'Youth in community services' survey – May 2016

Demographics

There were **51 responses** to the survey that went out to the not-for-profit sector in May 2016 about how they engage with young people at all levels of their service planning and delivery.

This survey information was supplemented by:

- Engagement with 6 young people through a discussion on the survey output
- Interviews with 5 organisations to drill down into the detail of some of this information

Based on the demographic responses, approximately 35% of organisations are large (i.e. more than $3 million turnover and over 50 staff), and 20% have less than a $300,000 turnover. The remaining 45% of responses were split between the three remaining categories fairly evenly.

This demonstrates that with regard to size of organisation, the responses are fairly representative of the sector.

There was also a good spread of responses from organisations across Western Australia, though it is likely that the larger organisations are headquartered in the metropolitan area and deliver services in regions.
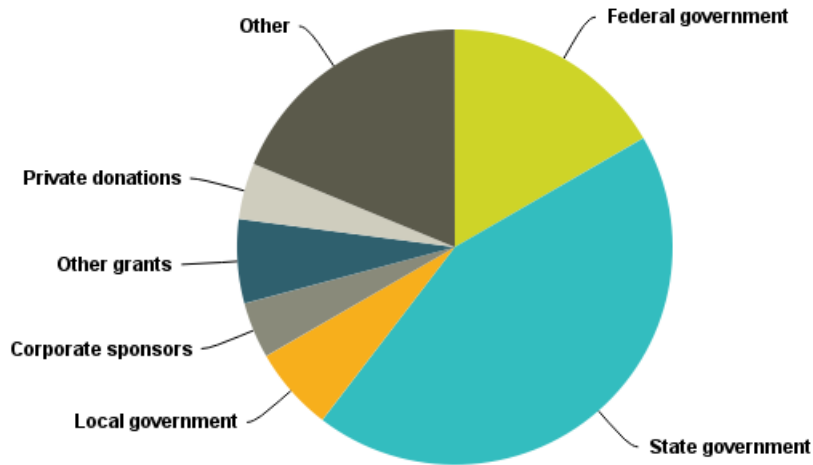
In which areas does your organisation operate?:

Answer Options	Response Percent
West Kimberley (includes Broome)	28.6%
East Kimberley (includes Kununurra)	8.2%
Pilbara (includes Karratha)	20.4%
Murchison/Mid-West (includes Geraldton)	20.4%
Goldfields (includes Kalgoorlie)	22.4%
Wheatbelt (includes Northam)	14.3%
Peel (includes Mandurah)	28.6%
South West (includes Bunbury)	26.5%
Great Southern (includes Albany)	22.4%
Perth metropolitan area	61.2%

In terms of where respondents receive their funding, the majority receive State (44%) or Federal government (17%) funding, although 'other' is a fairly significant response which needs some further exploration (18%).

Q4 Who do you receive funding from for your projects/services supporting young people?
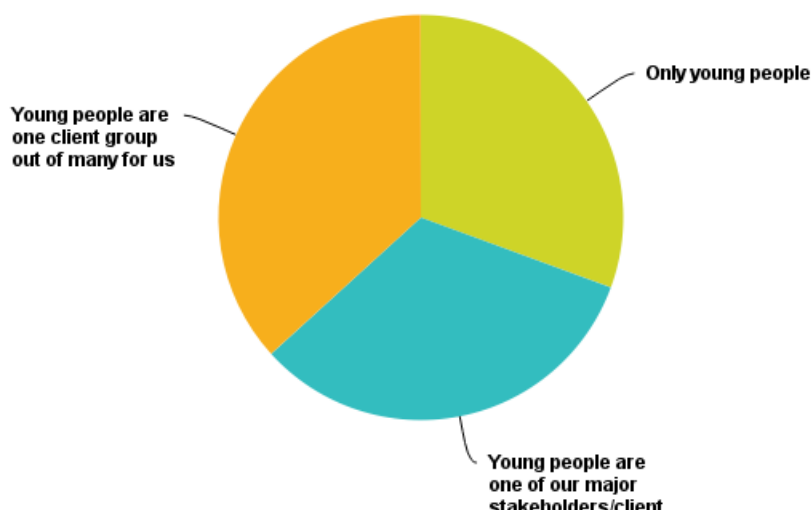
Answered: 48   Skipped: 1

Other
Private donations
Other grants
Corporate sponsors
Local government
Federal government
State government

Finally, to understand how large of a client group young people are for the organisations answering the survey, we asked whether they worked with a) only young people; b) in a situation where young people were one of the major client groups but not the only one or c) whether young people were one client group out of many.

Q3 Who do you work with?

Answered: 49   Skipped: 0

Young people are one client group out of many for us
Only young people
Young people are one of our major stakeholders/client

The data suggests that, whilst there were slightly more responses to 'young people are one client group out of many for us', there was an almost exactly even spread between these

three answers. This demonstrates that, once again, the mix of organisations that have answered the survey is quite representative of the sector at large.

Comments from young people

Young people engaged in comment about these survey results stated that what is most important for them in the kinds of services that they access is recognising the name. 'Brand recognition' was identified as one of the key reasons why a young person would access one service over another.

Young people also reported that it is really uncommon to be able to find smaller organisations. They would usually only go to a smaller organisation if they have heard about them through referrals, or perhaps if a friend suggested a smaller organisation.

The young people also stated that if an organisation is good, they don't care how big it is.
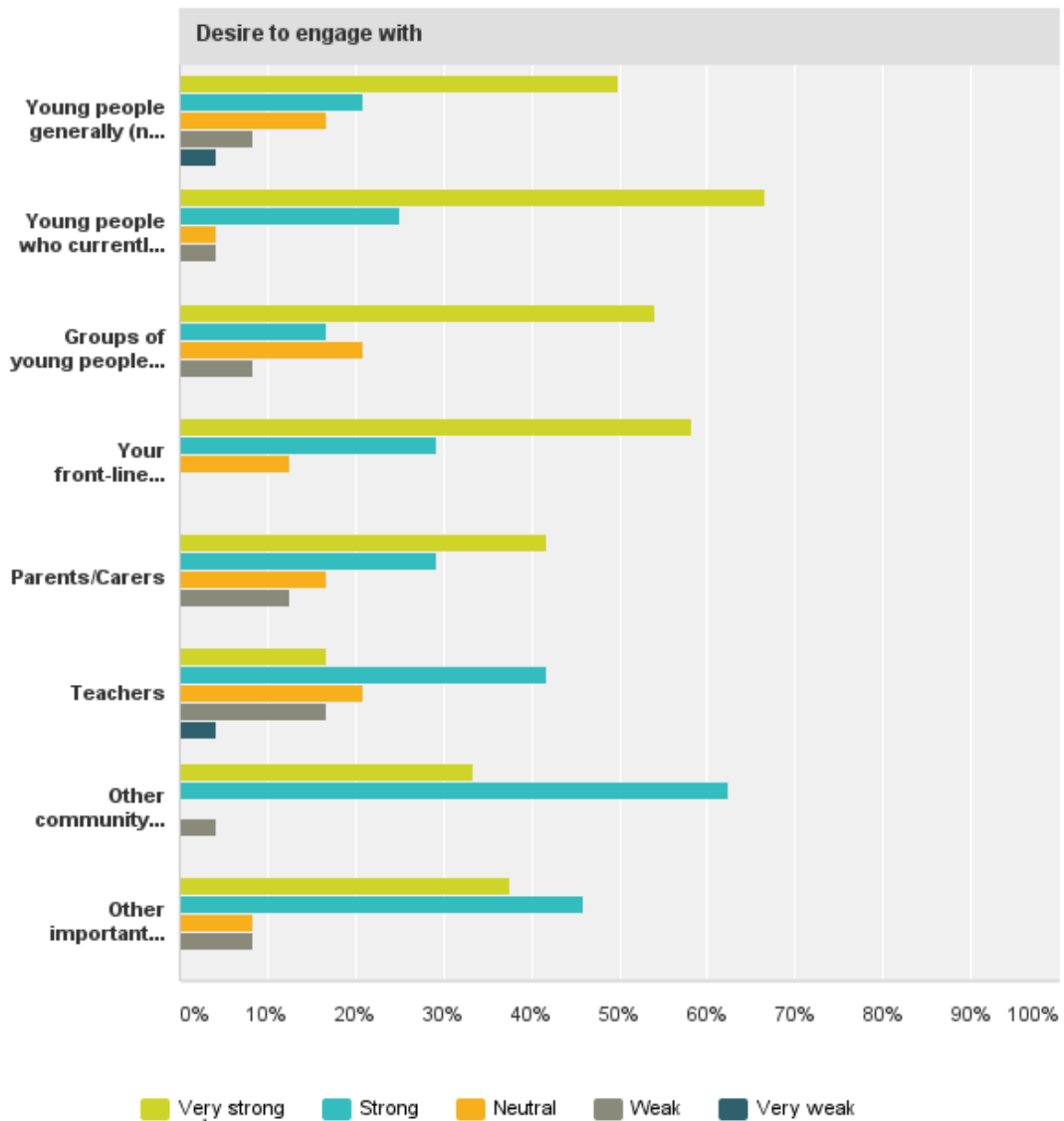

Desire to engage compared with actual engagement, in service design, review and evaluation
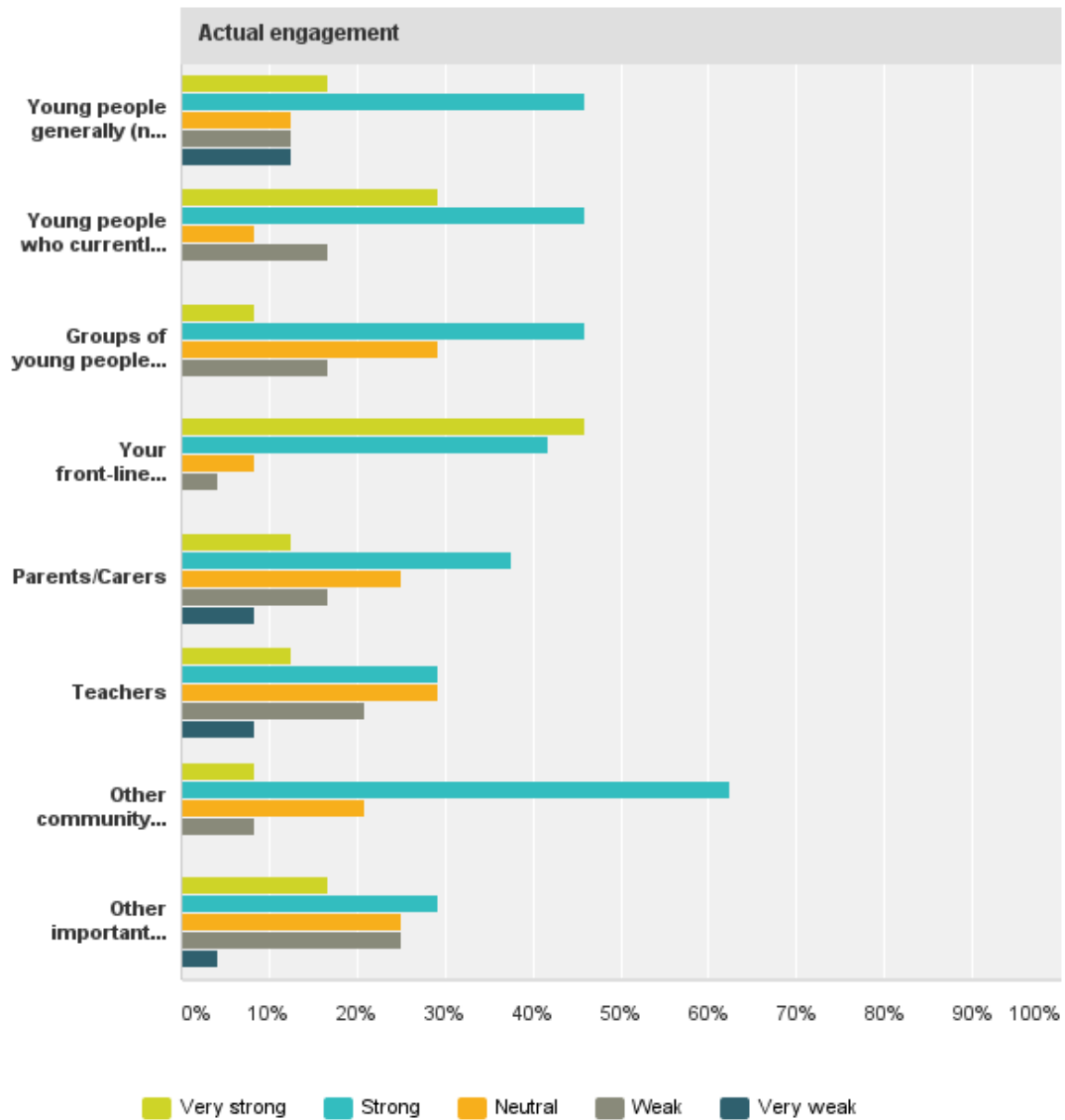
It is important to note that after the demographic questions the survey response rate dropped off quite dramatically – so the following questions have been answered only by about 27 respondents.

An important contextual question asked organisations how they ranked their *desire* to engage with, and then their *actual* engagement with, groups of different stakeholders.

Q6 How would you rank your engagement with, and desire to engage with, the following groups when designing, reviewing and evaluating programs/services for young people?

Answered: 24   Skipped: 22

Actual engagement

Young people generally (n...
Young people who currentl...
Groups of young people...
Your front-line...
Parents/Carers
Teachers
Other community...
Other important...

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

Very strong   Strong   Neutral   Weak   Very weak

This data demonstrates that there is a significant desire of the sector to engage with a number of these different stakeholders, **but they are not actually doing it.** This strongly suggests that there is a need for support to be able to engage these different stakeholders. It also demonstrates that the sector is able to be self-reflective and thoughtful about their engagement with young people.

Stakeholder group	Desire to engage is 'very strong' or 'strong'	Actual engagement is 'very strong' or 'strong'	Difference
Young people generally (not specifically ones that would access your service)	73%	65.4%	7.6%
Young people who currently access your service	93%	73%	20%
Groups of young people who you would like to access your service	72%	52%	20%
Your front-line staff, or people who engage with young people	88.5%	88.5%	0%
Parents/Carers	73%	50%	23%
Teachers	58%	42.3%	15.7%
Other community organisations working with the same young people you do	96%	69%	30%
Other important community members (i.e. such as elders for the Aboriginal community)	85%	46%	39%

This information brings to light a number of interesting points:

- The stakeholder group which organisations have the largest gap between 'desire to engage' and 'actual engagement' is other important community members, such as elders in the Aboriginal community. This was followed by 'other community organisations working with the same young people', and then by parents and carers
- There is a higher desire to engage with other community organisations working with the same young people than there is to engage with either young people generally or young people who would like to access the service. On the face of it, this seems counterintuitive, but there may be legitimate reasons such as organisations feeling as though the engagement with young people currently accessing the service is sufficient to understand the perspective from a young person.
- Organisations have a high desire to learn from their front-line staff, and feel that they incorporate information from them well. This makes sense, as it is logically the easiest engagement for an organisation to make.
- Whilst, in the scheme of things, this data demonstrates a need for support in engaging with different young people, there is actually evidence that organisations **more critically require support in engaging with other stakeholder groups**, such as community organisations, other community members and parents.

Comments from young people

Young people highlighted the proportion of respondents that wanted to work better with other organisations, and stated that in their experience, services are much better when organisations do talk to each other.

We asked the young people what they thought about services talking about them to other services, as often privacy and confidentiality issues are brought up with regard to more collaborative case management practices. Young people stated that they would rather not tell their story to many different people, and that if organisations set expectations up with them at the beginning of the service/relationship about where and how they'd be sharing their information, they'd be very comfortable with that.

Comments from organisations

On the type of young people that organisations engage with:

We engage with young people who are in a position to engage. They have a lived experience of mental health, but are not usually in crisis when they are engaged in our reference groups.

For example, young people leaving correctional facilities – we would like to engage with them better but don't necessarily know how to do that.

All organisations also reflected on the fact that there seems to be another 'class' of young people – sometimes referred to as 'professional young people' who are used initially by one organisation and then are 'picked up' by other organisations. They become comfortable in the role, can speak the right language so they become easier for time-poor organisations (and government) to work with. All organisations expressed a desire to know they were engaged beyond this group of young people.

Involvement of young people at various stages of design and delivery

The next question asked how often respondents involved young people at various stages of the design and delivery of a service:

Answer Options	Never/Rarely	Neutral	Often/Very often
In the planning of the service or project	5	3	19
In the delivery of services and projects, as a deliverer (i.e. young people delivering services/projects)	6	4	17
During the delivery of services and projects (i.e. continuous feedback and improvement of the service/project)	1	3	23
In the evaluation of the service or project	3	2	22
At the point of procurement of the service or project	12	3	13

As can be seen from this data, organisations often engage young people both during the delivery of services and projects as a continuous improvement mechanism, and in the evaluation of the project. To a lesser extent they engage young people in the planning of the service or project.

There is more diversity in responses with regard to the other answer options, including:

- In the delivery of services or projects as a deliverer
- At the point of procurement

Some organisations do this often or very often, and some are diametrically opposed in rarely or never doing this. To note also is that the response 'N/A or we don't see the need for this' was also available, but no response included this.

Therefore, organisations see the value in involving young people across the spectrum of planning, delivering and evaluating a service or project, including at the point of procurement.

Comments from young people

Young people stated that short timeframes aren't an issue from their perspective, as they are usually able to respond almost immediately or at least very quickly to questions asked of them, especially if the communication is via Facebook.

Young people gave examples of where they had been involved and engaged in different ways by organisations. One example was that Headspace has involved clients through writing a grant application and sending it through to the client group, asking for their perspectives and thoughts on the direction taken in the grant. The example of employing a younger person to fill in the grant, or have some kind of ad hoc reference group were also suggested.
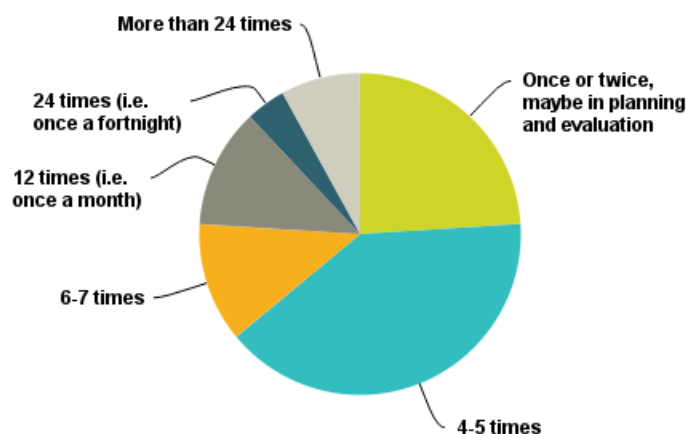
The next question asked respondents about a hypothetical example of running a 12 month long project. The idea of this question was to understand the regularity with which respondents collect feedback from young people.

The majority of respondents (40%) stated that they would engage with young people, and make changes based on their feedback, about 4-5 times over the life of the project, which would equate to just less often than once every two months. The next most popular response was maybe once or twice, maybe in planning and evaluation (24%).

Q8 Say you have a project that runs for 12 months. How often would you engage with and make changes to the program based on young people's feedback?

Answered: 25   Skipped: 24

It is clear from the responses to this question that there is no standard formula to seeking feedback from young people and making changes based on this. It is entirely up to each organisation, and what they think is appropriate given the particular project, their previous experiences and their clients.

Comments from young people

The young people in the group were overwhelmingly disappointed with the level of engagement during the course of this hypothetical project.

Further questions identified to drill down into this data is how often changes are made based on engagement v the potential to make changes; and what the barriers are to them making changes, or whether they are just unnecessary.

Comments from organisations

Many organisations that were interviewed stated that they were very careful about tokenism. It can be difficult to know when a particular engagement with young people is tokenistic or not. It is possible that this feeling could contribute to the data above about how often organisations were engaging with young people. It is clear that when they do, they want to ensure it is a quality engagement.

It was also identified by some organisations that we don't ask the right questions. We need to ensure that we really hone in on the questions that young people can answer. Rather than 'how can we improve this service?' it could be 'what was your experience like in filling in this referral form?' Often we can be asking them to think about the service at a higher level and they are not necessarily able to do that all of the time.
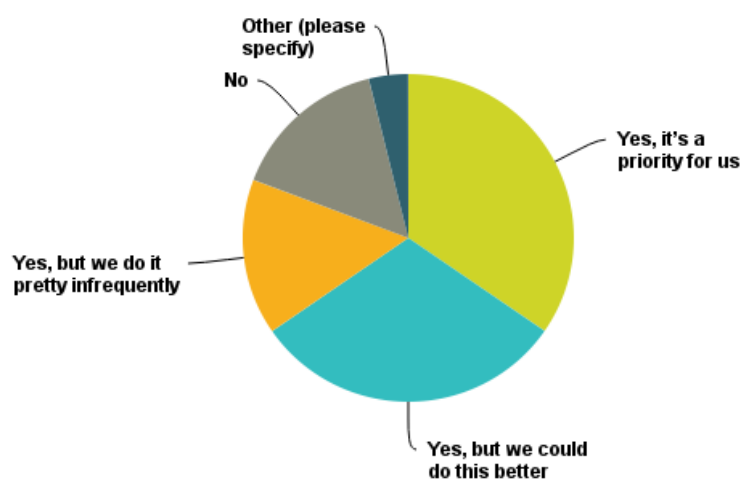
We need to be clearer about where we engage young people directly, and where we make use of their experiences and our own expertise, to incorporate that information and package it in a way that we need it, without taking away from the messages of the young people.

Feedback to young people

In terms of the feedback that is provided to young people about what changes occurred based on their comments or input, organisations largely reported that they do it (75%). 35% of respondents felt that they did it well, and it was a priority for them. Altogether 45% stated that they did it infrequently, and that they could do it better.

Q9 Do you give feedback to young people on what happened to their comments/input?

Answered: 26   Skipped: 23

This comment highlights one of the difficulties:

> *'It is often difficult to keep in touch with young people once they have left the service due to changes of mobile phone numbers, location and for privacy reasons.'*

Comments from young people

Young people stated that they very rarely, if ever, received feedback about their engagement on the projects and services they are involved with. They identified the only circumstances where they did receive feedback as ones where they chased it up.

The overwhelming experience from the group is that don't get told what happened after they have been involved to give feedback.

Some good examples were identified – for example, the CREATE Foundation advocated for some change in the care system and did hold a follow-up meeting to advise people involved of what happened with that work. One young person living at Foyer said that they appreciated that Foyer emails the young person back when they receive a feedback form.

The disability sector was also identified as being marginally better in providing feedback – but that often this will be provided informally.

Young people observed that perhaps given there is a power hierarchy, organisations just don't feel the need to provide feedback back to young people, or that it just doesn't occur to them.

What informs our work?

The next question asked was with regard to the kinds of literature or guides that organisations use in informing their work with young people. A number were provided for respondents to consider whether they had not read or heard of the resource, whether they had read it but did not consciously apply it in their work, or whether they had read it and consciously applied it in their work.

Which of these have you read/do you use in your work in engaging with young people?

Answer Options	Have read, and consciously apply in our work	Have read, but do not consciously apply in our work	Have not read/not aware of this
Hart's ladder of participation	5	3	16
Commissioner for Children and Young People (CCYP) 2009 Participation Guidelines	6	10	10
Materials from Dr Ingrid Burkett on co-design	2	6	16
Materials from the Australian Centre for Social Innovation on co-design	2	7	16
Building a Culture of Participation Handbook: Involving children and young people in policy, service planning, delivery and evaluation (UK Childrens Bureau)	2	9	14
Commissioner for Children, Tasmania – Involving Children in Decision Making – A Quick, Practical Guide	1	6	18

There was provision for respondents to provide materials of their own that inform their practice; however only one person took up this opportunity to state that they rely on their own experiences.

What this data tells us is that the majority of respondents, and potentially the sector at large, are not looking at how they use theories or evidence in the development of their projects or services, or in the practice of engaging with young people through their service. The reason for these responses may include:

- The individual filling in the survey for the organisation is not the same individual who undertakes research and evaluation processes
- Organisations may take into account other pieces of work that are not listed here, but they weren't able to think of what they were to provide them to us
- They think that engaging with the young people that access their service is sufficient

The data also illustrates, to a lesser extent, that whilst organisations might be aware of different theories or practices that they could use, they don't incorporate it into their work.

There is an important follow-up question here as to why they don't – is it because they don't know how, because once they've read it they don't see the relevance? If it is because they aren't sure how, this could be another important area for support – in translating and embedding theory into organisational practice.

When this question was explored with the organisations that were interviewed, it was clear that the people we were talking to had read at least some of these articles, or at a minimum they knew what literature or evidence they turned to in their particular area. Clearly to find a better answer to this question we need to engage the sector much more broadly.

> **Comments from young people**
>
> *The young people identified that perhaps there a role to play for YACWA in aggregating information and providing this en masse to the sector.*
>
> *They also identified some important further follow-up questions:*
>
> *For those that do know about it, how do they know about it?*
>
> *What they have used it for in particular?*
>
> *Young people did feel it was important for organisations to ensure that their practice is evidence based or informed.*

Mechanisms of engaging with young people

The next question to respondents asks whether they have young people sitting on their Board. As can be seen from the graph, the answers were well spread between the responses. The largest proportion was 'no, and we're not sure it's the most appropriate way to engage young people' (33%).
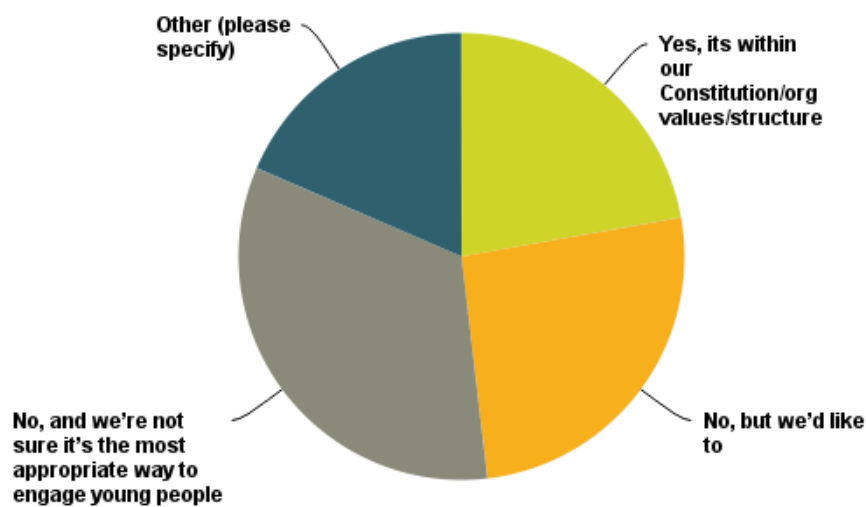
> **KH note**: Depending on the organisation, I actually agree with this. Especially given that about 2/3rds of organisations answering this survey don't ONLY work with young people.

Approximately 22% of respondents do have young people on their Board, and have it as a part of their Constitution, organisational values or structure. This is a very positive response, and a powerful way to engage with young people, if it is appropriate for the organisation.

Three of the five 'other' responses actually stated that they don't have a Board, and that is why they didn't have young people sitting on their Board.

Q11 Do you have young people sitting on your Board?

Answered: 27   Skipped: 22

Comments from young people

The young people expressed the importance on boards of diversity of opinion, and different ideas.

They also stated that they don't want to see tokenism. Young people should be included everywhere where is appropriate and supported, and structured in such a way that they can contribute, and shouldn't be included if it's not the best way, and/or they are not supported to engage in that forum/mechanism. They shared their experiences of where they have been included well through a Board type structure, and circumstances of where their knowledge and experience could have been used better than through a governing kind of structure.

One young person shared an experience of engaging with a group that simply had one question at the end of every meeting for her – 'so, what do young people think?' This wasn't an empowering way to be included.

Young people acknowledged that sometimes organisations want to engage but the people involved either don't have power to open the doors and sometimes don't know how to open the doors for young people to engage.

Quality of youth participation

The following questions were also asked in our survey to the sector around the Aboriginal Youth Services Investment Reforms, and the ways in which they engage with Aboriginal young people. We used the same questions so that we could combine data and have a larger sample size.

The responses under this heading therefore are based on 70 responses over the two surveys.

Approximately 34% of respondents were very confident that their programs reflected the feedback of the young people they engage with. If our aim is to know that all programs and services delivered for young people reflect the needs of young people, 34% is very low.
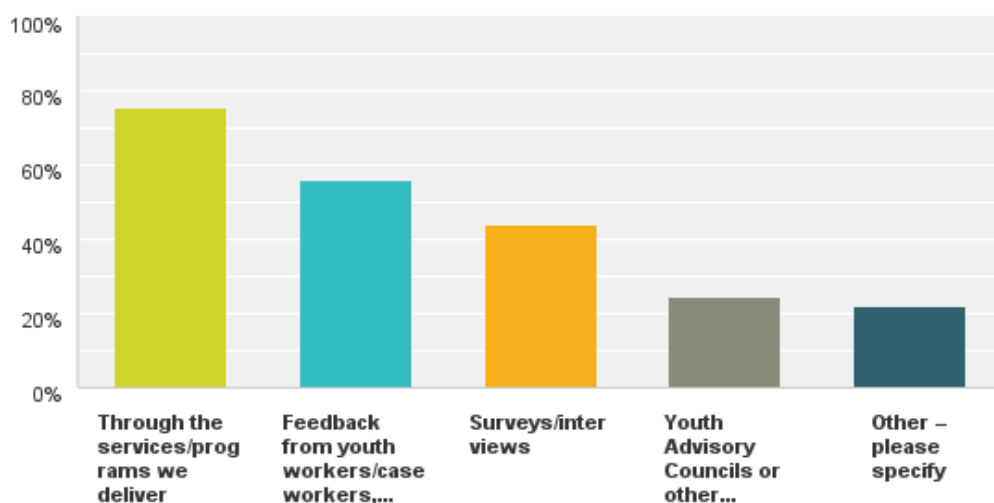
Altogether, 73% of respondents felt either somewhat confident or very confident that their programs reflect the feedback of the young people they engage with. This is a slightly better statistic, though somewhat confident implies some level of uncertainty around whether what is being delivered is actually what's required.

What this does positively suggest is that a strong majority of organisations surveyed believe that they undertake some sort of co-design or engagement process with young people so that the service they provide is what's actually required. However, it is also important to acknowledge that it was a fairly low number of organisations in being very confident in doing this.

The responses to current engagement mechanisms were the same across both surveys. The graph below is from the Aboriginal Youth Services Investment Reform survey, as it had more responses:

Q24 How do you currently engage with Aboriginal young people in designing your service? (Select all that apply)

Answered: 41   Skipped: 29

Altogether, 71% of organisations engaged with young people through the services and programs that they currently deliver. This potentially means that young people engaged in this way are possibly not encouraged to think outside of the framework, structure and context within which they are receiving the service or program, which is cause for some concern.

Overwhelmingly **respondents did want to understand how to better engage young people in service design (75%)**. No one answered that they did not want to understand how to better do this, so the remaining 25% of respondents answered 'maybe' or 'N/A' (which is an interesting response in itself).

Comments from young people

Young people observed that from their experiences, the engagement around service design or other questions is usually via networking. They said that often people see them in the community, or they hear about them and then want to talk about them, and that is by and large how they engage with organisations in the first instance.

*They also acknowledged that in engagement **through** services, that often it is the type of people that do make noise that get engaged with (and often self-identified as those very people!) They stated that there are services where they wouldn't be engaged if they hadn't pushed the issue and actively provided feedback.*

The mechanisms through which engagement with young people occurs makes a huge difference to the quality of that – considering email v mail or other mechanism like social media.
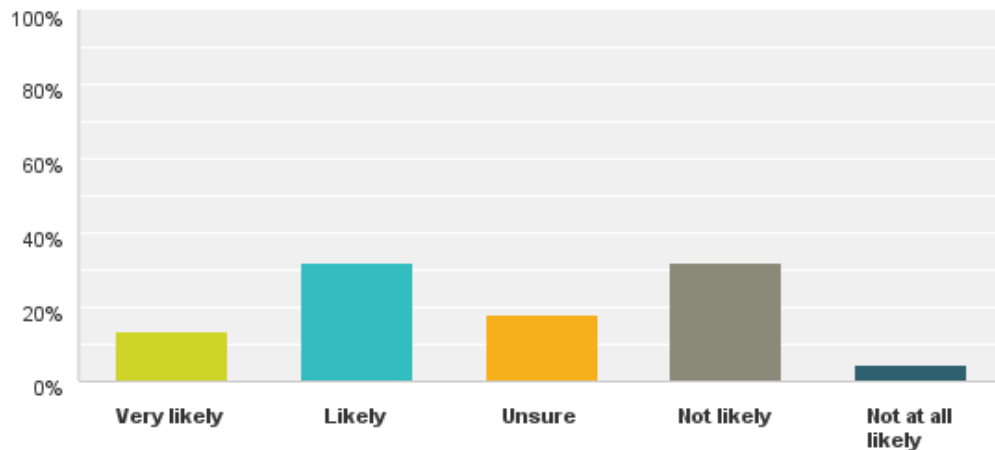

Participation and co-design at the point of procurement

We asked some specific questions about how organisations engage young people at the point of procurement. Our hypothesis is, and early data showed that, in the lifecycle of a program or service, this is the area where there is least engagement of young people, and therefore most potential to provide support and capacity building to the sector.

This question was with regard to the likelihood of engaging young people in writing a tender or grant:

Q16 From when a tender or grant is released, to the point at which you submit an application, how likely are you to engage young people in this period, in relation to the project/service/program for which you are filling in the grant or tender?

Answered: 22   Skipped: 27

Once again, as with the question earlier about the points at which an organisation would engage young people during the service/project lifecycle, organisations are widely spread and divided on this. Approximately 46% are very likely or likely to engage young people at the point of procurement. Of note is that 'likely' and 'not likely' received the same number of responses, nearly 32% each.

The respondents identified a number of major limitations on engaging with young people during this procurement period:

- Short timeframes (61.9%)
- Hard to incorporate their thoughts/feedback into the application (29%)
- We don't know how we'd go about doing this (19%)
- We don't think its required or needed (9.5%)

Some 'others' (19%) identified included:

- Organisational structure/culture
- Not all programs we run are for young people
- Applications don't give space for this

Support required

The final questions in the survey asked the sector where they need support in co-designing with young people.

In this question, organisations were asked where they think they needed support most in co-designing with young people, and to rank each of these states from 1 – 5; where 5 is where they most need support:

Answer Options	1 and 2	3	4 and 5
In the delivery as a deliverer (i.e. young people delivering project/service/program)	6	4	5
During delivery (i.e. continuous feedback and improvement of the project/service/program)	9	2	5
In the planning of the project/service/program	5	3	6
In the evaluation of the project/service/program	7	5	4
At the point of procurement for the project/service/program	5	3	13

The data demonstrates that organisations need support in most areas, but 'at the point of procurement' was the most highly ranked answer. This was something that YACWA initially thought this project might focus on, and will be considered this in the options developed.

Further, the data also shows that organisations least need support in engaging with young people during delivery and in the evaluation of the project/service/program. It seems they are generally fairly confident in the engagement of young people at these stages. This makes sense, as they are the easiest stages within which to engage young people. The support we provide, then, should be focussed more around engaging young people in those stages where it is not so easy.

Support that would be useful

Finally, the survey asked what would be the most useful in terms of the support required:

Which of these would you find useful in engaging young people at different points of your program/planning processes? (tick all that apply)

Answer options	Percent
Training or webinars on co-designing/engaging with young people	43%
Online portal (i.e. pureprofile) to ask questions live and have them answered by young people	33%
Bringing together all co-design resources in one place	62%
New resources specifically for co-designing with young people (i.e. guides, tips and tricks)	38%
Some sort of brokerage service by YACWA for young consultants to work with your organisation at different points of	48%

your program/planning processes	
A consultancy service providing advice and support on your engagement processes with young people	57%
Other (please specify)	14%

Bringing together all of the co-design resources into one place is something that we have begun to do, and can absolutely do as a part of this project.

A consultancy service providing advice and support is possible, but as was highlighted in the comments, would likely have to be on a fee-for-service basis which many organisations cannot afford.

The next most popular option is a brokerage service by YACWA for young 'consultants', which would be a great way to engage young people directly, and provide an opportunity to build the capacity of direct service users, which would also be of value to the organisations and to the young people. This option will need to be scoped for feasibility.

Other comments here from organisations included:

- Cost is prohibitive
- We don't have the funds to consult
- Face to face workshops
- Culturally specific resources

When these different possibilities were broached in interviews, all organisations were open to all possibilities. There was an acknowledgment that additional training is probably not what is required. All were particularly supportive of bringing together co-design resources into one place, and endeavouring to simplify them and make them more easily digestible.

Comments from young people

Young people stated that bringing resources together could also add value beyond just the organisations, to interested young people, as well as to other network groups or other types of organisations.

Young people also were supportive of the brokerage service, with all of them stating that they would be interested in being involved. They stated that, from their perspective, it would eb important to include some capacity to pay for travel or fuel as in their experience this is the one thing not covered when they are remunerated for their time and experience. They also stated though that often the money was secondary and that they were just very appreciative of being heard.

They stated that in any way that they are engaged, it would be useful to try to mitigate circumstances where certain young people feel they are carrying all of the weight of the project/support.

Other comments

Only two additional comments were made:

Hi Kylie - <person> here. I think that co-design is incredibly important and we've attempted to make some of it work at <place>, with greater and lesser success. (Less sold on service users involvement in service delivery, particularly where we are looking at multiple complex presentations, but I can chat to you about that another time).

A few things:

- In my experience, this is a resourcing issue. Services are asked to do a lot with a little, and high quality, effective and meaningful co-design is resource intensive - both in the process, and in the implementation of recommendations.
- Tender processes (when the most important co-design should happen, as its the only opportunity to radically change service provision) don't allow for the input of service users. And WA's current use of co-design within government, ie before tender, seems pretty bastardised.
- We need to be really careful with the idea that a 'young consultant' could deliver effective co-design processes simply because they are young. They certainly have a role to play (creative outsider?) but frequently the young people involved in this kind of space have very little understanding of the young people who need the services that we provide, and the young people who use our services can find their input patronising.
- Seems to me that sometimes 'co-design' is being used as a new buzzword for 'youth participation' or 'consultation' - and we've had good resources on this stuff for a long time (might be interesting to ask what the real barriers are to implementation of these principles, because the UK has been really successful in doing it, but Aus is not). If by co-design we are talking about the design led process that Ingrid talks about - then that is a more substantial change to current service capacity and learning. (and one that would be really worthwhile).
- Would love to be involved in any developments you guys take forward in this space.

Secondment, mentor placement etc where we receive information and assistance in the work place to achieve what we don't have the capacity- time and funds to do.

Conclusion and recommendations

The survey offers a number of insights into important areas of involving young people in community services, including:

- The desire of organisations to engage for young people with different groups (eg engaging with other community organisations and community members) but their lack of experience in actually doing so
- The seeming lack of evidence informing the practice of youth organisations (as discussed above, this requires further research and engagement)
- The interesting nature of the point of procurement – where organisations simultaneously rarely engage young people, and often engage young people, very unlike the other areas of the project development and delivery process.

Given the appetite for the mechanisms for support in the final question, but the simultaneous resourcing issue, we recommend the following as the way forward for this project:

- Bring together all co-design and participation resources in one place, and allow for organisations to add their own to this collection. This can be completed using the Co-design section of the specific platform set up on DropIN for the Aboriginal Youth Services Investment Reform
- Set up a pilot capacity building and brokerage service for youth consultants
- Conduct 1-2 training sessions on co-designing/engagement with young people, with a focus on how theories of co-design can actually add value to the long-standing theories of participation in engaging young people