

NSW Environment Protection Authority

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

2022–25



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Acknowledgement of Country

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The EPA acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which we live and work, and pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.

We recognise the connection to their land, their waters and surrounding communities and acknowledge their history here on this land.

We also acknowledge our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees who are an integral part of our diverse workforce and recognise the knowledge embedded forever in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander custodianship of Country and culture.

**DHARAWAL COUNTRY,
ROYAL NATIONAL PARK, NSW**

As environmental risks become more prevalent and better known, we want to **CONNECT WITH THE YOUTH OF TODAY**. As tomorrow's leaders, they can help us create the right **ENVIRONMENTAL** and **HUMAN HEALTH** behaviours for the future.



BACKGROUND

NSW is home to more than 1.3 million young people aged 10–22 years living in our cities, regional towns and rural areas. As environmental risks become more prevalent and better known, we want to connect with the youth of today. As tomorrow's leaders, they can help us create the right environmental and human health behaviours for the future.

The NSW Environment Protection Authority (EPA) is the primary environmental regulator for New South Wales.

We partner with business, government and the community to reduce pollution and waste, protect human health, and prevent degradation of the environment. To succeed, we must empower each other to share ideas and insights. This way, we can achieve the best outcomes for protecting our environment together.

The EPA already engages with young people in a range of ways, however, there is room for greater intergenerational input to help us achieve good environmental outcomes.

The EPA Youth Engagement Strategy has been developed to guide our youth initiatives over the next three years.

It has been developed collaboratively with input from across the EPA and with input from our newly established Environment Youth Advisory Council as well as other young people and stakeholders.

Our Youth Engagement Strategy aligns with and builds on our draft Engagement Framework, which sets out our commitment to bringing community, government, our partners, customers, industry and other interested stakeholders together to solve problems. The strategy reflects the United Nations' guidelines for Meaningful Engagement with Youth.



Why develop an engagement strategy targeted at young people?

- This is an opportunity to build intergenerational equity into our decision making
- Young people make up nearly a quarter of the total population of NSW.
- Most EPA engagement has not specifically been designed to reach young people in the past.
- Young people can be strong influencers in the home.
- Young people should have a voice on issues that are important to them.
- Young people are the future!

Young people in NSW

15%

NSW is home to nearly 1.3 million young people aged 10–22 years living in our cities, regional towns and rural areas. They represent more than 15% of our total population.



YOUNG PEOPLE ARE DIVERSE

Young people are a diverse group spanning different geographic areas, ages, abilities, genders and backgrounds resulting in diverse environmental concerns and priorities.



YOUNG PEOPLE CARE ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT

A Mission Australia survey of 20,207 young people across Australia found that 38% of young people say the environment is the most important concern for them for the future. In NSW, young people have ranked the environment in the top three issues of national concern over the last three years.



YOUNG PEOPLE ARE LEADERS AND INFLUENCERS

Young people care about environmental protection. Young people are already advocates, community leaders, volunteers and innovators in the environmental protection space. They also influence their family and friend network on issues they care about.

'Young people are quite concerned about the environment's health, therefore want to help NSW EPA and get involved. Young people can also learn a lot from the experience so that a few years down the track, they are able to become experienced members within the NSW EPA.'

**- YOUTH ADVISORY
COUNCIL MEMBER**

'It's vital that the NSW EPA listens to us as the youth of Australia, not only because we are the future, but because we will bring in fresh perspectives that only young people have.'

**- YOUTH ADVISORY
COUNCIL MEMBER**

Spectrum of interests and across age groups

Young people across the 10 to 22 years age group have a spectrum of interests and priorities across life stages from primary school to young adulthood. They have changing needs and aspirations, and experience different levels of access to resources and services. Recognising and responding to these varying needs is key in developing appropriate and meaningful engagement.

Demographic, social and cultural characteristics shape the **EXPERIENCE** of being a young person. These include, but are not limited to: gender, cultural background, socio-economic status, disability, sexual orientation and geographic location. These characteristics are not experienced in isolation from one another. To understand how they inform a young person's experience you need to also explore the **INTERSECTIONS** between them.

Age	Life stage	Interests and priorities	Guidance for engagement
10–12	Primary education/ transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Straddling childhood and adolescence with a focus on the transition to secondary school. • Develop increasing capability for social conscience and critical thinking, including understanding of complex issues • High levels of dependence on parents or carers • Strong influences from their peers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likely to find out information through friends and family, school and social media platforms including Instagram • Unlikely to participate unless prompted by carers or educators • Respond well to informal and quick consultation, such as drawing or other creative activities
13–17	Secondary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing levels of independence and autonomy as young people transition into secondary education • Increasingly exposed to new ideas and influences with expanding social networks and interactions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likely to find out information through social media platforms including Instagram and TikTok, at school, or from friends and family • Respond well to informal and quick consultation, such as short surveys and polls • Incentives such as vouchers for participation are important • More likely to participate in formal, ongoing engagement such as youth councils or focus groups • Respond well to competitions and engagement with tangible outcomes e.g. ideas competitions
18–22	Tertiary education and young workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be engaged in tertiary education or work • Actively looking for skill development and employment opportunities • Higher levels of independence, however still likely to live at home • Have increased resources and independence to make decisions based on their knowledge of options and consequences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likely to find out information through social media platforms including Instagram, TikTok or LinkedIn; tertiary education; friends and family; the news; websites; academic research • More likely to participate in formal engagement such as focus groups or longer surveys if they have an active interest • Likely to be interested in engagement with a skill-development, networking or work experience component

Making youth engagement meaningful

We want to make sure that our engagement with young people is genuine and meaningful. We will align with the principles set out in the United Nations guidelines for Meaningfully Engaging with Youth endorsed by the Interagency Network on Youth Development.

SAFE

We will ensure the physical and emotional security of the young people we engage. We will always follow NSW Government procedures as well as child protection rights and responsibilities for young people under the age of 18.

RESPECTFUL

We will respect young people as contributors, innovators and knowledge-holders on the basis of their perspectives and experiences.

VALUED

We will value young people's capacities and contributions as we value those of adults. We will encourage young people to express views and ideas freely.

INCLUSIVE

We will provide equal opportunities for all, regardless of cultural and social backgrounds, education, religion, gender, disability, sexual orientation, context, political and economic status or other characteristics. We will provide opportunities for traditionally underserved young people to engage, including those not members of any structures.

Where relevant, **we will** encourage engaged young people to self-organise in inclusive, democratic structures that are informed by diverse views and experiences.

VOLUNTARY

We will give young people the opportunity to choose the most appropriate area or form of engagement, or to discontinue at any stage of the process.

TRANSPARENT

We will clearly set expectations at the outset.

INFORMATIVE + ACCOUNTABLE

We will provide engaged young people with clear, accessible, diversity-sensitive and age-appropriate information about their role.

We will explain to young people how their inputs are used, interpreted and have influenced outcomes with transparency, establishing a communication feedback loop.

YOUTH FRIENDLY

We will invest in youth-friendly and age-appropriate environments, processes, mechanisms and materials. For example, we will use participatory and inclusive methodologies and tools to support youth engagement. We will ensure there are adequate time and resources.

SUPPORTIVE

We will enable young people to build their own capabilities. We will pay special attention to the capacity needs of young people and the organisations and networks that work with them.

ADVOCATIVE

We will encourage people engaging with young people to value and adopt the principles of meaningful engagement. We will challenge unequal power dynamics between young people and others.

OUR APPROACH TO ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE

Aligning our engagement approaches with best practice

Our approaches to engaging young people align with our draft Engagement Framework and the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum.

1. Inform and educate
2. Consult and involve
3. Collaborate and empower



INFORM & EDUCATE

This approach refers to the provision of information and sharing knowledge.

Our objectives

- Young people have increased awareness of key environmental issues and what they and their communities can do to help protect the environment and human health.
- Young people see the EPA as the go-to source for information and are aware of relevant EPA initiatives and campaigns, and how they can get involved.
- EPA creates content that young people can engage with and share across a range of formats and channels, including via parents and carers, educators, schools, community organisations and on social media.

Options for achievement

- Engage the Youth Advisory Council to better understand how young people would like to engage with our content and what they value regarding the areas the EPA works in.
- Expand offering and increase promotion of teaching resources and materials for primary school, secondary school and other environmental educators on a range of topics such as organic waste, recycling, forestry, etc.
- Ensure our publications and materials, including the State of the Environment report, are shareable across a range of formats and channels, including social media.
- Ensure our social media content is creative and engaging and reflects what information young people want on environmental protection.
- Investigate the potential role social media influencers and celebrity ambassadors could play in informing and educating young people about environmental protection.

Approach 2:

CONSULT + INVOLVE

This approach is about seeking diverse views and creating opportunities to be involved in a meaningful way.

Our objectives

- Young people have increased meaningful opportunities to make contributions and provide feedback on relevant EPA policies, programs and youth initiatives.
- Young people's values, concerns and ideas are integrated into and help to shape and inform our work.
- We actively listen to and learn from the enduring and emerging values, concerns and ideas of diverse young people across NSW.
- Young people are informed when their contributions and feedback are used to improve EPA policies, programs and youth initiatives.

Options for achievement

- Establish a Youth Advisory Council to seek input from young people on a range of environmental issues and provide advice and recommendations to the EPA on issues, policies and projects that affect young people in NSW.
- Update our Community Consultative Committees' Terms of Reference to include a requirement for a youth member.
- Consider engagement on projects that will involve young people from First Nations or other culturally and language diverse (CALD) backgrounds.
- Explore and trial a range of avenues and platforms for consulting young people, including short surveys and polls, forums, pop-up booths at events as well as informal feedback via social media comments.
- Create and share content that highlights and celebrates the involvement of young people in EPA policies, programs and youth initiatives.
- Establish a baseline for current engagement of young people in EPA consultation activities and develop measures for improved participation.

Approach 3:

COLLABORATE + EMPOWER

This approach refers to innovating solutions and providing support for young people to be proactive environmental advocates.

Our objectives

- Young people are empowered with the knowledge, skills and resources to be advocates for environmental protection, no matter their area of employment or interest.
- Young people are encouraged and supported to innovate and share new ideas to help protect the environment and human health.
- Young people have opportunities to pursue their passion for environmental protection through purposeful employment, work experience and mentoring opportunities with the EPA.
- Our strong partnerships with educational institutions, youth services and youth organisations enable us to empower young people.

Options for achievement

- Identify partnerships and sponsorships with other organisations, including not-for-profit organisations that run youth environmental leadership initiatives and events the EPA could support and be involved in.
- Participate in schools/university careers days, to inspire young people to pursue their passion for environmental protection through purposeful employment.
- Re-invigorate the EPA Young Professionals Network.
- Create a 'Shadow an EPA staff member' program for members of the Youth Advisory Council.
- Investigate the potential for the EPA to sponsor an Environmental Award for youth innovation.

What we are already doing to engage young people

The EPA is already delivering a number of initiatives to engage young people. We look forward to introducing new initiatives and refining our current ones to better reach young people across NSW.

Some of the current initiatives run by the EPA include:

ENVIRONMENT YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL

In 2022 the EPA established the inaugural Environment Youth Advisory Council, consisting of 12 members aged 15–22 from all over NSW that represent a diversity of young people living in NSW. The advisory council will meet three times a year, either online or in person, to discuss issues and provide advice and recommendations to the EPA on environmental issues, policies and projects that affect young people in NSW.

The objectives of the council are to:

- Gain insights into the opinions of young people in NSW to ensure the EPA's policies and programs genuinely consider the perspectives and impacts on young people
- Provide members with a unique opportunity to learn about the role of the EPA and gain skills advising on policy, programs and social media content
- Enable young people's input to a broader EPA Youth Engagement Strategy
- Share EPA education information with members.

DEVELOPING LEARNING RESOURCES AND SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS

The EPA has developed free curriculum-linked resources for schools on the Return and Earn program and is currently providing learning resources for the Love Food Hate Waste program Lunch out Loud.

These resources provide teachers with practical ways to engage students on sustainability and recycling issues. They also support schools' participation in the Return and Earn container deposit scheme, that gives community members a 10-cent refund when they return an eligible drink container. Schools are also able to use this as a fundraising opportunity.

The EPA is also working with the Department of Education's Environmental and Zoo Education Centre network to introduce learning resources on the NSW Plastics Plan into 20 schools in NSW.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH YOUTH-ORIENTED ORGANISATIONS

The EPA is a corporate member and annual conference partner of the Australian Association of Environmental Educators (AAEE) NSW – an organisation with connections to environmental educators in schools, universities, local councils and regional environmental education centres.

Formal partnerships were also formed in 2022 with a number of other youth-oriented organisations including Girl Guides' Association NSW, Take 3 and several universities to share messaging on and assist in delivery of the NSW Plastics Plan.

OUR PLAN FOR ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE

Actions	Approach	Measures
Priority 1 – Short term (6 months – 18 months)		
1.1 Establish a Youth Advisory Council to seek input from young people on a range of environmental issues and provide advice and recommendations to the EPA on issues, policies and projects that affect young people in NSW. Engage the Council to better understand how young people would like to engage with our content and what they value regarding the areas the EPA work in.	Inform and Educate Consult and Involve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of meetings held • Number of issues YAC provides advice and recommendations on • Levels of satisfaction with the engagement process at the end of the YAC term
1.2 Create and share content that highlights and celebrates the involvement of young people in EPA policies, programs and youth initiatives.	Consult and Involve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of newsletter articles, website updates and social media posts via NSW EPA channels
1.3 Ensure our publications and materials, including the State of the Environment report, are shareable across a range of formats and channels, including social media.	Inform and Educate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan developed to increase shareability of relevant NSW EPA campaigns (shareable tiles, infographics, graphs and stories) • Increased engagement on NSW EPA social media channels
1.4 Ensure our social media content is creative and engaging and reflects what information young people want on environmental protection.	Inform and Educate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review existing social media content and develop action plan to improve youth engagement • Trial YAC social media takeover
1.5 Establish a baseline for current engagement of young people in EPA consultation activities and develop measures for improved participation.	Consult and Involve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baseline and measures established • Commence monitoring of measures over time
1.6 Re-invigorate EPA Young Professionals Network.	Collaborate and Empower	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of networking events held and the number of participants involved

Actions	Approach	Measures
Priority 2 – Medium term (18 months – 3 years)		
<p>2.1 Actively encourage young people to participate on our Community Consultative Committees and update future Terms of Reference accordingly. Ensure the committees are accessible for young people.</p>	<p>Consult and Involve</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terms of reference updated
<p>2.2 Explore opportunity to host a Youth Leadership Forum bringing high school students across NSW together to discuss key environmental matters of concern.</p>	<p>Collaborate and Empower</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Leadership Forum delivered
<p>2.3 Explore opportunities to provide education on environmental issues to Aboriginal and other culturally and language diverse young people, including on waste and climate change, e.g. through schools or events such as the Koori Knockout, Yabun or multicultural festivals.</p>	<p>Inform and Educate Consult and involve</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of young people engaged, • Value of feedback • Choice of learning
<p>2.4 Investigate potential collaborations with universities that run courses on environmental protection, such as Career Trackers for young Aboriginal tertiary students or internships.</p>	<p>Collaborate and Empower</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with universities to identify opportunities for collaboration • Viability of scholarship investigated
<p>2.5 Identify partnerships and sponsorships with other organisations, including not-for-profit organisations that run youth environmental leadership initiatives and events the EPA could support and be involved in.</p>	<p>Collaborate and Empower</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List of potential partnership organisations identified • Liaise with priority partners to identify opportunities for collaboration
<p>2.6 Investigate the potential role social media influencers and celebrity ambassadors could play in informing and educating young people about environmental protection.</p>	<p>Inform and Educate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trial campaign using influencers and/or ambassadors

Actions	Approach	Measures
<p>2.7 Establish an internal working group including young staff to explore how to improve the engagement of young people with EPA policies, programs and youth initiatives.</p>	<p>Consult and Involve</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal working group established • Number of meetings held

Actions	Approach	Measures
<p>Priority 3 – Long term (3 years – 5 years)</p>		
<p>3.1 Investigate the potential for EPA to support an Environmental Award for youth innovation.</p>	<p>Collaborate and Empower</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viability of award investigated
<p>3.2 Attend careers fairs and present at schools/universities to inspire young people to pursue their passion for environmental protection through purposeful employment.</p>	<p>Collaborate and Empower</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of fairs attended • Number of presentations at schools/universities
<p>3.3 Explore the potential of creating an EPA podcast targeted towards environmental protection and young people.</p>	<p>Inform and Educate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Viability of podcast investigated



