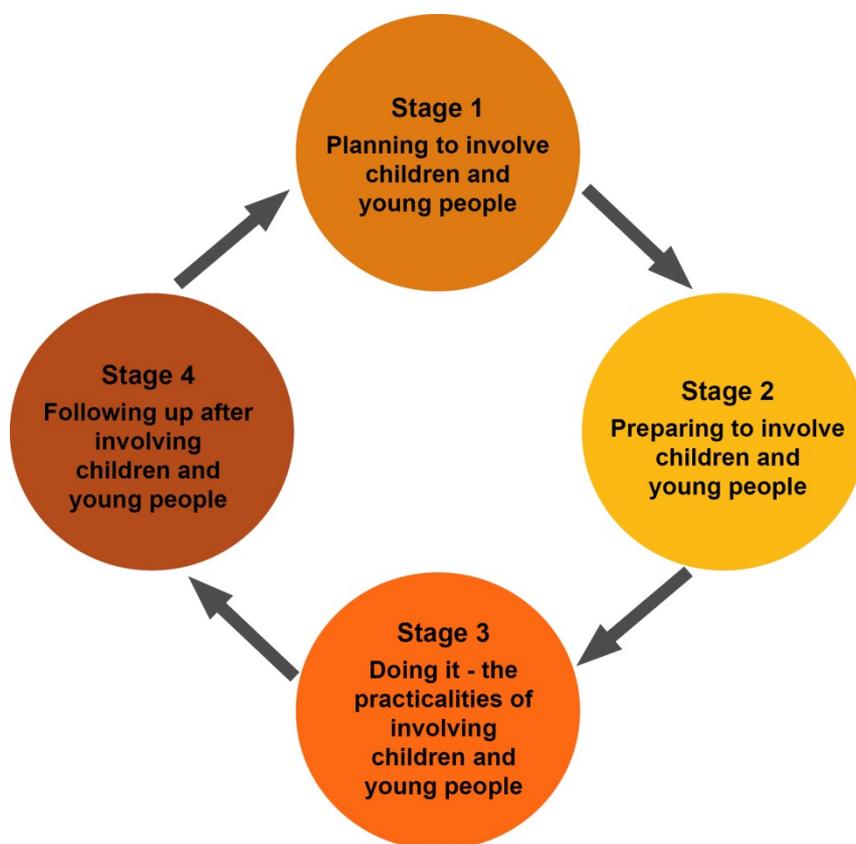


Section 4 - The engagement process

This section contains detailed and practical steps outlining the processes involved in undertaking meaningful consultation and engagement with Aboriginal children and young people for a specific project or target community.

*"If people feel respected, then you feel like, you get the feeling like some people really want to help you and then there's other people who don't give a s**t about you."* 18 year-old male

The Commissioner for Children and Young People's *Participation Guidelines for Involving Children and Young People* (2009)²⁴ describe the participation of children and young people in the stages pictured below.



²⁴ Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2009, *Participation Guidelines for Involving Children and Young People*, <<https://www.cyp.wa.gov.au/media/1479/report-participation-guidelines-october-2009.pdf>>

Stage 1: Planning to involve Aboriginal children and young people

"There should be different kind of programs...for different age groups of kids, girls, boys, old, young, and that sort of stuff... It encourages them to wanna be the one to win, and that sort of stuff." 18 year-old male

This stage requires you to understand your organisation or agency and the community you intend to engage in to inform the development of an internal/draft project scope. This ensures you act on an informed basis in moving to Stage 2.

Stage 1 has three steps:

Step 1: Committing to the participation of Aboriginal children and young people

"I would hire more staff members. So, let's say I had so many kids who need help, I would get, like, hire more staff members, for each single one of them, one-on-one time with them, more time, would be great." 17 year-old male

Once you understand the benefits of including the participation of Aboriginal children and young people generally, you need to investigate how they apply to your specific organisation or agency and its business.

Resources

- [Checklist tool - Is my organisation/agency ready to include the participation of Aboriginal children and young people?](#)

Why does your organisation or agency want to include Aboriginal children and young people?

A commitment to hearing and responding to the views of Aboriginal children and young people is vital for all organisations and agencies that deliver programs and services to this group. To enable this to occur consistently, leaders of organisations and agencies, including board members, chief executives, directors and managers, must take responsibility for creating and maintaining an organisational or agency-wide culture where consultation with Aboriginal children and young people is valued and respected.

It is important to know:

- what you want to achieve
- how this is meaningful
- that all parties involved have clear expectations.

Consider:

- Why do you want to engage with Aboriginal children and young people in this particular scenario?
 - to improve the service or program?
 - to encourage them to attend your service?
 - to inform policy development?
 - to gain a creative or innovative perspective?
 - to build their decision making and leadership capacity?

Case study extract

Lore Law Project – Purpose

The Lore Law project stems from a very clear understanding the purpose of the project and the content of the project, and its Aboriginal youth engagement, has been focused to support that aim.

“With the high rates of engagement of Aboriginal youth and Aboriginal Peoples with the WA justice system, the Francis Burt Law Education Programme (FBLEP), as a community law education program, determined that it had a responsibility to better engage with this audience. Instead of designing programs in the absence of Aboriginal people, FBLEP decided to find out what works for young Aboriginal people through direct engagement, including a number of consultations. FBLEP then facilitated the development of a process and a plan, led by young Aboriginal people, for how the lessons learned from those consultations would be implemented.”

View the full Lore Law Project case study in the *Case studies* section.

Establish a statement of commitment

Commit to the participation of Aboriginal children and young people in a statement that is publicly available and explains how the commitment is actioned, relevant to your organisation’s or agency’s work.

Examples of commitment statements and supporting strategies include:

Edmund Rice Education Australia Commitment Statement to Child Safety:

"All children have a right to feel safe, and be safe. Edmund Rice Education Australia (EREA) is committed to creating an environment where the safety, wellbeing, and participation of all children and young people is paramount. Additional focus is given to vulnerable children, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, as well as children with a disability."

Commissioner for Children and Young People WA Participation Policy:

"Contributions made by children and young people should be recognised for their value and merit and given due consideration in decision making. All agencies whose work affects children and young people are encouraged to involve them in decision making.....The Commissioner is committed to consulting children and young people on their views about a range of matters that affect their wellbeing."

[Create Foundation's Children & Young People's Participation Strategy](#)

[City of Mandurah Youth Strategy 2014 – 2018](#)

The statement of commitment could be published in:

- public documents, on the website, on posters or flyers across locations
- induction/welcome packs, on key internal documents and intranet
- Reconciliation Action Plans (RAP).

Examples of Reconciliation Action Plan commitments to working with Aboriginal peoples across Australia made by various organisations across industries, available at [Reconciliation Action Plans - Reconciliation Australia](#)

Establish a business structure to support the commitment

Build participation into business processes and strategic planning documents, including the contracting of services, service review, project planning and budget cycles.

Identify a responsible role(s) and expertise who can provide professional advice and support about how to plan and undertake consultation with Aboriginal children and young people. For example, create mechanisms so that:

- all areas of your organisation or agency understand the commitment you will be making and are prepared to support it

- everyone understands how the organisational or agency-wide commitment to participation of Aboriginal children and young people applies to them
- there are named roles to discuss practices and any concerns
- policies and procedures set minimum organisational or agency standards (e.g. on ethics, consent, participation and rewarding young people's participation) and that refer to additional information, support and contacts
- the training and professional development concerning best-practice consultation methods are available for staff.

Leaders must consistently model and promote inclusive practices

Cultural safety and a focus on best-practice consultation with Aboriginal children and young people should be modelled throughout the organisation or agency at all levels. For example:

- engaging and consulting with Elders and senior leaders prior to entering or engaging with a community as a matter of practice
- including consultation with Aboriginal children and young people as a regular agenda item in meetings and other communications
- monitoring and evaluating the use of policies and processes in practice
- promoting consultation with Aboriginal children and young people as core practice throughout the organisation or agency.

Staff must be appropriately skilled and resourced

To enable and support the participation of Aboriginal children and young people, staff must be appropriately skilled. This will include:

- hiring practices such as having mandatory Working With Children and police checks
- additional checks and processes like interviewing staff around their views on engaging with children and young people
- interviewing staff around their baseline knowledge and views on engaging with Aboriginal people
- providing clear information and training around participation standards as part of the induction process
- having policies in place to create safe spaces and outlining how to respond appropriately to any concerns around child safety, for example:
 - acceptable staff behaviour and child safe practices
 - responding to disclosures made by children and young people

- what resources are available for referring vulnerable children to support services and/or reporting disclosures appropriately (such as frontline services and physical and mental health supports).

For more information about being child safe see [Child Safe Organisations](#) and in the context of Aboriginal children and young people see *Understanding Aboriginal Cultural Contexts - Duty of care and managing disclosures*.

- having the training and professional development resources available for staff to undertake and revise best-practice consultation methods, including the appropriate cultural security and competency training and culturally-appropriate trauma-based practice, for working with Aboriginal children and young people

For more information about cultural security and the impact of trauma, see *Understanding Aboriginal Cultural Contexts - Understanding the impact of trauma*.

- providing staff with timeframes that allow for the development of relationships and trust in communities, make contact with cultural brokers (where required) and incorporate meaningful consultation with Aboriginal children and young people and their families

For more information about the importance of initiatives being place-based, see *Understanding Aboriginal Cultural Contexts - Aboriginal people's diversity requires place-based initiatives*.

- For individual projects or services, consider whether conflicts could arise for Aboriginal staff members due to cultural obligations? How will these be managed?
- Consider what resources you need for activities; this may include staffing, transport, venue hire, materials, audio visual equipment, administration, refreshments and reimbursement for young people who participate.

Step 2: Understanding your target community

“What keeps me outta trouble is staying out from town – go hunting, fishing, swimming. I mean, yeah, that’s keeping me outta trouble... Sometimes I go country sometimes I come back town and it’s trouble, it’s no good.” 15 year-old boy

Resources

- [Local mapping tool template - Commissioner for Children and Young People WA](#)

Taking the time to understand the community context in which you will be, or already are, working is an important step. This involves gathering background information on local politics, history, culture and practices.

Have early discussions with, and seek advice from, local Aboriginal Elders, community leaders and families, Aboriginal staff members, local Aboriginal organisations and cultural consultants. This will provide a good starting point from which to develop relationships with the Aboriginal community you are working with and can help to identify the existing strengths, capabilities and resources in the community. In particular, it is useful to be aware of potential family and community dynamics that may exist to avoid misunderstandings or unintentionally causing offence.

Steps you can take to access localised information include:

- Do an online search and/or ask the library if there are any books published about Aboriginal history and culture within the area (you need to consider the source of such information, information produced by an Aboriginal person(s) will be of most benefit to your organisation or agency).
- Look at [language maps](#) and find out about the Aboriginal language groups in your area and the history of those groups.
 - Find out who the community Elders and senior leaders/ spokespersons are; who are the traditional owners and custodians of the land?
 - What other clan or community groups are present in the community?
 - Consider, are the interests of these groups aligned? How will you cater for differing interests or approaches to issues? How can you support all children and young people within your target group to participate?
- Contact local education and parenting/family groups, which can also include the local health centre and get to know the grandparents, parents and extended families in the local community:
 - Who are the dominant family groups?
 - What are their preferred names?
 - How can they help you develop local cultural security?
- Get to know the local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, Corporations and local Aboriginal community groups, such as the local Land and Sea Council. You can quickly learn about:
 - family links to local organisations
 - areas of expertise held by community members

- local issues and services, including service gaps, overlaps and difficulties
- what works well in engaging with Aboriginal children and young people in that community/region, including success stories
- Get to know the local issues and practices.
 - If your organisation or agency has previously engaged with the community, how was it received? Were there any issues? What commitments has your organisation or agency made?
 - Are you working with a community that prefers to break down engagement generally, or particular issues, by gender? Have you allowed for this in your staffing? i.e. female staff working with female children and young people, male staff with male children and young people, particularly where you are discussing gender specific or sensitive issues like sexual education and health.
 - What is the potential impact of your organisation or agency entering the community and asking Aboriginal children and young people their views? Does this place the young people at any risk (e.g. if their views are in conflict with Elders/other community members)? How will you protect children and young people from this? How will you support the development of a desirable outcome for the children and young people?
 - In addition to seeking permission from the local leaders, particularly Elders, to enter the community, have you scanned the environment to determine factors such as feuding or a recent death that may affect your visit?
 - What safeguards need to be in place so your organisation or agency does not create or fuel community conflict? Are safeguards needed to protect Aboriginal children and young people who participate, including from internal (conflict between participants) and external (community) conflict?
- Find out about other local or visiting organisations and agencies.
 - Are there synergies between your participation work and the aims of their project, organisation or agency?
 - Are there relationship building opportunities?
 - Have there been previous organisations or agencies that have provided a similar service? Were they successful? If not, why not? Does their previous activity provide learnings for your organisation or agency? Has

their presence created a barrier in engaging, for example mistrust, in the local community?

- Would your organisation's or agency's process be duplicating any activities with Aboriginal children and young people already underway in the community? This is important because many Aboriginal communities experience a significant burden as they are over-consulted and researched but underserved in terms of outcomes and feedback.
- If another organisation or agency is visiting/planning to visit at the same time as you and you cannot partner with them, consider spacing out your consultation.
- Are there existing leaders or service providers in the community with whom you should engage to gain support for your organisation's or agency's activities?
- Is it possible to upskill local providers or community members in the delivery of your program or service?
- Can you provide local employment or traineeship opportunities through your program or service? Remember that the time of Aboriginal community members, and children and young people, is valuable and essential to your program's success.

Step 3: Developing a draft project scope

"Yeah, it's actually really good. So we can get other kids to speak up as well, not just a little bit of the kids. We want more kids to start speaking up so you can solve problems." 11 year-old Aboriginal girl, residential care

Once you have completed an environmental scan of the community and your organisation or agency as outlined above, your organisation/agency needs to commit to, and have a plan for, acting on the views and advice they provide. Thinking this through first will minimise the risk of creating false expectations among Aboriginal children and young people and the community; eroding trust.

Key questions and matters for your organisation or agency to consider, include:

- what do you want to know from Aboriginal children and young people?
- the community you will be engaging with
- who your organisation or agency provides services to
- the groups of Aboriginal children and young people that your organisation or agency will engage with or impact – their demographics, and any special needs they may have

- how you will access 'at-risk' Aboriginal children and young people, who are often the hardest to reach and have limited opportunities to have their voices heard
- are you required to and have you adopted a culturally appropriate, trauma-based approach? Are your staff prepared to create a safe space and respond to disclosures from vulnerable children and young people?
- do you have a protocol around how to ethically reward/recognise the participation of children and young people?
- will your process provide a benefit to the community? New work should only be undertaken at the community's request, and if it is going to provide new information or services to benefit the local Aboriginal people.²⁵
- what do you intend to do as a result of Aboriginal children and young people's ideas/views/advice?
- what might prevent or limit action (both internally and in the community) and how could this be overcome? Make sure you can deliver on your promised outcomes
- how are you going to share the information received? How can you engage the community in supporting the views shared by Aboriginal children and young people?
- how are you going to measure the outcome? Will you seek feedback from Aboriginal children and young people?
- what is your timeframe and budget? Can you meaningfully engage and follow-up with Aboriginal children and young people within these boundaries? If not, what changes can be made?
- who is the target group? What is their profile? How would you engage with them in a meaningful manner?
- do the staff/personnel facilitating the process have a strong understanding of participation principles and the knowledge, skills and cultural competence to work with Aboriginal children and young people on this project/service and in this community? If not, what additional training and support might they need?
- does your activity require any research approvals (such as ethics)? Or any other approvals or permissions, including from the community itself?
Remember that there are additional ethical requirements and safeguards for working with Aboriginal communities.

Include this thinking in your draft/internal project scope, which will be tested, reviewed and revised in Stage 2.

²⁵ Vicary D, Tennant J, Garvie T and Adupa C 2008, *Can You Hear Me? The Active Engagement of Aboriginal Children in the Development of Social Policy by Non-Aboriginals*. Perth, Western Australian Office for Children and Youth.

Resources

- [Project planning tool template - Commissioner for Children and Young People WA](#)
- [Business Plan Template and Guide - Department of Industry, Innovation and Science](#)

Case study extract

Kununurra Empowering Youth (KEY)

Engaging with 'at-risk' young people

KEY had a clear understanding of who its target audience was - at-risk kids in the community. KEY knew that it would need to consult with at-risk Aboriginal children and young people to understand what was driving the negative behaviours that the program was seeking to address and what children and young people wanted from the program.

"KEY used the following process to engage with hard-to-reach children and young people.

- Speaking with young people in their familiar environments. i.e. school or hang out places – pre the school holiday period
- Ensuring that those agency staff who have existing relationships and regular contact with young people were aware of the engagement required, and could undertake these conversations i.e. police, youth justice, Save the Children, Waringarri's One Family At A Time, and back to country programs
- Holding community events that catered for the interests of 'at risk' youth, and where engagement with young people by agency staff could occur in an informal setting
- Ensuring local Aboriginal community controlled organisations and not for profit organisations were engaged in the activities, as well as the planning and delivery work.

View the full KEY case study in the *Case studies* section.

Stage 2: Preparing to involve Aboriginal children and young people

"I think it is good when people like you come out and ask us what we think because then they know the real truth. So they don't just guess and there's things they can work on so things can get better." 15 year-old Aboriginal girl, foster care

This stage requires you to engage with the community you intend to target to check your previous assessment and inform the development of your internal/draft project scope. This ensures that you act on an informed basis in moving to Stage 3.

Stage 2 has two steps:

Step 1: Build relationships

"They have some mentors but they never have male mentors. My grandson needs a male mentor who's ongoing, who's in there for the long run. I'm old, I struggle to walk to the front gate. I can't go and kick a footy in the park with him. He needs someone who will stick with him. Not just like with JJT [Juvenile Justice Team] where there's someone for four months and then that's it, you're on your own."

Grandmother

Remember the importance of starting the relationship properly. Before commencing work in the community, the community must invite you in and request your involvement in addressing the issues being targeted by your organisation or agency. Together, your organisation/agency and the relevant community leadership and stakeholders will need to decide the best way to approach the issues being targeted by your organisation or agency.

Resources

- [Working with Indigenous children, families and communities - Australian Institute of Family Studies](#)

Taking time to build relationships provides opportunities to foster mutual respect, trust and reciprocal exchange; all of which are critical elements to working effectively with Aboriginal communities and which will require a significant period of investment from your organisation/agency to develop. These networks can enhance the process of involving Aboriginal children and young people in your organisation or agency and the outcomes of your project or initiative for the community. These relationships will also help you to manage any issues that arise during the consultation, such as whether it is appropriate to run planned activities following a disruption or loss in the community.

Consulting with the community

“I help these kids out, like talk to them and sometimes we even cook dinner for them. I also help with the kids programs on the weekends. There are things like girls and boy’s fishing trips. Girls and boys aren’t allowed to socialise together up here. It’s just how it is. I don’t mind, we still have fun.” C Jai, 17 year-old girl, Kununurra

This is your opportunity to introduce yourself, your organisation/agency and the work you are planning to undertake in the community.

Having identified local leaders and stakeholders as part of your community mapping, now is the time to have preliminary discussions about:

- the concept you have come up with and what the community thinks about it
- the community’s level of interest in what you are proposing
- the community’s expectations on how you will recruit children and young people to participate and how you will implement the program
- the community’s expectations on their involvement and feedback they will receive.

If the community is not responding well to your draft concept, you will need to develop a new concept with the community that meets the needs of your organisation/agency and the community. Remember, even after you have agreed a concept and plan with the community, you must remain flexible in order to be responsive to community needs.

In addition to exploring and reflecting on your own cultural beliefs and learning about cultural differences (see Section 2 of this toolkit), there are many things you can do to help build rapport with Aboriginal children and young people and their community. A few examples are:

- seek guidance about local community protocols
- always be open, honest and respectful
- use clear and plain language, uncomplicated by jargon (see Section 2)
- avoid speaking in a manner that is condescending or paternalistic
- do not make promises that you may not be able to deliver
- be prepared to admit mistakes and/or lack of knowledge and seek guidance from young people and community members
- avoid acting as though you are the ‘expert’ – demonstrate that you want to listen and learn from Aboriginal children and young people and their community because you value their views and ideas
- agree next steps for progress or feedback during the engagement and ensure they are delivered upon.

Consulting with other service providers and stakeholders

Organisations or agencies already 'on the ground' in the community will have insight into what does and does not work in that community and are a valuable resource to your organisation/agency.

Taking the time to introduce yourself, your organisation/agency and your proposed work is also an opportunity to bring other stakeholders on board who have established relationships and communication with your target audience.

These early conversations will help to prevent service overlap, create valuable partnerships and respect the existing systems and services in place in the community.

Case study extract

Lore Law Project – Build relationships

The Lore Law Project has a number of stakeholders as well as its core working group, so it has been important to develop clear lines of communication between the groups to ensure that the project remains focused and on track. Part of the success of the Indigenous Youth Leadership Team (IYLT) is the strong relationship between its members and their common focus on achieving better outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people.

"The IYLT first presented the Project and a pilot film to the Steering Group, the FBLEP Advisory Committee and the Law Society Council with the aim of having the Project proposal approved and signed-off. From that point, the Law Society, with input from the Project team, facilitated sessions with the IYLT to promote and advocate the Project to stakeholders. This ensured wider community participation and buy-in so the Project did not develop in isolation, while also gaining project ambassadors from stakeholders in the wider community to support the Project's sustainability."

View the full Lore Law Project case study in the *Case studies* section.

Step 2: Review your processes

“Adults have to start listening more to us kids, instead of just telling us what to do all the time.” 16 year-old girl, Great Southern

Once you have agreed on an approach with the community and stakeholders, it is time to revisit and update your draft project scope and finalise a project plan, including a communication plan.

Resources

- [Project planning tool template - Commissioner for Children and Young People WA](#)

Once you have a project plan, host a session for all staff and volunteers working with the Aboriginal children and young people on the project and cover:

- the plan for the activity/participation
- the applicable processes and protocols as agreed with the community, including on obtaining consent
- the information sharing/communication plan and materials
- revisit your duty of care requirements and processes
- contact numbers of responsible staff for any queries, concerns or issues on the day
- any questions staff or volunteers may have.

Stage 3: Doing it – involving Aboriginal children and young people

“We need to focus on the youth, they are our future...” 17 year-old Nyikina young person, Kimberley

This stage requires you to think about your communication and continue to test your processes as you begin to actively engage with Aboriginal children and young people.

Stage 3 has seven steps:

Step 1: Communication – be genuine and clear

“White people they will just...they don't care. They just look at us and say nothing to us. They just walk away and have no respect for us... When we speak our language or anything like that, or when we talk, they just look at us and laugh and copy us and then make fun of us.” 15 year-old girl

The engagement and participation methods your organisation or agency chooses need to be appropriate to the age, background, interests and capabilities of the Aboriginal children and young people you wish to involve. Adopt a strengths-based perspective that builds and develops the existing strengths, skills and capacities of Aboriginal children and young people.

The successful participation of Aboriginal children and young people depends on genuine and effective communication. You need to clearly tell young people:

- who you are
- what you are trying to achieve
- how you plan to achieve it
- what role children and young people will play
- where, when and how you will be engaging with them (time frame and commitment required)
- why you are engaging with them both generally as children and young people and that specific target group
- how you will check back with them to ensure that you've heard, and will share, their views accurately
- who will see/hear their contributions and what will be done with them.

Step 2: Test your processes

“The most important thing in my culture is to be a good role model, stand up for what’s right, stick up and protect family and be proud of myself.” 13 year-old young person, Pilbara

It is useful to test your communication resources and activity/service on an identified group of children and young people who can provide feedback to you prior to launching and implementing your project. This group may be identified through:

- your consultations with the community
- your consultations with stakeholders
- previously engaged Aboriginal children and young people
- students from the local school
- a targeted recruitment process for your project (as outlined below).

This will help to ensure your resources are clear, understood by and effective with your target audience.

Step 3: Recruiting Aboriginal children and young people to participate

“I would change a lot of things in my community if I was a boss like having more role models for the younger kids to teach them right from wrong and have respect and to encourage kids to get to school ‘cause learning is very important in life.” 11 year-old young person, Goldfields-Esperance

Aboriginal children and young people tell us that they want to be role models for other members of their community, particularly those younger than them. In the initial stages of seeking to engage with Aboriginal children and young people, you may need to use multiple forms of communication (including local language(s) if appropriate) to reach them. These communications may target families as well as children and young people directly by:

- word of mouth – utilise existing service providers and other key stakeholders and their established relationships and communication systems
- local radio, television and newspapers
- social media, including community social media (for example the Everything Geraldton account/page)
- promotion in community and sporting groups, cultural spaces, schools and youth centres
- local community boards, including at the local shopping centre.

Step 4: Implementing consent

“My parents thought it was important that I build a future for myself so encouraged me to go. I’m glad they did.” Jasirah, 18 year-old girl, Perth

Children and young people must provide their consent to be involved in an activity; what this looks like will depend on the protocol you have agreed with the community in your earlier consultations.

Remember that children and young people can withdraw their consent at any time, even once they have started the activity, this is another reason that participants/contributors will need to be kept informed as throughout the different stages of the project or activity. You will also need to specifically obtain consent to take and use photographs, and for the use of the information gained through the participation activity. Always be clear about what the information will be used for. For an example of a consent form, take a look at the [Commissioner for Children and Young People’s Consent Form](#).

In some communities Aboriginal young people may be considered adult by the community, having been through ‘lore’ ceremony/process, and consequently able to give their own consent.²⁶ It is important to consult with Aboriginal Elders and leaders in the community to seek their advice on this.

In most cases it will be necessary to obtain the consent of the child or young person’s parent or guardian too. Consider your organisation’s/agency’s duty of care and its processes around obtaining parental consent. At times, it may be difficult to obtain consent from parents or guardians of certain children and you will need to plan and set out the process you will follow when this occurs. Remember that the parents and guardians of the children and young people you are working with are important stakeholders and the appropriate time and effort needs to be allocated to ensuring they understand what you are doing with their children and young people.

Particularly in regional and remote communities, the practice of obtaining consent may involve a combination of visiting families door-to-door and organising family friendly community events (such as a BBQ), which provide opportunities for you to speak with parents and guardians about your organisation or agency, seek their feedback on your proposed activities and, ultimately, obtain their informed permission and consent to work with their children and young people.

Don’t forget to bring additional consent forms with you on the day of the activity to ensure all participants have a signed consent form and are familiar with the terms of participation on the day.

²⁶ Vicary D, Tennant J, Garvie T and Adupa C 2008, *Can You Hear Me? The Active Engagement of Aboriginal Children in the Development of Social Policy by Non-Aboriginals*. Perth, Western Australian Office for Children and Youth.

For more information about consent, see the Commissioner for Children and Young people's consent and participation policies on the *Understanding participation* page.

Step 5: Working together - involving the community

"Family keeps you safe, we have a culture of sharing." 7 year-old boy, Perth

Where possible, this should be done through direct feedback from the children and young people themselves, who can help shape the information provided back to community and develop their own communication and leadership skills in the process.

Case study extract

Kimberley Community Alcohol and Drug Service

Theatre of Transformation Project – project partners

The Theatre of Transformation Project is an excellent example of a partnership between different community sectors to achieve a common goal.

"The Theatre of Transformation project was a community-based activity conducted in Halls Creek by the following project partners:

- Kimberley Community Drug and Alcohol Service (KCADS)
- Melbourne based theatre director, Bryan Derrick
- the local Aboriginal Medical Service, Yura Yungi
- Halls Creek High School."

View more on the Theatre of Transformation Project in the *Case studies* section.

At what stage of the project/service community participation takes place and what it looks like will depend on what is appropriate in the context you are operating in and what you have agreed with the community. For example it may include a high level of involvement in the development and implementation of your project or service from the outset, or it may be limited to feedback following engagement with children and young people.

Participation by community stakeholders allows for valuable relationship development and information sharing between key stakeholders and supports children and young people, community members and service providers to work

together, respectfully and in an integrated way, to develop solutions for the challenges in their own community.²⁷

Through involvement, either by active participation or in receiving feedback, community members and service providers are more likely to feel motivated and empowered to enable the children and young people's vision.

Step 6: Methods and activities

"Always know that children and young people are looking for someone who will really listen. Keep youth projects fun with a positive outcome for them, and listen."
Kennah Parker²⁸

Involve Aboriginal children and young people in choosing the methods and activities they prefer and ask them how they would like to be communicated with.

Enable Aboriginal children and young people to determine their own priorities both during the development of, and within the context of, your participation activity, and to develop their own problem solving approach, and to decide on how they will contribute their views.

General ideas include:

- asking children and young people to help plan activities
- using creative, engaging and fun activities (for example, that include sport, arts and crafts and cooking)
- using mediums they value, such as online tools, music or videos and social media platforms (where appropriate)
- opportunities for local 'doing' activities such as going out bush, camping and fishing (particularly in remote and regional areas)
- using trusted Aboriginal community members and mentors to facilitate discussions
- upskilling young people to peer-to-peer facilitate discussions and mentor other children and young people
- encouraging and training young people to be co-facilitators
- selecting child and young person friendly venues and facilities, such as recreation centres and youth hubs – children and young people can offer good suggestions on this

²⁷ The Australian Centre for Social Innovation 2013, *Enabling change with Aboriginal families and services: A frank look at challenges & opportunities*. Adelaide, South Australia: Australian Centre for Social Innovation, <<http://www.tacsi.org.au/project/report-enabling-change-with-aboriginal-families-and-services/>>.

²⁸ Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2008, *Young People's Panel, Children's Week Forum 2008: Making a positive difference in the lives of WA children*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.

- scheduling plenty of breaks and variation in activities.

For more examples of a range of participation activities see the *Case Studies* section of the toolkit and our [Participation Guidelines examples](#).

Case study extract

Kids on Country – local ‘doing’ activities

Kids on Country is an activities based program that engages young people by taking them out on Country to complete various science related tasks.

“The program was developed through conversations with Aboriginal children and young people held around a fire, starting from the first day-trip. As the facilitators, Millenium Kids (MK) arranged food and logistics and asked simple, open questions to determine the priorities of the young people involved: What do you like about your community, what don’t you like and what would you change?”

View the full Kids on Country case study in the *Case studies* section.

Step 7: Implementing participation

“Being a role model to the younger ones is important to me.” 15 year-old girl, Pilbara

Children and young people need to have fun, find the experience meaningful and benefit from it. Aboriginal children and young people like to take part in participation activities that:

- are challenging but achievable
- are meaningful
- are socially and culturally respectful
- build knowledge and confidence
- develop leadership skills
- make a difference
- take them seriously and treat them with respect.

Being taken seriously

Children and young people told us how they knew that they were being taken seriously:²⁹

"They listen to you and don't ignore you."

"They are paying attention."

"They acknowledge you."

"They look at you."

"[They] take your phone number."

"[They] say they'll get back to you."

"They listen, are understanding and respectful."

Practical tips and steps for implementation on the day:

Resources

- [Practical tips for implementation on the day - Commissioner for Children and Young People WA](#)

After the participation activity:

- recognise the participants and celebrate their achievement through stickers, certificates, accreditation or references (where appropriate)
- reward them with vouchers, products, publications or similar
- acknowledge their contributions in publications.

²⁹ Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2013, *Are you listening? Guidelines for making complaints systems accessible and responsive to children and young people*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, Perth.

Stage 4: Following up with Aboriginal children and young people who participate

“Other things worry me too like what if the world keeps going the way it is and no one is prepared to make change and be nicer to each other. Right now it feels like nothing is going to change and people are not coming to together like they should.”
Jay, 17-year-old boy, Perth

This stage requires you to provide and receive feedback to and from the Aboriginal children and young people you have engaged with, to ensure that you accurately reflect and incorporate the information provided by participants during the activity, to inform your participants and their community and to further develop your practice for next time.

Stage 4 has three steps:

Step 1: Give them feedback

“Dancing is great. It lets you see other people’s points of view and teaches us about how when you work together you can create something amazing.” Grace, 12 year-old girl, Perth

Children and young people have given time, energy and commitment to your project and it is important to them. Children and young people have the right to receive feedback on how their involvement in your organisation’s/agency’s participation processes influenced and affected the decision making process, and to see that their contribution made a difference.

Provide feedback from the beginning through two-way conversation, using methods preferred by Aboriginal children and young people. Ask them how they would like to be contacted with feedback and how they would find it easiest to provide you with theirs.

Important feedback includes:

- acknowledging their attendance and work they completed (personally and also publicly through your organisation’s/agency’s website, social media and community-based platforms)
- describing and evidencing how their views have been responded to and influenced your work, including any actions taken and decisions made
- updating them about the project’s progress and explaining changes (including delays) to the plan
- allowing them to review and comment on documents that record their views prior to circulation/publication to double check the accuracy of the analysis and interpretation as well as improve program design and outcomes

- providing an opportunity for and responding to queries, requests and suggestions
- your response(s) to their feedback received so far
- share the value/praise of their contribution with community stakeholders.

Step 2: Get their feedback

“Thank you for listening to me because it finally gave me a chance to speak.” Girl of unknown age, South West

Asking Aboriginal children and young people for feedback about what it was like to be involved in the process will improve your participation activities in the future, improving results for Aboriginal children and young people and your organisation/agency.

Seek feedback by:

- observing children and young people’s body language and behaviour – use their feedback to adjust what you are doing as you are doing it, for example change the activity, the pace or have a break.
- asking them what they thought about an activity (individually and collectively)
- reviewing at the end of the activity (for example through a yarning circle or while sharing a meal)
- providing an opportunity for anonymous feedback (such as a survey or ideas box).

There a variety of tools that can be used to collect feedback, including stories, activities, child-friendly questionnaires, yarning circles and role play.

Resources

- [Models of Participation, Involving Children in Decision Making - Commissioner for Children Tasmania](#)

When asking Aboriginal children and young people for feedback after a workshop or activity, ask about their experience of participating, including:

- what went well, what they enjoyed
- what they learnt
- what could be done differently
- if they feel they were taken seriously and treated fairly
- if they feel they were listened to and safe (including in their identity and culture)

- what they think of the action or outcomes
- what they would like in the future.

Seeking the feedback of Aboriginal children and young people also helps to increase the evidence base around the issues affecting them and how best to achieve positive outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people. This is important to improve policy and practice, to design effective interventions and use as a basis for advocacy.

Case study extract
Kununurra Empowering Youth (KEY) – Feedback

KEY has continued to evolve its feedback process as a reflection tool for the success of past programs, a planning tool for future programs and a way of demonstrating anecdotal success of the program.

“Feedback from young people was obtained after the school holiday period, which contributed to the next phase of planning for future school holidays programs – many young people reported attending more than one event as part of the school holiday program; they were positive about family/community involvement and felt more confident about talking to agency staff at these events.”

View the full KEY case study in the *Case studies* section.

Step 3: Make sure you've delivered

“Listen to what young people have to say, and if you promise you are going to do something, do it, otherwise their trust in adults diminishes.” Dianna Wright ³⁰

It is important to deliver on what you agreed on in the beginning. If a different outcome or project has resulted from the consultation or participation activity, you will need to re-negotiate this, and any additional activities arising from it, with the community as part of your reporting back.

This can be particularly important when you don't receive the kind of engagement or results you expected, to ensure the approach or program is improved for future activity.

Formally monitoring and evaluating how well Aboriginal children and young people's participation is working for them and for your organisation/agency is an important part of this. Evaluation should be embedded in the process from start to finish. It

³⁰ Young Panel member, *Children's Week Forum 2008: Making a positive difference in the lives of WA's children*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA.

provides opportunities to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses during and on completion of the process.

Involving Aboriginal children and young people in the evaluation process can improve the quality and integrity of the evaluation and be empowering for them. When involved in the evaluation, young people will often feel more ownership and commitment to the initiative and its aims. It also supports their development as young leaders as it is an opportunity to think critically and express their views.