

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.