

Supporting meaningful arts engagement for culturally diverse young people

Youth-generated guidance for organisations and artists

Created by culturally diverse, arts-engaged young people in Bendigo, Australia, with Manchester Centre for Youth Studies (Manchester Metropolitan University) and Multicultural Arts Victoria's Emerge Cultural Hub Bendigo.

1. Youth consultation and collaboration are key

Young people should be supported to play a role in all aspects of arts activities, from project design to evaluation. They should also be encouraged to ask questions about and provide feedback on activities. This ensures that arts activities reflect the needs and interests of young people as well as building the capabilities of young people as both artists and leaders. Youth consultation and collaboration is particularly important for facilitating the meaningful engagement of hard-to-reach groups..

2. Arts programmes should be inclusive and diverse

Arts activities should always be inclusive, respectful, and non-discriminatory. They should accommodate the needs of different groups, including in relation to gender, ability, religion, ethnicity and skill level. This requires artists and organisations to develop relevant knowledge and competencies. It can also be supported by the employment of culturally diverse workers. In addition to ethnic-specific and 'multicultural' projects, mainstream programmes should be designed to accommodate culturally diverse participants. This enables the development of diverse communities of artists and fosters intercultural dialogue and understanding.

3. Young people need a range of different opportunities

Culturally diverse young people are not a cohesive group, and one project does not necessarily fit all. Young people have different interests, skills and capacities and should have access to a range of opportunities across art forms, skill levels, and mainstream/ethnic-specific/'multicultural' programmes. One young person does not speak for all young people of their ethnic background.

4. Practical support is often necessary

Some young people – especially those from refugee and non-English-speaking backgrounds – may face additional barriers to arts participation. Areas for support could include: transport; translation; parent engagement; free/subsidised participation; and clear, simple communication. Consultation with members of the targeted youth cohort and relevant community workers and leaders is essential to identifying and addressing barriers.



5. The complexities of young people's lives need to be recognised

Many young people – and especially those from refugee backgrounds – have significant roles and responsibilities in their families and communities. This is in addition to more general pressures on young people such as education and employment. These multiple responsibilities can affect arts participation. It is important to recognise this and ensure that arts programmes are responsive to young people's needs and don't become an additional burden.

6. Cross-sector collaborations enhance and support arts programmes

No single organisation or sector has all of the answers or all of the resources for effectively and meaningfully working with diverse young people. Cross-sector collaborations – across arts, education, refugee resettlement, social work, youth work and other sectors – is invaluable for supporting youth engagement; sharing knowledge, resources, and expertise; addressing challenges; providing pathways; and building on outcomes. Engaging with ethnic community leaders and community development workers can be particularly important for sharing information and support.

7. What will young people get out of participation in arts programmes?

Having young people involved in arts programmes has many benefits for artists and organisations, but too often young people are not recognised or remunerated for their creative and cultural contributions. Arts participation can offer a wide range of benefits for young people. This can include: artistic skills; personal skills and competencies; employment pathways; personal and professional networks; recognition through reference letters and certificates; opportunities to share ideas and experiences; and having fun. Project aims and outcomes should reflect individual and group interests, needs, and capacities.

Other useful resources:

Canas, Tania (2015) 10 Things you need to consider if you are an artist – not of the refugee and asylum seeker community – looking to work with our community. RISE (Refugees, Survivors and Ex-Detainees). <http://riserefugee.org/10-things-you-need-to-consider-if-you-are-an-artist-not-of-the-refugee-and-asylum-seeker-community-looking-to-work-with-our-community/>

Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network, Australia (2018) Not Just “Ticking a Box”: Youth participation with young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. MYAN. <https://myan.org.au/myan-reports/not-just-ticking-a-box-youth-participation-with-young-people-from-refugee-and-migrant-backgrounds/>

Oval House Theatre (2009) Participatory Arts with Young Refugees: Six essays collected and published by Oval House Theatre. Oval House Theatre. https://www.ovalhouse.com/participation/publication/participatory_arts_with_young_refugees

Platforma Arts + Refugee Network (2018) Platforma Manifesto: A guide to good practice for the arts, refugees and migration. <https://www.platforma.org.uk/platforma-manifesto/>

Tiller, Chrissie (2017). Power Up. Creative People and Places http://www.creativepeopleplaces.org.uk/sites/default/files/Power_Up_think_piece_Christie_Tiller.pdf

