

SUMMARY | Future Makers

What ten young Victorians had to say about volunteering for nature

The need

Young people have the most to gain and the greatest to lose in policy and planning for the future. This is especially true in the context of the climate and biodiversity crises.

There is much that government is doing to respond to the most pressing environmental issues for our state, and our globe - but we know more action is needed. And it needs to happen in partnership with Victoria's greatest assets – our young people.



Environmental Volunteering - Youth Expert Advisory Group

In October 2022 the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) collaborated with the Youth Affairs Council Victoria (YACVic) to explore government's role in supporting and empowering young Victorians to volunteer for nature.

To do this, a Youth Expert Advisory Group Roundtable was formed. The Roundtable consisted of ten young Victorians aged 16 to 25 with diverse experience related to biodiversity, climate change and volunteering for nature.

Of the ten participants, seven lived in regional or rural Victoria and three in metropolitan Melbourne. A variety of identities were represented including LGBTIQA+, refugee or migrant background and disabled young people. All Roundtable participants were paid for their involvement.

Roundtable sessions were co-designed and led by trained YACVic [Young Peer Facilitators](#). Themes and recommendations which emerged from this session are outlined in this summary.



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What was said

Advocacy, particularly on climate action, is a key way young people feel they can make a difference on important environmental issues. Investment should be prioritised in initiatives that empower young people to advocate for environmental causes.

“From my experience young people make a difference but we’re not making a difference in traditional ways. Young people do more advocating. I think of Greta Thunberg and School Strike 4 Climate.” – Participant, aged 16

The potential for **citizen science** usage among young people is significant. But work is needed to improve the usability, accessibility and attractiveness of citizen science apps, ensuring they are promoted to young audiences, and clearly articulating the benefits to the environment.

Young people want their volunteer contributions to be valued and acknowledged. Organisations should take the time to design **volunteer experiences that are meaningful** e.g. developing transferrable skills.

*“[Being] willing to accept that young people are new to volunteering is vital to ensure meaningful youth participation.”
- Participant, aged 23*

Expanding networks, learning new skills, having fun and a sense of belonging are all important factors in **retaining young environmental volunteers**. Intergenerational and peer-to-peer mentoring by volunteers more progressed in their careers was supported as a point of interest by participants.

Most **young people are juggling multiple commitments** – study, employment, sport, caring roles, cultural or family responsibilities. Volunteering opportunities need to be flexible to be accessible. Examples cited included one-off or short-term projects and online volunteering.

“What if the creation of websites and use of technology was a volunteering opportunity in itself?” – Participant, aged 17



Young people receive information through a range of platforms – social media, school and university newsletters, extra curricula clubs, and word of mouth. Consequently, volunteer recruitment campaigns and ‘call to actions’ need to be promoted through mixed channels.

“When volunteer groups don’t have websites or use social media, they [can] fall out of touch with young people, and make the volunteer groups feel ... outdated.”- Participant, aged 16

Volunteering can be intimidating, especially if you are a young person who has a disability, is LGBTIQA+ or are from a culturally diverse background. Efforts to ensure programs are **safe and inclusive**, and communicating this to potential volunteers, is important.

To successfully include young people in volunteer roles environmental groups should incorporate **youth engagement principles** in the way they design and deliver projects. Roundtable participants believe government has a role to play in **building the capability of groups** to do this effectively.

There were calls to make it as easy as possible for young Victorians to find opportunities to volunteer for nature. The development of a **centralised volunteer database** and the **provision of transport** to volunteer events were both cited as a pragmatic way of doing this.

It was highlighted all environmental projects occur on the land of **Victoria’s Traditional Owners**. As active partners in caring for Country, environmental volunteers are well-placed to educate themselves on the knowledge, history and cultural rights that Aboriginal Victorians have on Country. There’s always more to learn.



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Reflections

Inclusive engagement supports better decisions, and the outcomes of this engagement will do just that – inform environmental volunteer programs and policy design moving forward.

The success of this engagement was largely due to the inclusive and participatory approach adopted by DELWP and YACVic, with each partner contributing their expertise to the process. It also reflects the collective knowledge and leadership of the young peer facilitators and participants.

Overall, Roundtable members reported finding the consultation process as positive but noted the need for, and right of, young people to be involved in ongoing consultation on decisions that impact them.

“The group size was great and I felt comfortable to share my ideas and opinions.” - Participant, aged 16

While there was strong diversity in voices and experiences captured through the Roundtable, this was a small and targeted engagement. DELWP recognises that no two young people are the same. As DELWP transitions into the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), it is committed to an ongoing conversation with young Victorians, acknowledging their expertise and valuable contributions to public discourse.

Visit [‘Our promise. Your future: Victoria’s youth strategy 2022-2037’](#) to find out more about how the Victorian Government is working to realise the aspirations of young people.

You can find out more about [youth engagement principles](#) at YACVic.



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