

Amplifying the Voices of Young People

Prepared for the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation 2021-2024 Strategic Review

By YLab, a social enterprise of the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA)

The Foundation for Young Australians and YLab acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet and work throughout Australia. We pay our respects to their elders past, present, and emerging and acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

Statement of Focus

Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation (VFFF) is developing a new three year funding strategy, which will focus on backing young people.

While young people's voices shape (ideally co-design) all programs and services (from mental health to the environment) where young people are the key beneficiary -- of equal importance must be the resourcing of dedicated "amplifying youth voice" programs, enabling young people to self-determine problems, set priorities, and *be heard* in the public realm.

By focusing on Amplifying Youth Voice, VFFF has the opportunity to invest in increasing young people's agency to drive change on the issues that matter to them most while strengthening democratic participation.

This paper

- explores the 'why' and 'what' of current practice in 'amplifying youth voice';
- maps the funding landscape (philanthropic, government, and corporate) in NSW; and,
- provides indicative examples of initiatives VFFF might back if this theme is pursued.

There is a unique opportunity for VFFF to focus on funding initiatives that increase the representation of young people experiencing significant structural injustice, namely those in and of rural and regional settings, First Nations young people, and culturally and linguistically diverse young people.

Methodology

VFFF engaged YLab to prepare this paper. FYA and YLab assembled a project team including two young people (Edward and Nathaniel, YLab Associates) and seven internal subject matter experts in youth advocacy, capacity-building, and engagement. The co-creation of the report with young people is an example of youth voice 'in action'. Edward and Nathaniel completed 50 hours of paid employment, developed capabilities in hypothesis testing, conducted qualitative research and report writing as part of the project.

Beyond the expertise of the team, the findings and recommendations draw upon:

- Eleven specifically conducted interviews with "Amplifying youth voice" initiatives to test hypotheses, identify high-impact initiatives, and form the funding criteria' foundations.
- Desk research and papers, referenced in the footnotes

More than fifty additional interviews on the same theme conducted by FYA as part of our shared interest in this space (these were conducted principally from November 2020 - February 2021, before securing this project). These interviews were with a cross section of youth-led organisations, Children's

Commissioners, social sector organisations, and philanthropy.

Why “Amplifying youth voice”?

Tackling chronic disempowerment

Opportunity is not spread evenly in a system stacked against young people - the impact of COVID-19 promises that young people will face a weak labour market, disrupted education experience and increased uncertainty around their future - especially those already experiencing structural disadvantage.

Young people in NSW are chronically disempowered - marginalised from discussion and decisions on the policies and practices that affect their lives - from the education model to the accessibility of income support. This lack of visibility and involvement means their needs may not be prioritised, and contributes to a sense of powerlessness:

- Only 7% of young people feel represented in politics, and only 13% feel heard and respected more broadly.¹
- 60% of young people believe ‘Politicians care more about businesses, corporations, and older people than they do about what people like me think’.²
- While young people use ‘intelligent’, ‘wordly’, ‘respectful’ and ‘go-getter’ to describe their generation, the way they understand adults’ perception of them is different - ‘lazy’, ‘entitled’ but also ‘intelligent’.³
- Media coverage across 160 articles on economic wellbeing during COVID-19 showed positive sentiment for Generation Z at 7%, compared to 31% for baby boomers. Furthermore, 59% of articles mentioning young people in the headline failed to include youth voice through quotes or case studies.⁴
- The 2019 Federal Election saw large declines in turnout in Australia’s electorates with the highest proportion of young voters.⁵

Young people want to be heard - and can play a key role in systems change

At the same time, young people are engaging in democracy and expressing themselves in their own impactful ways.

In 2019, NSW high school students played key roles in the organisation of the School Climate Strikes. From the small rural town of Wollar, to regional centres such as Albury and Orange, and Sydney’s streets - demonstrating their passion, forging a civic identity while inspiring a significant shift in public support for

¹ UN Youth Australia. 2019. *Australian Youth Representative Consultation Report*.

<https://unyouth.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2019-YOUTH-REPRESENTATIVE-REPORT.pdf>

² Foundation for Young Australians. 2020. Political Attitudes and COVID-19 survey. <https://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Foundation-for-Young-Australians-Reserach-Report-2020-D2-1.pdf>

³ Gani, A. 2016. *Millennials at work: five stereotypes - and why they are (mostly) wrong*. The Guardian.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/15/millennials-work-five-stereotypes-generation-y-jobs>

⁴ Foundation for Young Australians. 2020. Missing: Young People in the Australian News Media. https://www.fya.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/FYA2020_Missing-Young-People-in-Australian-News-Media.pdf

⁵ Wright, S. and Koslowski, M. 2019. *Voter turnout at record low after young people disengage*. Sydney Morning Herald.

<https://www.smh.com.au/federal-election-2019/voter-turnout-at-record-low-after-young-people-disengage-20190530-p51sol.html>

more decisive climate action.⁶

First Nations young people who are part of the SEED Indigenous Youth Climate Network have played a lead role in the campaign to prevent natural gas's fracking and the destruction of the Aboriginal country in the Northern Territory⁷.

In recent weeks, current and recent NSW high school students have driven a national conversation about misogyny and consent that has led to significant policy and practice shifts from State governments to top private schools⁸.

And right now, several young people are running a campaign highlighting how COVID-19 has compounded already significant barriers demonstrating eligibility for Youth Allowance, notably for regional youth moving to the city for study.

Young people across the political spectrum say a greater diversity and representation of young people in decision-making would increase engagement. International studies have found meaningful engagement with young people can lead to greater government innovation and economic development.⁹

In the US, where there is a more significant philanthropic investment in amplifying youth voice, we have seen youth-led groups play vital roles in the most recent national reform debates. March for Our Lives (a youth movement driven by students who experienced the Parkland school shooting) has successfully lobbied for dozens of new State gun-safety laws and registered 800,000 young people to vote. They have received at least \$20 million in funding¹⁰. Investing several million dollars are significant foundations such as the Rockefeller Bros Fund¹¹ into The Sunrise Movement, an innovative youth-led climate movement credited with strongly influencing the Biden administration's early appointments and its \$2T Green Infrastructure bill¹². Similar efforts led by young people and heavily funded by philanthropy have been key to debates around immigration, gender equality and criminal justice reforms.

Our review of research on young Australians from 2019-2021 consistently highlighted several areas of greatest need and interest identified by young people in NSW aged 12-25: quality education, mental health support, and employment access. These are key advocacy areas where young people can harness youth voices for systemic change.

Multi-pronged impact

When most effective, programs that amplify youth voices straddle the twin concepts of *youth development*

⁶ Cox, L. 2019. *Climate strike in Australia: everything you need to know about Friday's protest*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/sep/14/going-to-the-streets-again-what-you-need-to-know-about-fridays-climate-strike#:~:text=Strikes%20are%20planned%20in%20120,as%20Albury%2C%20Orange%20and%20Bendigo>

⁷ SBS The Feed, 2020. "The Young Indigenous Woman Fighting Fracking in Remote NT" <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/the-feed/the-young-indigenous-woman-fighting-fracking-in-remote-nt>

⁸ SBS News, 2020, "Petition calling for better sexual consent education in NSW gets bipartisan backing" <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/petition-calling-for-better-sexual-consent-education-in-nsw-gets-bipartisan-backing>

⁹ OECD. 2019. *Engaging Young People in Open Government: a communication guide*. <https://www.oecd.org/mena/governance/Young-people-in-OG.pdf>

¹⁰ March for our Lives, funding disclosure form, 2018. <https://www.causeiq.com/organizations/march-for-our-lives-action-fund,824535615/#form990s>

¹¹ Inside Philanthropy, 2019. "Sunrise movement is shaking up the climate debate - will more funders pay attention" <https://www.insidephilanthropy.com/home/2019/1/7/sunrise-movement-is-shaking-up-the-climate-debate-will-more-funders-pay-attention>

¹² Time Magazine, 2020, "The Sunrise Movement is an early winner in the Biden Administration, now comes the hard part". <https://edition.cnn.com/2021/01/02/politics/biden-administration-sunrise-movement-climate/index.html>

(supporting young people's immediate needs, skills, agency, and connectedness)¹³ and *systems change* (addressing systemic issues at their roots in policy or culture). They are transformative both for young people directly engaged but also their peers and communities. Amplifying young people's voices means moving their voices from the margins towards the centre of policy conversations.

Investing in youth voice offers tangible benefits beyond young people being heard:

| <i>For the individual</i> | <i>For communities</i> | <i>For institutions</i> |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased sense of agency and confidence through opportunities to learn, meet new people and engage in values-aligned activities ● Development of skills that are also transferable across other areas of life, including employment and strengthening personal relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Improved wellbeing through increased belonging to their communities and the creation of strong and safe networks¹⁴ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● When institutions engage young people's expertise, they do a better job of keeping up with the rapid pace of global change and design more fit-for-purpose services and practices.¹⁵ |

Conceptualising youth voice

“Youth voice” tends to connote stereotypes of student politicians and essay contests. But this is not (or at least mostly) about your classic high school debating contest.

Whether it be support for a youth arts company (that provides a platform for young people to share their stories and experiences on stage), a youth-led campaign group (mobilising their peers in support of a policy change), or an organisation that facilitates young people's co-design of policy and services -- amplifying youth voice is not simply about shining a bigger spotlight on individual young people.

Done well, this work supports young people to engage their peers and lead their communities (potentially including institutions) so that young people's voices have more power and impact.

“It all comes back to genuine engagement of young people. If you were sitting in a meeting with 5 adults. If someone got constantly talked over, you'd make a point. People don't always do that with young people.” - Shopfront Youth Theatre

¹³ UN Youth Australia. 2019. *Australian Youth Representative Consultation Report*. <https://unyouth.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2019-YOUTH-REPRESENTATIVE-REPORT.pdf>

¹⁴ UN Youth Australia. 2019. *Australian Youth Representative Consultation Report*. <https://unyouth.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2019-YOUTH-REPRESENTATIVE-REPORT.pdf>

¹⁵ Act for Youth. 2021. Principles of Positive Youth Development. http://actforyouth.net/youth_development/development/

“Young people may be 20% of the population, but they are 100% percent of the future.” - *Picture You In Agriculture*

“I recognise the power in what young people have to say.” - *YLab*

“It all starts from what young people tell us” - *Youth Action NSW*

| Stereotypical conception of ‘youth voice’ | Recommended approach |
|---|---|
| Problem ¹⁶ (young people lack a voice and we need to give them one). | Solution (young people’s voice is valuable but isn’t heard enough - we need to amplify it). |
| Young people from more privileged backgrounds. | Diverse young people, including those facing injustice and with unique lived experiences and expertise. |
| “Voice” structured as competition ¹⁷ . | “Voice” structured as encouraging young people to collaborate with their peers. |
| Mock events - parliament, trials. | Real-world influence, campaigns, a seat at the decision-making table. |
| Personal leadership development only. | Community and ecosystems development and systems change. |
| Programs designed and run by adults, who may also assess or validate young people’s voices. | Young people actively engaged in leading the program from design to delivery. |

Characteristics of high-impact initiatives

Across our research, we identified various characteristics in high-impact initiatives. Guided by young people and other subject matter experts in the youth voice space, we created funding criteria to identify early and established talent.

| Characteristics | Initial success metrics |
|---|---|
| Young people | |
| Young people are involved at every level, including decision-making, co-design, and participation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth-informed: “have a say” (low) Co-designed: actively involved in creating, strategising (medium) Youth-led: young people partnering with organisations to lead the process (high) |
| Organisations commit to reducing the | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diverse groups of young people are involved, |

¹⁶ Sahlberg, P. 2020. *Are Australian students receiving the school education they deserve?* ABC News. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-03-09/education-policy-learning-problem-australia-schooling-funding/12034350>

¹⁷ Duraipah, A. 2015. *International Youth Day: we need to give young people a voice in decision-making.* The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/aug/12/international-youth-day-give-young-people-a-voice-in-decision-making>

| | |
|---|---|
| engagement barriers young people face | <p>speaking to their own experience - not one young person speaking for all other young people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people are paid for their time and involvement in initiatives |
| Organisation is committed to the growth of young people | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation has a framework for progression/development in the skills or experience of all young people they work with |
| Systemic change | |
| The challenges the initiatives address are deemed important and relevant by the community they affect | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The degree to which the decisions of young people are implemented • Initiative's leadership understand how to shift power to young people and work in partnership with young people and demonstrate a willingness to partner genuinely |
| Initiatives have a clear theory of change that considers systems thinking and is informed by evidence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A proposal has articulated a theory of change, if not the funder has resources and coaching available that enable initiatives to define this • Logic, evidence and theoretical concepts are provided to support the project's delivery of outcomes |
| The level of boldness and appetite for calculated risk in tackling the challenge | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation in audience, method, technique and technologies used to deliver the initiative • Non-numerical project outcomes are identified, indicating deep engagement with young people |
| Partnerships | |
| Strong partnerships in their communities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiatives demonstrate they work through partnerships with others and are connected to their relevant communities |
| Appetite for cross-sector collaboration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-principle agreements with other parties in the sector to share learnings and insights |
| Capacity | |
| Strong leadership within the initiative | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values-based leadership - a common set of core principles - within the leadership of the initiative with protection for succession planning |
| Initiatives recruit good talent with relevant lived experiences and technical skills | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The team have lived experience of issues they are working on and advocating for • Initiatives demonstrate formal and informal capacity-building programs and coaching mechanisms for teams |
| Capacity to scale as needed | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiative models are replicable and scalable |

The funding landscape for youth voice in NSW

While many dedicated people and organisations are supporting young people across NSW, youth voice is significantly under-resourced in NSW compared to Victoria. This comparison has been made because of the similarities between youth populations in the two states.

Lack of Government Funding

Governments are a primary funder of education and youth services. Youth-centred service delivery organisations receive significant amounts of their funding from the government to address identified needs (e.g. homelessness, mental health treatment)¹⁸. By contrast, youth-voice organisations are chronically under-resourced and typically rely on teams of passionate young volunteers committed to creating change around other paid work opportunities and study commitments.

Partly, this is structural. Young people's interests span policy areas across diverse levels of government (from school to local, state and federal government, and even international fora), and there is a tendency towards buck-passing.

At a State level, NSW still appears behind compared to other states and territories. While Victoria has a long-standing, joined-up state Youth Policy¹⁹ (including an update soon to be released), the last policy statement from NSW was in 1998.²⁰ Below is a comparison of the investment in youth voice initiatives in Victoria compared to NSW.

| | VIC | NSW |
|---|--|--|
| Budget allocation to youth voice initiatives | \$43.3 million in 2020-21 ^{*21} | \$1.4 million in 2020-21 ^{*22 23} (\$554,000 is rural/regional-specific) |
| Priority concerns and objectives | Empowering Indigenous youth, community development for CALD youth, creating communities for young people ²⁴ | Skill development ²⁵ |
| Funding of peak body for young people | Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic) | Youth Action NSW \$909,000 in 2019-20 ²⁷ |

¹⁸ Foundation for Young Australians. 2021. Youth-led advocacy campaigning landscape (internal).

¹⁹ Department of Health and Human Services. 2016. *Youth Policy: Building Stronger Youth Engagement in Victoria*. Victoria State Government. <http://youthlaw.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Youth-Policy-%E2%80%93-Building-Stronger-Youth-Engagement-in-Victoria.pdf>

²⁰ NSW Government. 2020. *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998 No 157*.

<https://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-1998-157>

²¹ Department of Treasury and Finance. 2020. *Victorian Budget 2020/21: Service Delivery: Budget Paper No. 3*. State of Victoria.

<https://www.dtf.vic.gov.au/2020-21-state-budget/2020-21-service-delivery>

²² NSW Government. *Budget Statement 2020-21: Budget Paper No. 1*. <https://www.treasury.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-11/Budget%20Paper%20No.%201%20-%20Budget%20Statement%20-%202020-21%20Budget.pdf>

²³ Youth NSW. 2021. *Funded Projects 2020*. NSW Government. <https://www.youth.nsw.gov.au/youth-opportunities/funded-projects-2020>

²⁴ Department of Treasury and Finance. 2020. *Victorian Budget 2020/21: Service Delivery: Budget Paper No. 3*. State of Victoria.

<https://www.dtf.vic.gov.au/2020-21-state-budget/2020-21-service-delivery>

²⁵ Youth NSW. 2021. *Funded Projects 2020*. NSW Government. <https://www.youth.nsw.gov.au/youth-opportunities/funded-projects-2020>

²⁷ Youth Action. 2020. *Youth Action 2019-2020 Annual Report*. https://www.youthaction.org.au/annual_reports_and_financials

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | <p>\$3.8 million in 2019-20²⁶</p> <p>Victoria’s funding also secures several fully-fledged youth-voice initiatives such as</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Koorie Youth Council ● Youth Disability Advocacy Service ● Victorian Student Representative Council ● Victorian Youth Congress (statutory youth advisory council) | |
|--|--|--|

Federal Government

At the Federal level, there have been promising signs of renewed support for youth voice programs, including a \$1m grant program in 2020. However, at present these appear to be once-offs, and a proposed National Youth Policy Framework due for release in 2020 has stalled²⁸.

Risks in any reliance on government funding

Dependence on government (at any level, or party control) for support presents risks for the independence and longevity of youth voice initiatives. There is a repeated history of the government’s defunding of youth voice structures after expressing dissatisfaction with government policy. A 57% cut in youth engagement funding in the 2013 budget saw the closure of the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition, National Youth Week, the National Youth Awards, and the Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies²⁹.

Further, when youth initiatives are run directly by a Department, they cannot easily accept additional resources (such as philanthropy) and are limited to a scale, scope, and level of influence determined by the bureaucracy (rather than young people’s ambition).

Corporate funding

Funding to NSW youth voice initiatives from the corporate sector is limited. Desktop research into the AFR Top 50 Corporate Givers failed to identify any current grant-making to youth voice initiatives. Funding focused more generally on young people from bluechip companies tends to be directed to adult-led programs to strengthen young people’s digital skills and entrepreneurial mindset, career guidance and vocational training. These important areas are a natural focus for corporate Australia grounded in their business experience, desire for measurable outcomes, and risk tolerance - but they are not about empowering young people to have a say and set an agenda on issues that matter to them.

²⁶ Youth Affairs Council Victoria. *Annual Report 2019-20*. <https://www.yacvic.org.au/assets/Uploads/YACVic-Annual-Report-2019-20-Accessible.docx>

²⁸ National Youth Policy Framework, Australian Department of Health, 2020 - <https://www.health.gov.au/initiatives-and-programs/national-youth-policy-framework#funding>

²⁹ The New Daily, 2013, “Abbott Government doesn’t care about young people” <https://thenewdaily.com.au/news/national/2015/06/14/government-doesnt-care-young-people/>

One embryonic corporate foundation to watch is that of venture capital firm Blackbird, which are focused on creativity and expression and have contributed support for the new youth engagement initiative Ripple.³⁰

The role of philanthropy

Given the inherent challenges the government and the corporate sector face in funding this area, there is a crucial role for philanthropy.

Australian philanthropy can also look to a range of international philanthropies who have invested in this space for decades: the Andrus Family Foundation and Ford Foundation (US), the McConnell Foundation (Canada), Open Society (globally), and quasi-government funders such as UN agencies, the British Council, the European Youth Foundation.

NSW philanthropy has historically lagged behind Victoria in funding youth voice initiatives (where funders such as the Reichstein Foundation and Donkeywheel Trust seeded VicSRC before it obtained Government support). Nevertheless, the more recent growth of PAFs and increased philanthropic interest in systems-level change has seen an increase in NSW philanthropists funding youth voice initiatives. A standout example would be the Purves Environmental Fund's long-term core funding for the Australian Youth Climate Coalition.

Through our conversations with 30+ Australian philanthropic funders since mid-2020, FYA has found a growing, if still embryonic, appetite for further investment in youth voice programs. In some cases, this is explicit. For others, there is a recognition that young voices will be necessary to their broader systems change agenda on issues ranging from more affordable housing to education to climate change.

The Foundation for Young Australians pivoted in 2021 to focus entirely on backing young people to create systems change. This includes a \$4 million annual investment from its endowment in youth participation infrastructure, program design & seed-funding, co-investment mobilisation, and evaluation. FYA's strategy is underpinned by research privately commissioned from US-based *Global & Collective*, which identified six critical support types: trusted relationships, convenings, training, flexible funding, long-term partnerships, and infrastructure.³¹

Structuring philanthropic investment into youth voice

Youth voice initiatives often have inherent challenges when it comes to soliciting and receiving philanthropic support whether it be fundraising capacity, experience in governance, and a lack of DGR status (or even any formal legal structures). Projects that break down 'issue silos' when it comes to system change and advocacy initiatives struggle to obtain DGR status - meaning powerful youth-led initiatives may have a lifespan of only a few years.

Historically, Australia has lacked the robust ecosystem of fiscal sponsorship and intermediaries that help overcome these challenges in the US -- channeling philanthropic investment to earlier stage US-youth voice initiatives and supporting back-office needs. Approximately half the Andrus Family Foundation's grantees listed on their website currently appear auspiced by fiscal sponsors.

³⁰Ripple. 2020. <https://ripple.com.au/>

³¹ Global & Collective. 2020. Private research commissioned by FYA (internal).

Potential priorities and pipeline for investment

The state of the pipeline

At present, a limited number of large-scale investment-ready youth voices are "up and running." This should not be taken as a sign that funding is not required - on the contrary, it is because so little funding has been available. Few NSW social sector leaders have let themselves "dream big" and scope or pilot scalable initiatives - the inevitable result of market forces is that a weak supply of funds becomes matched by reduced demand from grantees.

If VFFF clarifies this area of interest, the project pipeline will likely widen significantly over the coming years. VFFF might flag interest in the area at least 3-6 months before making significant grants, enabling further ideas to seed and shape up over the remainder of 2021.

Selecting priority cohorts

While all young people are disproportionately impacted by the compounding challenges in education, employment and mental ill health, our analysis has found **Rural and regional, First Nations and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse** young people aged 15-25 in NSW will be some of the most significantly impacted across the three challenges over the next 3-5 years. Yet, they are underrepresented in the decision-making and the design of solutions to these challenges. The pipeline of initiatives below are organised by priority cohorts, where further detail is provided on the unique challenges that influence the underrepresentation experienced by these cohorts.

Priority cohort 1: Rural and regional young people

In regional NSW, young people experience unique challenges. Skills training is sparse, unemployment is rising, there are limited mental health services and there are few places for young people to connect or feel like they belong,³² making social isolation more likely.³³ *"There is no Headspace in Port Stephens ... if you're stuck on a waitlist after courageously asking for help, you feel worthless."*³⁴

There is an exciting opportunity for VFFF to support young people from this priority cohort to re-engage with meaningful skills development and employment and community connection through agriculture and media engagement.

Priority cohort 2: Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Young People

Young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds across NSW bring a wide range of skills and experiences. However, the support they receive to participate in society is greatly limited. In particular, young people from migrants and refugee backgrounds experience unique challenges

³² NSW Government. 2020. *Regional NSW Youth Action Plan: Empowering youth in regional NSW*.

https://www.regional.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/1244345/NSW-Regional-Youth-Action-Plan.pdf

³³ NSW Government. 2020. *NSW Regional Youth Framework*. https://www.regional.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1243912/NSW-Regional-Youth-Framework.pdf

³⁴ UN Youth Australia. 2019. *Australian Youth Representative Consultation Report*.

<https://unyouth.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/2019-YOUTH-REPRESENTATIVE-REPORT.pdf>

in settlement: trauma, disrupted education or employment, and the overall frustration of settling into a new environment.³⁵

A targeted approach is needed to address CALD, migrant and refugee communities' needs in re-engaging with education, mental health, and employment.

Priority cohort 3: First Nations young people

Young people from First Nations communities across NSW face significant barriers in the transition to adulthood. This includes inter-generational trauma, racism and prejudice, and socioeconomic injustice,³⁶ which prevents them from amplifying their voices. Statistically, Indigenous youth are more likely to experience risk factors such as physical inactivity, smoking, and lower educational attainment.³⁷ These challenges systematically disempower First Nations youth from re-engaging with education, mental health, and employment.

“I sit in the indigenous space for instance where young people are caught up in chasing careers in sport. But it doesn't necessarily happen in the entrepreneur's space or accounting space or medical space. A lot of it is around helping people realise what is already out there rather than finding a program. One of the things society does poorly in Australia is showcasing to minority groups just what is possible. It's like the quote, 'you can only be what you see.' If you're in NSW, and you can't see an Indigenous person who is going to university or running a business you can't connect the dots.” - Josh. First Nations Advocate

Conclusion

Young people face significant challenges but are passionate about creating a better world for themselves and future generations. As we recover from COVID, amplifying youth voices will re-centre young people and their priorities in the NSW conversation and the minds of decision-makers. It is not enough to ask young people to be their own advocates or tell their own stories - they require resources, skills, and infrastructure to be heard.

NSW currently lags when it comes to investment in youth voice - with very little funding available from government, corporates, or philanthropy. Organisations and programs in this area are typically modest. While there does not appear to be a huge pipeline of 'shovel ready' projects to scale, we believe an open-call process would identify a number of exciting initiatives worthy of core and project support over several years.

If VFFF were to amplify the voices of young people in NSW a priority, the scale of investment (compared with the status quo) would immediately see it become the leading Youth Voice philanthropic contributor -- inspiring and shaping others' priorities and sending a strong signal about its belief in the power of young people in NSW to create change.

³⁵ MYAN NSW. 2018. *NSW Youth Settlement Snapshot 2016-2017*. P1. <http://scoa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/2016-17-MYAN-NSW-Settlement-Factsheet-FINAL-v2-small-pdf1.pdf>

³⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2018. *How are young Indigenous people in NSW faring?* P1 [https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/f2334744-84f4-4cc9-af0e-a9469568845b/aihw-ihw-202-factsheet-nsw.pdf.aspx#:~:text=In%202016%2C%20around%2045%25%20of,employment%20or%20training%20\(NEET\).](https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/f2334744-84f4-4cc9-af0e-a9469568845b/aihw-ihw-202-factsheet-nsw.pdf.aspx#:~:text=In%202016%2C%20around%2045%25%20of,employment%20or%20training%20(NEET).)

³⁷ Health NSW. 2014. *Youth Health Resource Kit: An Essential Guide for Workers*. Section 3.7 Resilience and Indigenous Young People. P130 <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/kidsfamilies/youth/Publications/youth-health-resource-kit.pdf>

Appendix A: Levers for philanthropy

The interviews and literature reviews revealed three major levers for philanthropy to amplify youth voice initiatives:

- Lever 1: Shifting power to young people
- Lever 2: Meaningful financial investments
- Lever 3: Provide infrastructure and operational supports

Lever 1: Shifting power to young people

| Opportunity | <i>From the perspective of young people and youth voice initiatives</i> |
|--|---|
| <p>Fund Youth Voice in decision-making structures The majority of those interviewed believed that having young people on grant decision committees was the most effective way to ensure the funding of high-impact initiatives.</p> | <p><i>“It would involve young people with lived experiences explaining what would most benefit them and was important to them. ...There would be young people on the assessing panel. It would look like young people being included in all parts of the process. Not simply, a consultation to be informed and then forget about young people entirely.”</i></p> |

Lever 2: Meaningful financial investment

| Opportunity | <i>From the perspective of young people and youth voice initiatives</i> |
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| <p>Fund organisations operations and back end Investing in Youth Voice initiatives to work on long-term campaigns, pay young people for their time, and build organisations with robust operational infrastructure will enable the effective recruitment, training, and support of priority cohorts to lead their work meaningfully.</p> | <p><i>“When collectives are trusted with a multi-year process. There’s ability [for an organisation] within that grant to pivot from learnings.” This allows an organisation to multiply its impact.</i></p> <p><i>“What high-impact organisations like YACVic do best, is they are great at recruiting and retaining talent. It’s a sign that they’re good at building meaningful relationships with young people.”</i></p> |
| <p>Use a Learning-orientated funding approach There is a unique opportunity for VFFF to fill an urgent gap for learning-orientated funding, which offers flexibility on outputs and outcomes. Youth voice initiatives could prototype, test, and rapidly adapt bold, novel models and initiatives based on their</p> | <p><i>“Larger NGOs can afford to take risks because they have a buffer, which can afford to absorb more if the cost rises. Grassroots youth voice initiatives can’t. If they’re overwhelmed, the default is to service issues with the greatest demand.”</i></p> <p><i>“[Philanthropy has a unique opportunity to embrace funding processes that excite young people. This naturally ups risk tolerance allowing for more innovation within the ecosystem.”</i></p> |

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| <p>learning during the project.</p> | |
| <p>Funding which sits outside the box For young people and youth voice initiatives to be genuinely self-determined in the challenges and solutions they respond to, funders should allocate a percentage of the investment in youth voice to initiatives that emerge unexpectedly and may sit outside of a predetermined remit of issues or projects.</p> <p>This investment would back organisations and young people who are thrust into the spotlight or a time sensitive campaign with limited resources and support.³⁸</p> | <p><i>“Back the jockey not the horse. If you invest in the individual maybe good things will come in the future. Many individuals in rural communities who are not privy to the startup sector but are also individuals who are very community-minded. If philanthropists back them a lot more change to come rather than just backing organisations.”</i></p> |

Lever 3: Provide infrastructure and operational supports

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| <p>Opportunity</p> | <p><i>From the perspective of young people and youth voice initiatives</i></p> |
| <p>Invest in Impact Measurement There is an opportunity to invest in the co-design and implementation of a theory of change and impact measurement framework for defining, measuring and collecting the systemic change occurring due to amplifying youth voice in NSW.</p> | <p><i>“Nobody has yet actually funded that critical piece on the bottom of somebody who's collecting all of the data on our behalf and bringing us all together. “</i></p> <p><i>“The most high-impact initiatives can say ‘this is our MO and this is how we’re doing it’. They have a strong Theory of Change they can go back to. More funding should be focused on helping youth voice initiatives to develop actual Theories of Change that can be their guiding lights. Smaller youth orgs don't have the opportunity to spend time on this. Implicitly they know, but to be able to write it down and refer to it and have concrete evidence to why they’re doing the work they’re doing.”</i></p> |
| <p>Build ecosystem and relationships A strong relationship between ‘fundere’ and ‘fundees’ is an invaluable condition for success. Additionally, youth voice initiatives cited campaign funding as</p> | <p><i>“I’ve seen amazing funding relationships and experimentation happen when [fundere] get to know who will benefit from the project. It helps them better understand what the project could look like by hearing first hand, because you can never convey a project in a report in the same way as a</i></p> |

³⁸ Raworth, M. 2021. Brave Young Farmer puts up a fight against power company threatening her crops. Nine News. <https://www.9news.com.au/national/brave-young-farmer-fights-against-big-power-company-in-victoria/4029bd6b-f832-4eed-bedf-238102b72f43>

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| <p>critical to facilitating cross-sector collaboration. Cross-sector collaborations support youth voice initiatives to maximise their resources to scale their impact.</p> | <p><i>relationship”.</i></p> |
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