

Project Tool

Voices of Young Australia

Final Report to Scanlon Foundation 2010



The future prosperity of Australia, underpinned by continued population growth, will depend on our ability to maintain social cohesion in a society with even more cultural diversity than we have successfully accommodated historically.

Scanlon Foundation

The *Voices of Young Australians: Uniting for Social Cohesion* Program was developed and delivered by the Centre for Multicultural Youth over a three year period with financial support from the Scanlon Foundation. It is a unique program that provides opportunities for young people from diverse (refugee, migrant and Australian born) backgrounds to tackle issues of racism and discrimination, and to make positive changes in their schools and the local community.

The program model involves bringing diverse young people from a number of schools together, providing them with leadership training to develop their leadership skills and then enabling them to organize and deliver a youth-led project that promotes social cohesion in their local area.

According to the research undertaken by the Scanlon Foundation, *social cohesion* can be understood in terms of the following elements: sense of belonging; social justice and equity; participation; acceptance, and; worth.¹ These elements form the foundation upon which the program model is based, aiming to not only provide an opportunity for young people to participate further in their schools and the community, but also for them to create opportunities for others to participate and contribute.

Youth Participation principles underpin the program model, the leadership training aims to equip young leaders with the tools, knowledge and skills required to enable them to identify barriers to social cohesion and plan, deliver and evaluate a youth-led project that tackles these barriers. Youth participation can take many forms, and requires the provision of *meaningful* opportunities for participation. There are many theories of youth participation the most well known being the ladder model as advocated by Roger Hart.² This *Voices of Young Australians* program model has been aimed at achieving a high level of participation, with young leaders and staff working side by side to create change. A worker's role in this context is to facilitate access to resources, networks and opportunities so as to ensure young people are well supported to undertake a project.

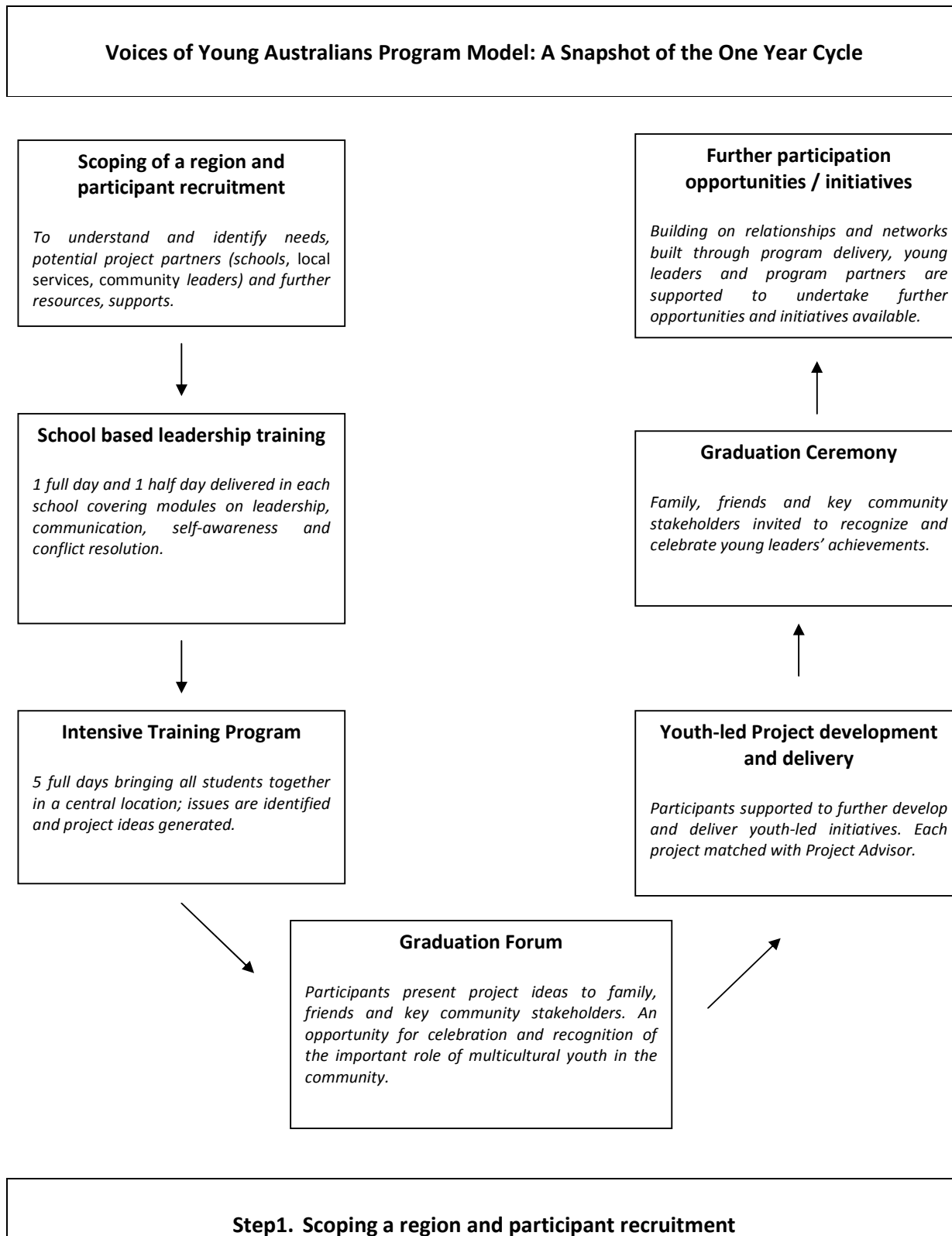
This program model was delivered at high schools. The optimal year range for participants is Years 8 to 10, the rationale being that young people at this stage are settled into high school and are still finding out who they are, what they value and what is important to them. Students from the later Years, 11 and 12, can face challenges with balancing coursework and program commitments. With regards to geographic location of program delivery, growth corridors and areas where the cultural and faith diversity of the local population is relatively new and increasing are well suited to this model due to the aim of building relationships between diverse young people and their communities. Schools within these areas are

¹ Markus, Prof Andrew *Mapping Social Cohesion: The Scanlon Foundation Surveys*

² <http://www.freechild.org/ladder.htm>

engaged to provide participants with the opportunity to develop relationships across school boundaries and to ensure the outcomes of the program are wide reaching.

The following diagram provides an overview of the program model, with a detailed description of the program stages included in the remainder of the paper.



Key aims/goals:

- Scoping – identify need, partnerships, key stakeholders;
- A full understanding of issues and context developed;
- School partners identified;
- Participants nominated and interviewed;
- Key dates for delivery finalised.

Timeline: Approximately 3 months

SCOPING

A comprehensive scoping process is necessary for a program to provide meaningful and sustainable opportunities for multicultural young people to participate in their schools and the community. A full understanding of the local context (i.e. demographics, service gaps, key stakeholders etc) and issues in the area is required in order to ensure that the program is designed so as to be relevant and address the existing issues appropriately. The Voices of Young Australians has been delivered in 'growth corridors' in Melbourne, where in recent years there have been changes in local demographics. However it could be delivered in any multicultural area where racism and discrimination have been identified as issues for young people.

The Project Officer should commence the program by identifying areas of need through existing networks, organisational knowledge and research. Through the scoping process, a key local government area will be identified for program delivery, and opportunities for partnerships are explored with local council youth services, as well as local community organisations, police and relevant community leaders.

Establishing a partnership with the local council youth services is integral to the successful delivery of this model. To ensure the partnership works well, a Memorandum of Understanding should be drawn up between the agencies involved, outlining clearly roles and responsibilities, program objectives, delivery schedule and dispute resolution methods. An MoU can be critical to the success of a partnership. The benefits for local council partnering with CMY to deliver the program were numerous: youth services were able to meet targets for engaging young people in service provision; they were able to attract more diverse young people to their services and their service users were more representative of the cultural and faith diversity in the local community. Further, co-location of workers allowed for the sharing of knowledge and practice across the government and non-government sectors. For participants, a partnership meant increased opportunities for leadership within their local community.

Three schools should be identified as potential project partners, and approached to engage students from the school in the program. Program information including key dates, structure, and any material from previous delivery phases are important in this stage. Audio-visual material such as footage from training, projects and programs can provide a better understanding of what the program is trying to achieve and can be used to promote the program to school staff and students.

Prior meetings with key staff in the Department of Education can be useful in approaching schools if the program is supported by the Department and for ensuring that the program links where possible with school curriculum and VELs.

RECRUITMENT

Participants can be recruited according to program needs, and can be either staff nominated or self-nominated. Ways of recruitment (in negotiation with schools) can include:

- Presentations at assemblies or classes as appropriate;
- Notices in the school bulletin;
- Posters around the school;
- Staff nomination of students meeting the selection criteria;

- Student self-nomination* through the abovementioned presentations.

Potential participants are invited to complete an application form (that is accompanied by a parent/guardian information letter and requires their signature).

It is important to ensure that the participant group represent a diverse range of cultural and faith backgrounds, including young people from Anglo-Australian and Australian born backgrounds. This allows the program to overcome the issue of simply involving those who might experience racism and discrimination, to include those who may have negative views towards cultural diversity as well as providing an opportunity to build relationships between diverse young people. In order to promote social cohesion, the program must reflect this aim in its participant group and model.

Young people aged between 13 -18 years old from Years 7 to 12 have participated in the program, representing a wide range of skills, experiences, interests and maturity. As mentioned earlier, the optimal year range is 8-10 (ages 14-16 years old), with school coursework commitments making it more challenging for older Years students to participate fully.

Once students who submitted an application form are interviewed by the Project Officer and accepted into the program, parent/guardian consent is confirmed by phone or in person where possible to ensure *informed* consent is obtained. The program aims, commitment required, delivery schedule and role of the Project Officer are explained, using an interpreter or school multicultural aide where appropriate and necessary.

*Note that some students from diverse cultural and faith backgrounds may not self-nominate due to lack of confidence, having had limited opportunities for roles of leadership to date, or don't see themselves as 'leaders' and therefore staff nomination is particularly important as well.

Challenges at this stage can include:

- Different approach or understanding of the program from school perspective;
- Issues with students gaining parental consent to participate due to school commitments;
- Difficulty in recruiting students that match program requirements;
- Training dates that suit all program partners.

To overcome these challenges, it is important that the program is flexible in format. Adequate time is needed to promote and recruit participants, which includes meetings to ensure that nominated staff members are across the program aims and target group. Ideally allocate at least two to three months for recruitment, which includes indentifying a key school contact, promotion to students, interviews and gaining parental consent. Similarly, flexibility in terms of target group can be useful to ensure that the program builds upon current initiatives or school programs to further support learning in these areas.

Step 2. School based leadership training

Initial leadership training can be conducted in a variety of ways, covering a range of topics. The format of the Voices of Young Australians program has been:

- Four 4hr sessions, or;
- One full day followed by a half day session.

The format can be changed to meet the availability and needs of the participants and to ensure that it accommodates the school term without interfering with key dates.

The topics covered in the school based sessions include:

- Leadership Skills and Styles
- Group Norms (Team Charter)
- Communication and leadership
- Conflict Resolution
- Group development
- Exploring Stereotypes
- Values and Leadership
- Team Building
- Migration and journeys
- Cultural Diversity

Activities in these sessions aim to develop relationships between young people, and encourage sharing about each other's journey (whether it is the young person, their family, or their ancestors). The activities are run with minimal information delivery via presentation, focusing more on interactive activities that encourage learning through doing. Recognition of the skills, interests and ideas that participants already bring to the program is important, and modules are delivered flexibly to ensure engagement of a range of ages, confidence levels, cultural and faith backgrounds.

Using this model allows facilitators to develop relationships with each participant in a familiar setting.

Step 3. Intensive Training Program

The Intensive Training component of this program involves bringing all participants together for five full days. This can either be over one week, or a series of days across a month in order to fit in with school dates and participant availability.

The training covers a range of topics and workshops:

- Team Building
- Cultural Diversity
- Group Norms (Team Charter)
- Legal context of racism and discrimination
- Creative workshops (art, drama, dance, music, comedy)
- Media workshop
- Interfaith Tour (visiting a mosque, church, temple, synagogue, Indigenous site)
- Public Speaking workshop
- Project Management workshops
- Panel of young leaders
- Visioning workshop
- Identifying Issues Workshop

As with the school based training, the activities in these sessions are interactive, with a focus initially on team building and sharing of cultural and faith backgrounds, as well as identifying issues of mutual concern. Through a series of workshops, this part of the program provides an opportunity to meet new people from different schools in an area; further develop leadership skills; explore the issues of racism and discrimination and to develop project ideas to address issues in school and the community.

Step 4. Graduation Forum

A Graduation Forum is held at the end of the Intensive Training Program, where participants present their youth-led project ideas to key stakeholders. Parents, friends, family, school staff, local service providers, police, community leaders and other interested parties are invited to hear from the young leaders about their achievements so far, and their ideas for ways to make positive contributions to their school/community.

The Forum aims to provide an opportunity for the young leaders to generate support for the youth-led projects phase; receive feedback and guidance about their project idea; and to share their vision for their school and the community.

The young leaders are involved in the development of the structure of the event, as well as presenting the majority of the information to the audience.

This event often provides key stakeholders with a new perspective in recognizing the young leaders as having an important role in addressing issues in the community.

Step 5. Youth-led project development and delivery

This phase requires the Project Officer to provide support to Youth Project Planning Committees (who came together during the leadership training) as they further plan, develop, deliver and evaluate their initiatives.

In order to ensure the young leaders are appropriately supported, the engagement of a 'Project Advisor' who has specialised skills, networks and experiences that match the group's project aims is important. The following process can be used in recruiting for this role:

- Completion of an application form;
- Interview (in which program guidelines are discussed);
- Referee checks conducted;
- Working With Children Check;
- Police Check;
- Provision of training where required;
- Agreement to a Project Advisor Position Description and Code of Conduct.

Consider the possibility of engaging young people as Project Advisors where possible and appropriate. Young leaders who have participated in the program before or been involved in leadership opportunities that are in line with youth-led projects are great candidates to engage in this role. Youth Project Advisors should also be screened and trained where necessary by the Project Officer, with regular supervision to ensure the process is beneficial for the Youth Project Advisor as well as the young leaders.

Project Officers can also provide support in other ways, including:

- Facilitating the arrangement of planning meetings;
- Developing community support through networking, meeting attendance, door knocking (where appropriate) and promotion;
- Providing transport for participants to attend meetings;
- Facilitating relevant training sessions based on needs identified by the groups;
- Providing organisational support (e.g. auspicing for funding, resources, networks) for projects;
- Liaising with parents/family members to ensure continued and supported engagement of young people, as well as involvement in the initiatives where possible and appropriate;

It is integral to ensure that young people voluntarily and willingly participate in this phase, and that the young leaders are working in partnership with adults/service providers. The nature of youth led initiatives is unpredictable, energetic and engaging. As with any group, sometimes things can go really smoothly, other times there might be need for a bigger role for a Project Officer to play to address issues.

If it is difficult to bring young leaders together to plan a project due to time and resource issues facing the young people (e.g. school commitments, casual work, family issues, lack of motivation/interest) then the project may not be completed as originally planned. This may not reflect a failure of a program to engage

young people and may simply be a result of the timing, resource issues and capacity for young people to volunteer their time to run a project.

Step 6. Graduation Ceremony

A final Graduation Ceremony is an important aspect of the program as it provides an opportunity to publicly recognize and celebrate the achievements of young leaders. The development and delivery of a youth-led initiative is a big undertaking, and inviting friends, family and key stakeholders (including the Mayor and local councilors) to celebrate this is integral. Engaging the local media outlets to cover the event can further promote positive images of multicultural young people making changes in their community.

Further participation opportunities/initiatives

Strong partnerships during program delivery ensure young people who participate in programs have further opportunities to continue in their leadership journey via pathways in their schools and the community. It is important for Project Officers to be adequately resourced to enable the development of partnerships/relationships with key stakeholders who can provide further opportunities for participation. This can be in the form of: engagement in new programs; taking on leadership roles at school; being involved in the local council youth advisory group; participation in activities through local organisations; and running workshops or delivering presentations at network meetings about projects and achievements.