

The Australian Youth Forum

**A new era in youth
consultation**

**A discussion paper
17 March 2008**

**Closing date for consultation
30 May 2008**

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The Australian Government intends to establish the Australian Youth Forum (AYF) to ensure that young people and the youth sector have a framework for putting forward their ideas and concerns to the Australian Government. Its establishment will be led by the Hon. Kate Ellis, MP, Minister for Youth.

This discussion paper forms the basis of a public consultation process about the Australian Youth Forum and how the Australian Government can improve the way young people and the youth sector are able to influence the policies, programs and services that impact on them.

This paper has been written as a guide to individuals and organisations wishing to make a submission.

The Government is looking for input in two key areas:

- What the role and functions should be for the Australian Youth Forum and how it should operate; and
- The key issues affecting young people today.

Introduction

A great deal of rousing rhetoric is often spoken about young people. Phrases such as: “young people are the nation’s future”; “they are a valuable resource”; “they should be consulted about issues affecting their lives” are easy to trot out.

But these sorts of statements can sometimes be received with caution and considered with some cynicism.

The Rudd Labor Government is determined to turn this rhetoric into a reality at a national level and challenge that cynicism and caution by ensuring that young Australians are actively involved in the conversations the Federal Government has about them.

This Government recognises that young people are not just the future; they are also important citizens, contributing in a variety of significant ways now. The Government also understands that young people have unique perspectives, useful insights and important opinions. Young people are the best experts on issues affecting them.

And this Government is aware that young people want more than token efforts when it comes to consultation; they want to be involved in ways that are accessible and meaningful to them. They want their input to be given serious consideration by Government.

The Rudd Government also knows that the youth sector, those who work with and for young people in our community, have particular expertise in relation to the issues facing young Australians, and they seek greater opportunities to engage federally.

And the Government recognises that the current generation of young Australians are facing issues and challenges unique to their generation; the housing affordability crisis, the cost of getting a tertiary education, the impact of climate change to name a few. To prevent the widening of a “generational divide” in this country, the needs and issues of young Australians require attention at the highest levels of Government.

For these reasons, the Government will be fulfilling an election commitment by establishing an Australian Youth Forum and welcomes the input of young people, the youth sector and other interested parties in shaping their plans for the AYF.

The Australian Youth Forum

The AYF will act as a formal communication channel for young people and the youth sector, replacing the previous government's National Youth Roundtable.

While the Government is seeking input into the precise model for the AYF through this consultation process, it has envisaged that the Australian Youth Forum will include the following elements:

- Youth participation—representatives aged between 15 and 24 to discuss issues of importance and advise the government in relevant policy development. The AYF will give young people real, meaningful opportunities to interact with Government about issues affecting their lives. Ongoing dialogue will be a feature of this. The AYF's youth participation will be inclusive; recognising the diversity of interests, cultures, needs and life circumstances of young people and ensuring that this diversity is reflected in the AYF. The Government intends that the AYF provide a range of different mechanisms for youth participation to cater for such diversity. The Government recognises that youth consultation needs to reflect emerging trends in technology and the changing social contexts of young people.
- Coordinating dialogue between youth sector organisations, autonomous youth services and the Government. The AYF will also provide feedback in relation to services and programs specific to young people.
- Be grounded in evidence and will draw on sound research including the latest literature and national and international best practice. The Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies will ideally work closely with the Australian Youth Forum so that members are made aware of the most up-to-date information and latest research.
- Will include a capacity for the Minister for Youth to engage with young people around Australia on a regular basis in a series of face-to-face forums. And the Minister will be seeking the views of young people whose voices often don't get heard through the more structured consultation measures.
- Will communicate with the Minister for Youth. However, the Government also recognises that policies affecting young people's lives are developed across the full range of portfolios in government. It is envisaged that the AYF will channel feedback from young people and the youth sector to government more broadly.

The Consultation Process Explained

Consultations will occur from 17 March and will run through to 30 May 2008.

In addition to these formal consultations, the Minister will also take into consideration an analysis of existing models of youth participation, relevant work of the National Youth Roundtable as well as discussion about the AYF to be held during the 2020 Youth Summit on 12 and 13 April.

There will be opportunities to participate in consultations in two ways:

- Through online submissions; and
- Through participation in group meetings.

Meetings will be held in every capital city and a number of regional centres. Details of the time and venues for each of these meetings will be published on www.thesource.gov.au on 15 April 2008. To attend a meeting in these locations you must first register your interest (registration form will also be available on www.thesource.gov.au on 15 April 2008).

Information on how to participate will be available widely, including via thesource website, on youth radio, youth specific websites and through existing youth sector agencies and other networks.

To make a submission, or register to attend a consultation meeting, simply go to www.thesource.gov.au.

The results will be compiled in a concise report which will be published on www.thesource.gov.au.

It is expected that the Minister will make an announcement about the Australian Youth Forum soon after the consultation process has been concluded.

Your Input

Your input is sought on:

- The appropriate role, functions and operation of the Australian Youth Forum; and
- The priority youth issues which would inform the work of the Forum.

Relevant Background Information

The National Youth Roundtable

Between 1999 and 2008, the National Youth Roundtable was the Australian Government's primary youth consultation mechanism. It brought together 45 young people aged 15 to 24 years from all areas around Australia and various cultural backgrounds to meet with representatives of the previous Australian Government to discuss and explore issues that impact on young people.

The Rudd Government is aware that there were a range of concerns and criticisms expressed about the previous government's approach to youth engagement and consultation through the Roundtable.

The establishment of the Roundtable coincided with the previous government's decision to defund the Australian Youth Policy and Action Coalition, the former national peak youth body.

In pursuing their election commitment to replace the National Youth Roundtable with the AYF, the Government will seek to build upon successful aspects of the Roundtable while expanding the Government's capacity to engage with young people and the youth sector in new ways.

Questions about the Role, Functions and Operation of the Australian Youth Forum

These following questions should be considered as a guide only. If there are other aspects of the Australian Youth Forum you have comments on, you are encouraged to make them.

Q 1. What should be the role (or roles) of the Australian Youth Forum?

e.g. to advocate for young people, to represent young people or the youth sector as a whole, to advise government on youth issues, to be the voice of youth, to improve the portrayal of young people in the media and the general community.

Q 2. What functions should the Australian Youth Forum undertake?

e.g. research capacity and tasks (either itself or in cooperation with other relevant bodies), development opportunities for young people (e.g. leadership), on-going and ad hoc consultations (perhaps utilising new communications technologies), training workshops, policy conferences, media or social commentary and/or analysis.

Q 3. How will the Australian Youth Forum consult?

e.g. with young people direct, through youth organisations, how regularly should the consultations be held, face-to-face, using new media.

Q 4. Who will the Australian Youth Forum 'represent'?

e.g. young people directly, youth organisations, young members of other organisations, young people not affiliated with any organisation, or a mix of all these.

Q 5. What type of organisation should the Australian Youth Forum be?

e.g. Board/Committee directed, membership-based, peak body, representational, advocacy, outside of government.

Q 6. Who would the Australian Youth Forum include?

e.g. young people; other individuals with knowledge and understanding of youth issues and the youth sector, including youth workers; organisations with an interest, services and expertise in youth affairs; or a mix of all of these.

Q 7. What capacity should the Australian Youth Forum have?

e.g. provide secretariat and/or consultation functions using in-house resources, ability to purchase and manage external services and suppliers, flexible and scaleable structure and staff to undertake significant one-off or annual activities.

Q 8. What role would young people have in the Australian Youth Forum?

e.g. direct involvement as decision makers, members of management structures, individuals on committees, advocates in the media and/or broader community.

Q.9 How can the Australian Youth Forum ensure all young people have the opportunity to be heard?

e.g. different strategies to engage people at different ages (15–17years, 18–20 years, 21–24years etc), Indigenous-specific options.

Q.10 What role would youth organisations have in the Australian Youth Forum?

e.g. direct involvement as decision makers, members of management structures, represented on committees.

Priority Youth Issues

The first task for the newly formed Australian Youth Forum would be to develop a work plan based on key youth issues. Please let us know (in priority order) what you feel are the top five issues facing young people, particularly those issues that might be addressed nationally.

Next Steps

Through your responses, the Australian Government hopes to develop the Australian Youth Forum in a way that accurately reflects the needs and wants of young people and other key stakeholders.

Your feedback on what the key issues impacting on young Australians are, will help set a direction for the work of the Australian Youth Forum over the next 12 months, and inform Government youth policy and program development.

Once the outcomes of these consultations have been taken into consideration, the Minister for Youth will make the final decision on how the Australian Youth Forum will operate. An announcement is expected to be made soon after the consultations process has been completed.

How to provide feedback

Written submissions are required by close of business on Friday, 30 May 2008 and should be emailed to:

youthforum@deewr.gov.au or by post to:

Australian Youth Forum Consultation
Youth Bureau
Location 136
Department of Education, Employment and
Workplace Relations
GPO Box 9880
Canberra Mail Centre ACT 2601

You can download a submission template at
www.thesource.gov.au

Where to find out more

Enquiries about this discussion paper can be directed to:

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An electronic version of this discussion paper can be found at www.thesource.gov.au

The fine print—confidentiality

Unless you request that your submission be treated confidentially, submissions may be made publicly available on Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) websites as part of the consultation process. In addition, you may wish to note that, because DEEWR may be required to release your submission by the operation of law, judicial or Parliamentary body or government agency, the Department can give no undertaking that your submission will never be made publicly available.

If you would like your submission to be kept confidential, please indicate clearly at the top of your document or in a covering note. If only part of your response is confidential, please put that part on a separate page.

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