

NYCI Youth Participation Charter



Statement of Commitment

Through adopting the Youth Participation Charter, NYCI acknowledges that young people have a right to be active citizens. It is also shows that NYCI is committed to involving young people in decision-making in appropriate areas of work such as relevant policy development, youth related programmes, activities and services.

Purpose

The NYCI Youth Charter outlines the values and principles which are fundamental to 'ensure that young people have the opportunity to participate in the development of policies and strategies that affect them'.¹ It also highlights some of the benefits and barriers to youth participation.

Youth Participation Charter Values

The following statements on youth participation values outline and underpin the principles laid out in this document.²

Young people:

- Have the right to be involved in making decisions that affect them;
- Have the right to be treated with respect and dignity;
- Have unique insights and perspectives on matters that affect them;
- Have the right to be treated equally;
- Have the right to express their views and be heard;
- Have the right to freedom of expression and access to information and ideas.

Benefits of Youth Participation

- Promotes confidence and self-esteem in young people.
- Generates ideas for new and up-to-date activities and services.
- Provides opportunities for young people to learn and practice the skills needed in different professional roles such as negotiating, planning, reporting, communication etc.
- Offers young people the chance to develop important decision-making and problem solving skills.
- Provides opportunities for both young people and adults to develop more meaningful relationships.
- Young people are more likely to make a commitment to a programme and/or policy when they have been involved from the outset in the programme's design and implementation plan.
- Provides opportunities for adults to show that they respect young people's views.
- Ensures that more relevant and appropriate decisions can be made with regard to young people and their needs.
- Young people will have an increased feeling of ownership and influence over the decisions which are made by adults in relation to them.

Youth Participation in Action

	Obstacles	Enablers
1	Lack of trust or belief in the benefits of youth involvement.	Sign up to the charter and principles of youth participation.
2	Lack of preparation for how to go about involving young people.	Develop a participation strategy.
3	Not listening to young people.	Ensure that processes for young people to be heard are developed.
4	Underestimating young people's capabilities and levels of interest.	Sign up and agree to abide by youth participation values.
5	Making false or unrealistic promises.	Review resources and plan achievable activities together with young people.
6	Lack of training for youth workers and young people.	Carry out a group assessment to identify training needs and access relevant training.
7	Lack of adequate resources allocated, both financial and other.	Develop an action plan for how to go about supporting your participation strategy.
8	Unwillingness to change structures and methods of working. It may be felt that it is easier to let things continue as they are, the 'If it's not broken, why fix it?' attitude.	Review the aims of the organisation. Consult with the young people you are working with. Make decisions based on young people's needs.
9	Wariness on behalf of young people due to previous unsuccessful experiences.	Involve young people from the start and show them that you are committed to the values and principles.
10	Fear of the unknown by organisations, workers and young people.	Feel the fear and do it anyway! Youth work is all about taking risks and trying new things. Try to make the experience fun for all.
11	Lack of interest/desire from young people to be involved.	That's ok too! Start off where young people are at. Identify those who are interested to begin with. The rest may become involved when they are ready.

¹ NYCI Strategic Plan 2004-2007, Pg 13

² Adapted from The Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989

Youth Participation Charter Principles

When making decisions about policies, programs, activities and services, young people should be actively engaged on relevant issues. This includes issues that directly impact on young people. This charter supports engagement and participation that is:



Voluntary

Youth participation must be, in essence, a voluntary arrangement if it is to be of any value to the young people involved;

Informed

Young people should be made aware of what they are getting involved in and what their rights and responsibilities are;

Relevant

Young people should be able to input into the development of initiatives which should aim to address their needs and deal with relevant issues of importance to them;

Enjoyable

Young people need to have fun and feel valued, therefore, all youth participation initiatives, no matter how intense, need to be implemented in a way that is enjoyable;

Developmental

Young people should be given the opportunity to explore issues relating to the society in which they live and be empowered to become active citizens;

Educational

Youth participation projects should provide young people with opportunities for learning in both formal and informal settings;

Supported

Youth participation initiatives and activities should be supported as appropriate, whether that involves training, advice, or guidance;

Resourced

Activities and initiatives also need to be adequately resourced in terms of staff support, access to information, funding, time span and space to carry out activities;

Valued

Young people should feel that they are valued and are being taken seriously, as is their work, in order to avoid tokenism;

Owned

Activities and initiatives should be youth led and young people involved should feel that they have ownership;

Flexible

In order to meet the changing needs of young people and allow for personal and other work obligations, there needs to be a certain amount of flexibility built into youth participation initiatives;

Diverse

It is important that all young people are afforded the opportunity to participate and that diversity in groups is not only respected, but sought after;

Monitored and evaluated

In order to ensure that initiatives are meeting the changing needs of the young people involved and to promote innovative youth participation activities, it is vital that all such initiatives and activities are monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis.