

Youth Voice in Governance

BOARD GUIDANCE

Overview

Having input from young people (aged 12-24) can improve governance, strategy, and decision-making outcomes. This paper will guide you through key considerations to help your board make an informed decision on the best way to hear from young people.

Key considerations

The Why

What are we wanting to achieve by hearing from young people? And how might we consider Te Tiriti o Waitangi?

The How

How could we hear from young people to achieve our goal/s?

The When

Will we be able to do this well now?

The Who

What groups of rangatahi do we need to hear from?

The What

What does good look like for recruiting and onboarding a youth trustee?

Deep dive

The Why

What are we wanting to achieve by hearing from young people?

- Define the purpose of hearing from young people at a governance level.
- Discuss the value young people may also get from engaging with the board.

Reasons might include:

- **board diversity:** strengthening your board experience and skill sets, and plan for succession
- **participant voice:** bringing an 'on the ground' perspective to your strategic decision making
- **youth leadership:** providing growth opportunities for the young people in your community
- **Te Tiriti o Waitangi:** including rangatahi Māori can help bring a te ao Māori view
- **staying relevant:** bringing new views to your board to adapt within a rapidly changing world.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi considerations

How might rangatahi Māori voice add value to our board?

Discuss your board's Te Tiriti o Waitangi journey, and how rangatahi voice could add value.

- What obligations or commitments do we have to Te Tiriti o Waitangi?
- What decisions does our board make that specifically affect rangatahi Māori?
- Do we currently have Māori representation on our board? If yes, how does this representation address our commitments?
- How could rangatahi voice help us act on our commitments to Te Tiriti o Waitangi?

When to engage specifically with rangatahi Māori

If your board decisions and/or the delivery of your organisation affects:

- the individual rights of all young people, consider engaging with a diverse range of rangatahi.
- the collective rights of rangatahi Māori (eg your organisation delivers programmes that specifically cater for rangatahi Māori or iwi, affecting their cultural rights and responsibilities as part of their whānau, hapū, iwi), consider specifically engaging with rangatahi Māori.

Bringing rangatahi Māori onto our board

If you are considering engaging specifically with rangatahi Māori, discuss:

- what role those young people will be expected to play (eg are they representing their own individual views, or views of tangata whenua?)
- if they will have the right support to do so (such as a Māori mentor/tuakana, or support from their hapū/iwi)
- how you will clearly communicate these expectations upfront.

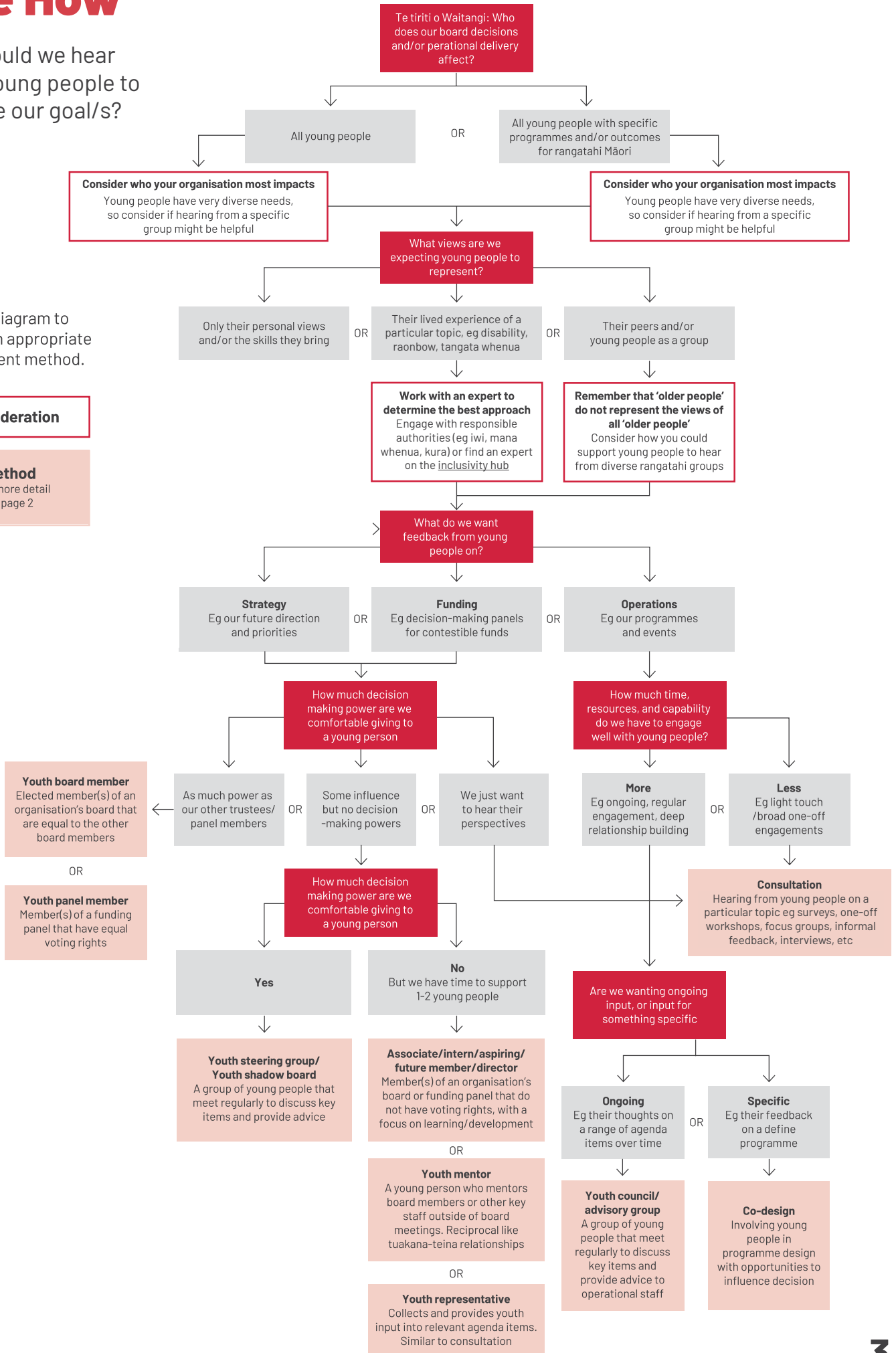
The How

How could we hear from young people to achieve our goal/s?

Use this diagram to choose an appropriate engagement method.

Consideration

Method
Read more detail on page 2




Engagement methods: Ways to hear from young people

Here are some common ways to involve young people in your decision-making. This table is not hierarchical, and no one way is necessarily better than another. The most important thing is that everyone involved understands the role, purpose and powers of rangatahi.

Method	Definition	Influence	Power	More information
Youth board member	Elected member/s of an organisation's board that are equal to the other board members.	Strategic	Full decision-making power	What does good look like for recruiting and onboarding a youth trustee? (Sport NZ)
Youth steering group/shadow board	A group of young people that meet regularly to discuss key items and provide advice to a board. May make some decisions.	Strategic	Some decision-making power	How shadow boards bridge generational divides (Harvard Business Review)
Associate/intern/aspiring/future board member	Member/s of an organisation's board that do not have voting rights, with a focus on learning/development.	Strategic	Influence only	Board intern job description example (English Language Partners)
Youth mentors/reverse mentoring	A young person who mentors board member/s or other key staff outside of board meetings. Reciprocal like tuakana-teina relationships.	Strategic or operational	Influence only	Why reverse mentoring works and how to do it right (Harvard Business Review)
Youth council/advisory group	Similar to a youth steering group/shadow board but focused on operations. May make some decisions.	Strategic or operational	Some decision-making power	Working with young people through a youth advisory group (Hanwell Zoo) - video Youth Advisory group information page (Oranga Tamariki)
Co-design, Youth Commission	Involving young people in programme design and/or delivery with opportunities to influence decisions.	Strategic or operational	Some decision-making power	Co-design (Sport NZ)
Consultation	Hearing from young people on a particular topic, eg surveys, one-off workshops, focus groups, informal feedback, interviews etc.	Strategic or operational	Influence only	Pages 22-23: Consulting Young People, Involving Young People in Decision making (MYD)

Levels of youth engagement and power

Below are different levels of power and influence young people have when engaging with adults. For example, a youth trustee role may become tokenistic if rangatahi aren't supported to fully participate.

More time required from young people and adults	Level of engagement	Description	Examples of rangatahi role
	Doing with – an equal and reciprocal partnership.	Co-production – Working in equal partnership with rangatahi. All decisions are either shared or made by young people, who contribute and develop their leadership skills in the process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Making decisions at every stage from design to delivery. Leading multiple aspects of a project.
		Co-design – Involving rangatahi in programme design and making sure they have opportunities to influence decisions throughout the process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attending ongoing meetings to discuss ideas and develop solutions together. Leading some aspects of a project. Seeing their ideas reflected in the final outcome.
	Doing for – engaging and involving rangatahi.	Engagement – Rangatahi have regular opportunities to contribute their thoughts and opinions. They might influence some decisions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attending meetings to give feedback and share their views. This feedback is often reflected in changes the organisation makes.
		Consultation – Inviting rangatahi to share their thoughts and preferences on issues and options while a project is being developed, or after it has already been developed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Responding to a survey. Attending a one-off event, focus group, or interview to share thoughts.
	Doing to – rangatahi as passive recipients of a service.	Informing – Informing rangatahi about something that has been developed for them, and explaining the decisions that have been made.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading or seeing information updates. Hearing about a project from peers or adults in their lives.
		Educating – Educating rangatahi on the benefits an rationale of a programme that has been designed without their input.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading a newsletter about a physical activity programme.
Less time required from young people and adults	Non-participation	Tokenism – Rangatahi appear to have a say but in reality, have little to no input or decision-making power.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being asked to represent the 'youth voice', but not being given the time or ability to consult their peers.
		Decoration – Rangatahi 'decorate' an event or project, attending in a very limited capacity with no role in decision making.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reading a script written by adults about "why young people do not engage in active recreation" at a conference.
		Manipulation – Adults pretend that rangatahi have participated. Adults ask for feedback that is then ignored or used for their own gain.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Giving ideas that are not reflected to all in a final product which adults claim has been influenced by young people.

The When

Will we be able to do this well now?

Engaging poorly with young people can negatively impact their confidence, sense of value, and trust in adults or civic processes.

Discuss if your board realistically has the capacity and capability to do this well, or if your board/organisation has more pressing priorities:

- Is our governance group functioning well, with a clear plan, processes, and relationships?
- Do we have the capacity to support a young person to participate meaningfully?
- Who could we partner with to best reach or engage with local young people? (eg schools, kura, youth development and delivery organisations, mana whenua).
- Do we have the resources to compensate young people fairly at this time?

If your board doesn't have the time, skills, or resources now to engage well with young people, consider waiting until a better time or committing to some capability building first.

Compensation

Rangatahi should be compensated for any costs incurred to participate (eg Ubers, parking), and recognised fairly for their time and contribution, in line with how adults would be compensated. If you're not sure how young people might want to be recognised, ask them what they could find valuable.

Non-financial recognition might include:

- thank you letters signed by the CEO
- positive and helpful verbal feedback
- with rangatahi consent, publish photos and articles about their participation on websites and in publications or quote them in media releases
- provide rangatahi with a written reference letter for their CV
- freebies or experiences from your organisation
- professional development opportunities.

Reference: <https://www.myd.govt.nz/documents/resources-and-reports/publications/keepin-it-real/keepin-it-real.pdf>, Pg. 30

The Who

What groups of rangatahi do we need to hear from?

Hearing from diverse voices

Discuss if your board needs to hear from any particular groups of young people to achieve your goal. This might include looking at:

- demographics: age, gender, ethnicity, attraction, location, ability, residency status, socio-economic backgrounds
- behaviors: such as if/how they engage with physical activities
- their wider interests and beliefs
- skills and knowledge: eg climate action, social media, technology.

If your board decisions and/or your organisation delivers programmes that specifically cater for rangatahi Māori or iwi, consider specifically engaging with rangatahi Māori.

> [Check out the Inclusivity hub](#) for guidance on how you might tailor your approach based on demographics, and who you could partner with to do this well.

Clarify their role

If you are considering engaging with a specific group of young people, discuss:

- what role those young people will be expected to play (eg what views will they be expected to share or represent?)
- how could you work with others to support them do this safely (such as a youth worker, mentor, or other responsible authorities eg kura, mana whenua, hapū/iwi)
- how you will clearly communicate these expectations upfront.

The What

What does good look like for recruiting and onboarding a youth trustee?

The [Mana Taiohi](#) youth development principles can help you plan how your board might create a great experience for a young person. Below we show you how you can incorporate four of the eight interconnected principles into recruitment and onboarding.

Whanaungatanga

Build relationships before doing the work

Recruitment

Advertise through youth-focused channels and partners

- universities, clubs, schools/kura, youth groups, marae and churches
- work with iwi to find candidates if you are wanting rangatahi Māori to engage as tangata whenua.

Selection

Get to know young people through the application process, in ways that work for them, eg consider asking for a short video instead of a formal cover letter whenua.

Onboarding

Choose two or more youth trustees to support each other Introduce youth trustees before your first board meeting

- set up one-on-one meetings with board members
- set up a board buddy to help them navigate board language and processes
- start their first board meeting with informal, in-depth introductions.

Ongoing support

Keep getting to know each other

- start future board meetings with informal 'check ins' to help youth trustees feel comfortable speaking to the group, eg 'Share a highlight from this week'
- book in some informal board meals or fun activities.

Manaakitanga

Ensure rangatahi feel welcome and safe

Recruitment

Use their language

- avoid board jargon, and test the role ad with a young person to see if it makes sense to them.
- consider creating a short recruitment video to share online.
- consider using photos, video, or linking to relevant social media channels and websites to give them a taste of the organisation.

Selection

Help them feel comfortable in an interview

- give a range of times to fit around their schedules
- meet in a safe, casual space, eg their local school, library, cafe, or via video call
- make time to get to know each other before talking about the role. Use your pronouns
- frame questions so young people can draw on different kinds of skills and experience (not just academic).

Onboarding

Explicitly acknowledge the power imbalance, eg prior to and at the first board meeting, acknowledge the commonly held view that the older we are, the more valuable our experience. Reinforce that your board fundamentally disagrees with that view so young people feel valued bringing a different perspective. Compensate them for their time.

Ongoing support

Provide training and support

- link them to [online governance training](#)
- discuss with them [examples of common challenges they may face and potential solutions](#) (pg. 12)
- delegate board members to go to [Mana Taiohi youth development training](#)
- connect youth trustees with relevant mentors.

Whai Wāhitanga

Give rangatahi space to have agency

Recruitment

Ask young people to lead

the promotion and recruitment for roles to do so in ways they think will best reach their peers.
> [recruitment examples](#) (pg. 18).

Selection

Ask young people to help interview or choose youth board members

Onboarding

Provide value to unsuccessful applicants

- take notes to give them kind and constructive feedback
- offer other ways to get involved or have their say
- ask if you can keep their contact details for future board opportunities
- ask for feedback to make the next process better for young people.

Ongoing support

Help them contribute their skills and experience

- review the agenda together before board meetings
- after their first board meeting, ask what you could change together to make the next one better
- ask what board projects or sub-committees they might want to be part of or lead.

Mātauranga

Give rangatahi space to have agency

Recruitment

Provide information on

- realistic expectations/commitments eg number of hours per month and board meeting time/places
- if travel and other related costs will be covered, and any other compensation
- application criteria, eg age specific skills, experience, or perspective you want them to bring as a young person (eg if they will be representing a 'youth voice')
- > [board intern JD example](#)
- > [youth advisory group information page](#).

Selection

Provide interview questions beforehand so they can consider how to answer them best.

Onboarding

Provide key information on how board meetings will be run through a short video or information document. Go through this with young people prior to your first board meeting.

Ongoing support

Remind young people that good governance is asking good questions. Young people can sometimes feel stuck if trying to bring an 'opinion' to the table. Provide them with a short list of good go-to questions they can use.