

# Insights and Findings from Engagements

Strengthening youth leadership  
and advisory groups

Report prepared by the Ministry of Youth Development – Te Manatū  
Whakahiato Taiohi Youth Advisory Group for the Minister for Youth

**May 2024**



# Nā tō rourou nā taku rourou, ka ora ai te iwi

With your food basket and my food basket, the people will thrive

We want to thank and acknowledge the 47 young people who gifted us with their kōrero during our engagements. Their mātauranga enabled us to weave together the findings, insights, and recommendations presented in this report.

By combining our experiences together, we hope to strengthen our collective voice and work towards a future where more youth advisory and leadership groups thrive.

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# Introduction

# Ministry of Youth Development Youth Advisory Group



The Ministry of Youth Development (MYD) – Te Manatū Whakahiato Taiohi Youth Advisory Group (YAG) was first established in 2022 and is a departmental advisory group supporting MYD. The purpose of the group is to provide advice on specific projects that help embed youth voice into government decision-making.

A central focus for the MYD YAG in 2022-2023 was supporting the review and refresh of the Youth Plan. Following the launch of the refreshed Youth Plan: Voice, Leadership, Action (Youth Plan) in August 2023, the MYD YAG has been contributing to and supporting implementation of Youth Plan actions.

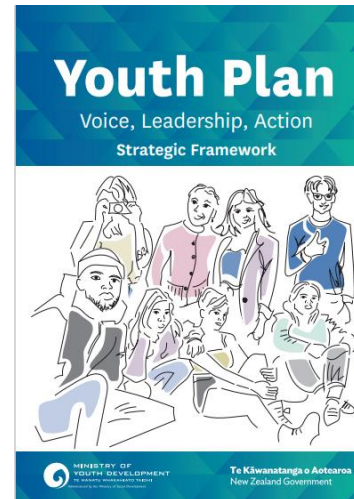
# Youth Plan: Voice, Leadership, Action

The Youth Plan is a collaborative strategy that aims to:

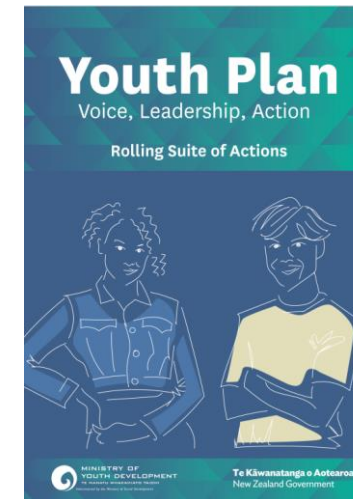
- amplify **youth voice** in government policy and decision-making and ensure processes are in place for young people to have **meaningful input into decisions**, and
- increase opportunities for young people to **lead their own lives**, have their identities seen, valued, and respected, and **have increasing influence** in their communities and across government policy.

The Youth Plan is comprised of three interconnected documents:

## Strategic Framework



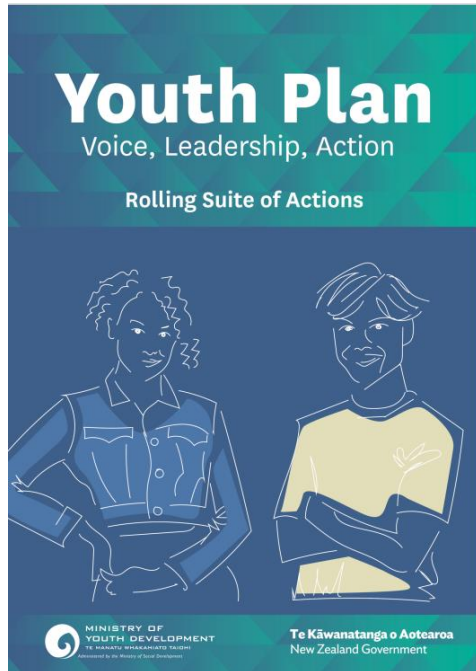
## Rolling Suite of Actions



## Measurement Framework



# Youth Plan Action: Strengthen youth leadership and advisory groups



The Youth Plan was launched with an initial suite of six actions including an action titled '**Strengthen youth leadership and advisory groups**'. This action is led by Mana Mokopuna – Children and Young People's Commission and is supported by a number of other agencies, including MYD.

## Key deliverables of the action include:

Facilitate monthly hui for agency staff supporting youth advisory and leadership groups

Facilitate networking hui and wānanga for youth advisory and leadership groups

Facilitate workshops for agency staff supporting youth advisory and leadership groups

# Connection hui with other youth leadership and advisory groups

As part of implementation of the 'Strengthen youth leadership and advisory groups' Youth Plan action, we (the MYD YAG) facilitated connection hui with other groups across February, March, and early April 2024.

## Three types of groups were engaged:

1. Central Government Youth Advisory Groups.
2. Youth Councils.
3. Youth Sector Youth Advisory Groups.

## Groups had:

- **different age ranges** with some groups focusing on younger cohorts (school-aged taiohi), others focusing on an older cohort (18-24 years), and some spanning a wider range (e.g. 15-25 years)
- **existed for varying lengths of time** with some groups existing for over a decade, others that were set up in the last few years, and some established within the past 12 months
- **a variety of structures** ranging from very structured to more informal.



# Connection hui with other youth leadership and advisory groups

In total, the MYD YAG connected with **47** members of **14** different youth leadership and advisory groups through a series of **ten** connection hui.

## Central Government Youth Advisory Groups

- Youth Voices Group (Ministry of Education & Mana Mokopuna)
- Expert Advisory Group (Te Puna Aonui - Te Aorerekura)
- Māngai Whakatipu (Te Whatu Ora, school-based health services)
- Youth Advisory Panel (Classifications Office)
- Te Rito o te Pāremata (Parliamentary Services)

## Youth Councils

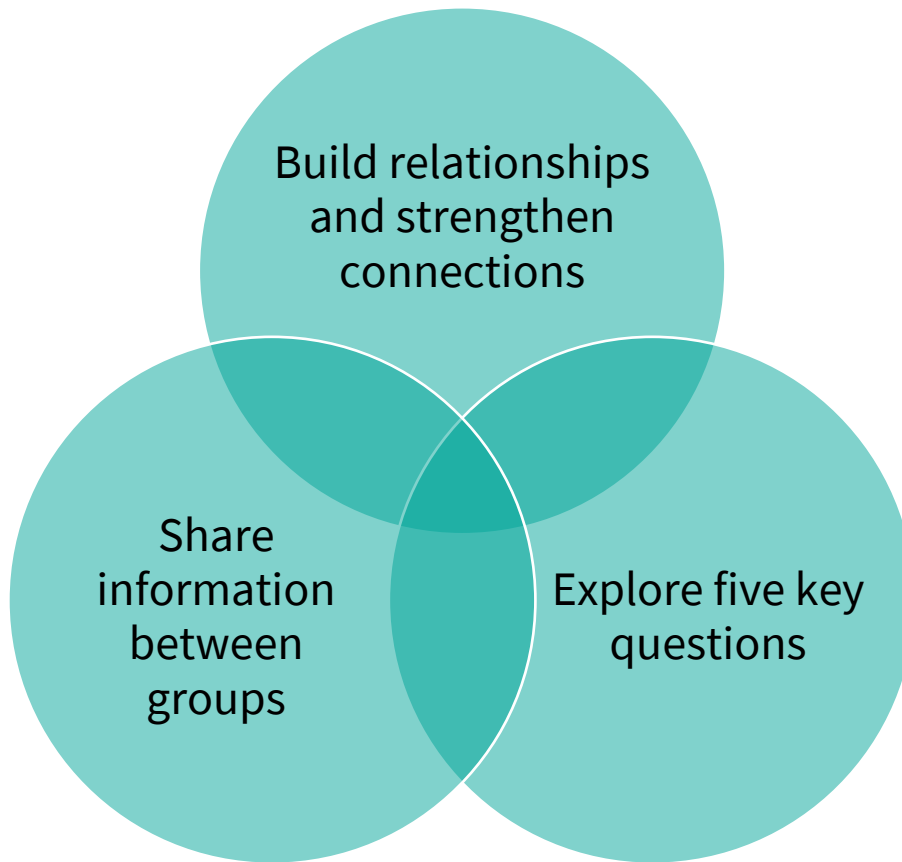
- Rangitikei Youth Council
- Ashburton Youth Council (recently disestablished)
- Selwyn Youth Council
- Christchurch Youth Council
- Waimakariri Youth Council
- Wellington Youth Council

## Youth Sector Youth Advisory Groups

- Empower Youth (connected to South Taranaki District Council)
- Inspiring Stories Youth Advisory Group
- Māwhera Youth Voice (connected to the Greymouth District Council)

# Connection hui with other youth leadership and advisory groups

The purpose of connection hui was to:



1. What has **worked well** in your group?
2. Have you experienced any **issues/challenges/roadblocks**?
3. What are your **aspirations** for youth leadership and advisory groups?
4. Do you think there is **value in connecting** between groups like ours? If yes, why? If no, why?
5. If we had an **opportunity** for groups to come **together in person**, what would you want to talk about or do during that time?

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# **Insights and Findings**



# **1. Working Well**

# Working Well

When we asked groups what is working well for them, we consistently heard **three themes** about the way their youth leadership and advisory groups are operating.

## 1 Ongoing, longer-term engagement with strong feedback loops and accountability mechanisms

For most groups, young people described that decision-makers engaged with them repeatedly and reported back to them regularly.

Young people said this led to:

- feeling meaningfully engaged (e.g, not engaged as a 'tick-box exercise')
- having the opportunity to engage on work early and at multiple stages
- decision-makers being held accountable due to the ongoing nature of groups and long-term relationships between kaimahi and taiohi
- young people being able to see the impacts and influence of their advice on outcomes and decisions.

## 2 By-youth, for-youth spaces

Many participants said they felt empowered to take the lead in their groups rather than kaimahi dominating the space. When young people were empowered to take a lead, it helped create more youth-friendly, safe spaces where young people could participate fully and be heard.

Some described this as a by-youth, for-youth approach.

## 3 Focus on specific work programmes or projects with tangible, measurable outputs

Young people said having a focused work programme or project(s) helped ensure their voice and leadership directly influenced decision-making and drove change.

By contributing to work with tangible and measurable outputs, young people felt their contributions were meaningful and impactful.

Kōrero about what is working well also highlighted **two key enablers**.

1

## Support from experienced kaimahi

Young people said that potentially the single most important enabler for the success of groups and positive experience of taiohi, was the type of support they received from kaimahi.

Experienced kaimahi who understand and value youth voice, effective participation, and youth development know when to support and when to step back. This was a critical factor to young people feeling empowered, engaged, valued, and supported without feeling overwhelmed, overburdened, patronised, or ringfenced.

2

## Flexibility around group structure and processes to ensure they fit the work programme AND the needs of the participating young people

Young people identified the need for flexibility around group structures as there is no 'one size fits all' structure or approach that will work for all young people or all types of work.

When young people are able to co-design things like Terms of Reference, position descriptions, recruitment or appointment processes, structure and agendas of meetings, etc. the more likely it is members will have positive experiences and groups will successfully deliver on work.

Taiohi identified **three positive outcomes** when youth leadership and advisory groups are working well.

## 1 Effective youth participation in decision-making

First and foremost, when youth leadership and advisory groups are working well, they achieve their core purpose: young people influencing and improving decision-making.

Rōpū like YAGs and youth councils provide a formal mechanism through which young people can be heard, take on leadership, and participate in decision-making that impacts them and other young people.

## 2 Personal and professional development

When groups are run by experienced kaimahi they can serve as significant youth development opportunities. Participants reported growing both personally and professionally. Participation in groups allowed members to learn more about government and different ways of working. Participation in groups also helped many taiohi develop or refine leadership, communication, strategic thinking, and relationship-building skills.

Members of groups who lived in more isolated regions noted there were often fewer opportunities to take on leadership outside of sport and school settings, making groups like youth councils valuable development opportunities.

## 3 Improved hauora individually and collectively

Young people also reported participation in youth leadership and advisory groups made them feel like they were making a positive difference and contributing to better outcomes for other young people and their communities. This feeling of achievement and positive contribution made participation in groups more rewarding.

## ENABLERS:

- 1 Support from experienced kaimahi
- 2 Flexibility around group structure and processes to ensure they fit the work programme AND needs of the participating young people

## STRENGTHS OF GROUPS:

- 1 Ongoing, longer-term engagement with strong feedback loops and accountability mechanisms
- 2 By-youth, for-youth spaces
- 3 Focus on specific work programmes or projects with tangible, measurable outputs

## OUTCOMES:

- 1 Effective youth participation in decision-making
- 2 Personal and professional development
- 3 Improved hauora individually and collectively





## **2. Issues, Challenges, Roadblocks**

# Issues, Challenges, Roadblocks

When asked about issues, challenges, and roadblocks, taiohi identified **three key challenges**.

## 1 Funding and resourcing

Most groups said funding and resourcing was a challenge impacting their ability to meet together in person, engage with other young people, or complete projects.

Most groups talked about the need for agencies and Councils to better prioritise wider *existing* funding rather than expecting *new* investment specific to youth leadership and advisory groups.

## 2 Loss of key champions

Many groups said they were reliant on a small number of key champions (e.g, dedicated kaimahi, a founding young person) who spend large amounts of voluntary, personal time to ensure groups remain viable and successful.

Without these key champions, it would be difficult for groups to continue. Some young people recounted previous experiences where groups closed after losing a key champion.

## 3 Disconnected ways of working across government and complexity of government

Complexity of and disconnection within government makes it harder for groups to share information, be aware of other work underway, and for young people to navigate and understand how they can influence decision-making.

We heard this especially from those working with central government agencies.

# Issues, Challenges, Roadblocks

Many of the challenges young people identified related to **two underlying issues.**

1

## Youth voice being seen as a ‘nice-to-have’ not a ‘need-to-have’

Taiohi felt that many decision-makers (Ministers, Mayors, Councils, public servants, etc.) view youth voice as a ‘nice-to-have’ rather than a ‘need-to-have’. Taiohi identified this as an underlying issue connected to a lack of prioritisation and under-resourcing of their groups.

Young people also pointed out this is contradictory to how many other groups like business owners or sector leaders are treated and valued. Taiohi felt that if youth participation was seen as essential, groups would receive more support and experience fewer barriers.

Youth leadership and advisory groups provide valuable insights and advice, help safeguard young people’s right to participate, support the development of young leaders, and should therefore be viewed as a necessity.

2

## Lack of embedding of youth voice through multiple mechanisms and at multiple levels

Many groups felt like they were the ‘be all, end all’ when it came to youth voice influencing decision-making because they were the only young people being engaged.

Young people highlighted that if youth voice was embedded at multiple levels, it would be easier to connect within and across agencies and share information. If youth participation was embedded through multiple mechanisms, youth leadership and advisory groups wouldn’t feel as much pressure to represent and speak for all young people.

# Issues, Challenges, Roadblocks

Taiohi also identified the impact of these challenges results in **two negative outcomes**.

## 1 Lack of sustainability and consistency

Youth voice being viewed as 'nice-to-have' leads to decision-makers not prioritising it. Lack of prioritisation results in limited funding and support. Lack of funding and support impacts young people's ability to produce high quality, meaningful work. This leads to many groups fizzling out or being disestablished.

This is especially true when key champions supporting groups (young people and/or kaimahi) move on to other opportunities or get burnt out. Few protections exist for groups to ensure their continued operation and sustainability.

Due to lack of embedding youth participation at multiple levels throughout the system, groups can be run in ad hoc ways that don't always follow best practice, leading to inconsistency between groups and over time.

## 2 Frustration, disillusionment, and disappointment of young people involved

While most of the young people we engaged had positive experiences in their current groups, many noted previous experiences of frustration and disappointment when engaging with decision-makers who didn't value youth participation.


This outcome is particularly prevalent in the youth council space where we heard about a cycle many groups go through in which Councils establish, don't resource or adequately support, and then eventually disestablish youth councils. Young people felt youth councils were often one of the first initiatives to be cut in any budget change processes.

This cycle leaves young people feeling disconnected, disillusioned, and jaded.

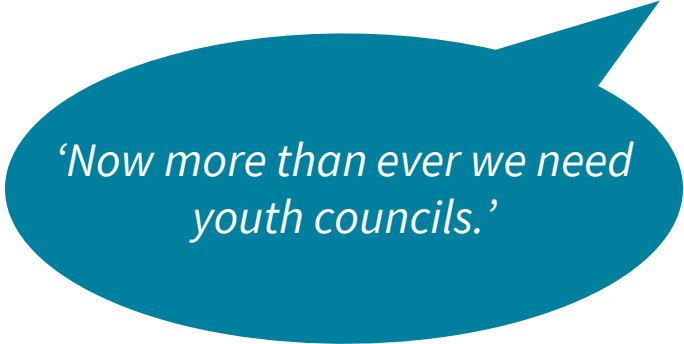
# Issues, Challenges, Roadblocks

Already in 2024, the Ashburton and Whanganui youth councils have been disestablished with the future of other youth councils being considered.

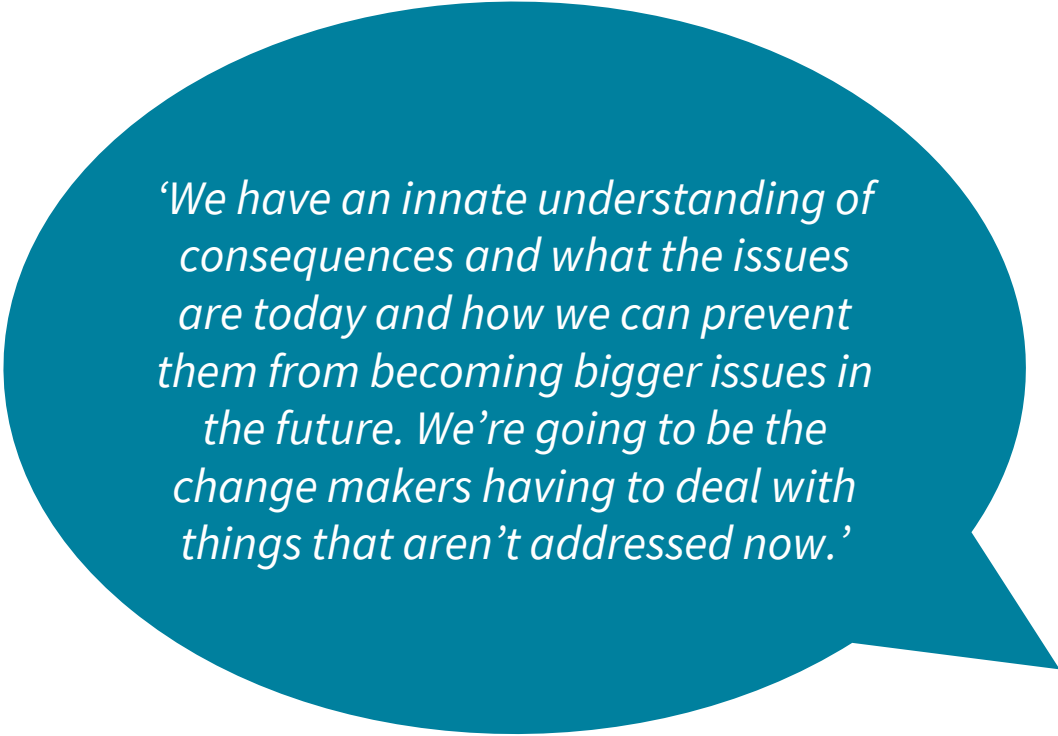
When we asked taiohi what they would say to decision-makers about this, they said...



*'This is our future and the things decided now impact us, especially long-term plans. Having youth councils have a say, is essential. It's us that will be left with the pieces.'*



*'Now more than ever we need youth councils.'*



*'We have an innate understanding of consequences and what the issues are today and how we can prevent them from becoming bigger issues in the future. We're going to be the change makers having to deal with things that aren't addressed now.'*

# Issues, Challenges, Roadblocks Summary

## UNDERLYING ISSUES:

- 1 Youth voice being seen as a 'nice-to-have' not a 'need-to-have'
- 2 Lack of embedding of youth voice through multiple mechanisms and at multiple levels

## CHALLENGES:

- 1 Funding and resourcing
- 2 Loss of key champions
- 3 Disconnected ways of working across government and complexity of government

## OUTCOMES:

- 1 Lack of sustainability and consistency
- 2 Frustration, disillusionment, and disappointment of young people involved

# Differences between groups

While there were many similarities across groups there were also significant differences. Some of these differences included:

By-youth, for-youth approaches	
Members of some groups felt they were empowered to lead and create by-youth, for-youth spaces while other groups reported feeling like adults had taken over, limiting their ability to lead, with some even saying they felt like they were sometimes being ‘babysat’ rather than supported or empowered.	
Buy-in from senior decision-makers	There were a range of experiences reported about the level of buy-in from senior decision-makers. For example, at a local level some youth councils and groups had mayors and council members regularly attend meetings and be highly supportive of their work. Other groups reported feeling disrespected, belittled, ignored, or undervalued by senior decision-makers. On a national level, young people commented on the type of rhetoric they hear from ministers and members of Parliament referring to young people in deficit-focused rather than strengths-based ways.
Diverse lived experiences represented	While some groups reported they felt the diversity of their rōpū reflected the wider youth population with strong representation from historically marginalised groups, others acknowledged that there was a need to increase the diversity of membership to ensure a representation and influence from a wider range of lived experiences.



### **3. Aspirations**



# Aspirations

We identified nine aspirations from our kōrero with members of youth leadership and advisory groups.

Young people  
want to see **MORE:**

1

Tuakana-teina mentoring  
Including peer-to-peer coaching  
within and across groups

2

Connection and collaboration  
across groups

3

Regional connection opportunities  
and networks

4

Visibility of groups that already  
exist

5

Decision-makers being champions  
for young people's right to  
participate

6

Youth participation at all levels  
including but not limited to: policy,  
operational, service design, delivery,  
monitoring and evaluation

7

Young people being paid for their  
time and contributions

8

Young people being given  
development opportunities

9

Ways young people can be heard

# Aspirations

Of the nine aspirations, we wanted to draw your attention to two in particular:

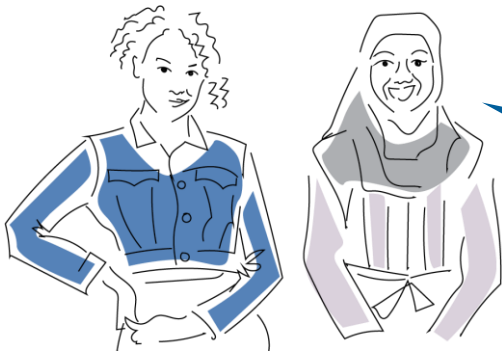
5

Decision-makers being champions for young people's right to participate

9

Ways young people can be heard

Many young people said they wanted decision-makers, especially the Minister for Youth, to be more vocal and visible in championing the importance of youth participation. Specifically, they want to see advocacy that leads to ministers, members of Parliament, and government agencies prioritising youth engagement.



*'We want to see taiohi valued as experts and for more people to value youth voice and know how to engage with young people.'*

Young people also wanted to emphasise there is no single-solution, or 'one size fits all' approach to youth engagement.

There should be multiple ways and different spaces for young people to be heard and contribute to decision-making that impacts them.

Formal mechanisms like youth leadership and advisory groups are just one piece of the puzzle. Surveys, workshops, research and other engagement methods should be used to complement formal groups.



## **4. Value in Connecting Between Groups**

# Value in Connecting Between Groups

Taiohi were asked if they thought there was value in connecting between groups, they said...

*'Would love to see more connecting happening so we could learn from each other instead of starting from scratch all the time.'*

*'So many different groups exist but we don't even know about each other.'*

*'We want to learn from other groups and bounce ideas off of each other. It would be great to have more peer support by other young people who are in similar roles as us instead of just the adults who support our groups.'*

*'Regardless of location, there are lots of similarities between our experiences. Being able to bring our voices together will make what we are saying more powerful.'*

*'It is great to collaborate and see what other youth councils are up to, hear about their experiences, and know we're not alone.'*

# Value in Connecting Between Groups

Taiohi across all 14 groups identified there was value in increasing connections between groups. They saw this as a key way to strengthen groups.

While some regional networks exist, there is **currently no national mechanism** enabling regular connections between members of different groups.

Taiohi also identified that the kaimahi supporting and managing groups needed to be better connected. They felt if kaimahi were better connected, it would address many issues including:

- duplication of effort
- inconsistency in the quality of practice across groups
- lack of visibility or awareness of what different groups are doing.

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## **5. Ideas for Future Connections**

# Ideas for Future Connections

The final question we asked young people during our connection hui was: 'If we had an opportunity for groups to come together in person, what would you want to talk about or do during that time?'

Taiohi discussed what the purpose of meeting in person would be. They said as much as they would enjoy the opportunity to network and build relationships, they also wanted time spent together to deliver tangible outcomes beyond whakawhanaungatanga.

## **Ideas for focus of future connections:**

Panels,  
presentations, or  
stalls where groups  
share knowledge,  
insights, and ideas

Professional  
development  
workshops  
both peer- and  
kaimahi-led

Establish more peer  
support across groups  
through relationship-  
building and networking

Workshops  
identifying  
collaboration and  
joint action  
opportunities

Celebrating and  
sharing  
successes of  
different groups

# Ideas for Future Connections

We also asked groups what future connections over the next two years might look like practically. Three ideas were raised repeatedly:

	1. Regularly held online hui	2. Festival for the Future	3. INVOLVE
Description	Online hui facilitated by MYD YAG members open to any members of other youth leadership or advisory groups.	Building on the success of last year’s Mayor’s Lunch which brought together mayors and youth councils from across the motu, Festival for the Future 2024 could be another opportunity to bring large numbers of youth councils together in one place to build relationships, share about work underway, and brainstorm ideas for connection and collaboration.	INVOLVE is Aotearoa New Zealand’s leading youth sector conference and happens every two years. The Youth Plan was launched at INVOLVE 2023. INVOLVE 2025 could be an opportunity for members of various youth leadership and advisory groups to convene together.
Timing and logistics	Every one-two months via Microsoft Teams or Zoom	July 2024 in Wellington	August 2025 in Christchurch
Leads	MYD YAG with support of MYD and Mana Mokopuna kaimahi	Inspiring Stories, Wellington youth council, MYD, Mana Mokopuna, Mayors Taskforce for Jobs	Ara Taiohi with support from MYD and Mana Mokopuna
Attendees	Active members of youth leadership and advisory groups including YAGs, youth councils, and other youth voice groups	Focus on youth council members	Members of youth leadership and advisory groups including YAGs, youth councils, and other youth voice groups
Purpose	Regular connection, peer-support, idea and information sharing, professional development	Strengthening connections across youth councils, identifying opportunities to collaborate	Networking, peer-support, idea and information sharing, professional development
Activity Ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tuakana sharing insights and lessons learned through panels or presentations</li><li>• Whakawhanuangatanga</li><li>• Groups sharing updates about what they are doing</li><li>• Guest speakers for professional development opportunities</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mayor’s Lunch</li><li>• Half-day workshop following Mayor’s Lunch for youth council members to connect and workshop – potential workshop topic drafting a youth council Charter to improve practice across groups and increase accountability from decision-makers</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stalls hosted by different groups</li><li>• By-youth, for-youth workshops to identify and design future work or brainstorm ideas</li><li>• Session with the Minister for Youth or other decision-makers engagement hearing directly from young people</li><li>• Professional development through attendance at conference sessions</li></ul>



# Ideas for Future Connections

These three opportunities focus on utilising existing platforms or spaces. For in-person opportunities, young people saw this as a way to reduce costs and barriers to participation as many members of groups may already have plans to attend Festival for the Future or INVOLVE.

Similarly to the kōrero about there not being a single-solution, or 'one size fits all' approach to youth engagement, young people identified that no particular type of connection hui will work for everyone or be the perfect solution.

Taiohi said a regular online space would be a great starting point but that opportunities to come together kanohi ki te kanohi are strongly preferred.

Additionally, some groups emphasised that longer term they would like to see an increase in regional networks like Youth Voice Canterbury which provided regular regional networking opportunities. Other regions could use Youth Voice Canterbury as a model to inform future networks. Continuation and growth of these networks, however, would likely require central or local government leadership and investment.



# Recommendations

# Recommendations

Following our engagements with other groups we have:

**three** recommendations for you as the Minister for Youth



**three** recommendations for the agencies leading and supporting this Youth Plan action



**three** recommendations for us



# Recommendations – Minister for Youth



- 1** Promote the **importance of meaningful youth voice and leadership** with other ministers and senior decision-makers

## Recommended Actions:

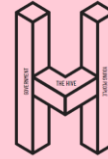
- **Short term:** send a letter to MPs and local councils about the importance of mechanisms for youth voice and participation including an emphasis on the role youth councils play.
- **Ongoing:** champion the importance of youth participation with senior decision-makers including ministerial colleagues particularly when they talk about young people in deficit-focused ways or are discouraging young people who are actively participating and sharing their views with government.
- **Long term:** request policy advice and work with colleagues to scope opportunities to strengthen mandates for youth engagement and consultation e.g. legislation like the Local Government Act.



- 2** Promote the **visibility of existing groups** and champion their use to embed youth voice at multiple levels of decision-making

## Recommended Actions:

- **Short term:** agree to the proactive release of this report and send a letter to ministerial colleagues with information about existing groups, asking them what ways their agencies are engaging with or hearing directly from young people.
- **Ongoing:** amplify the work of youth voice and leadership groups through communication channels like interviews, media releases, and your social media.
- **Long term:** consider centralised investment and budget options that increases resourcing support for groups including central government YAGs, local youth councils, and other youth voice and leadership groups.



- 3** **Understand, utilise, and leverage existing groups**, particularly **The Hive**, to hear directly from young people

## Recommended Actions:

- **Short term:** set up a meeting with The Hive to develop your connection with them and to better understand how you could champion and leverage their unique model across Ministerial portfolios.
- **Ongoing:** continue to support our (the MYD YAGs) work and consult us on recommendations and opportunities to embed youth voice and leadership throughout government and meet directly with other groups of young people.
- **Long term:** work proactively across Ministerial portfolios to ensure young people have been consulted or engaged on key pieces of work that impact them. Advocate for utilisation of The Hive for agencies who do not have youth advisory groups or alternative methods of engagement.

# Recommendations – Mana Mokopuna and MYD



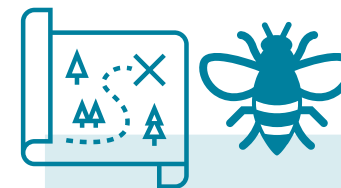
**1** Use this report and the key findings as the base for the **Youth Week 2024 in-person hui** for members of youth voice and leadership groups, specifically workshopping:

- ideas and planning for regular online hui
- workshop questions and structure for Festival for the Future 2024
- preliminary plans for INVOLVE 2025
- resources that would be helpful for members of groups to have access to.



**2** Increase **access to resources and information** for young people and kaimahi:

- Create a webpage or centralised place that young people and kaimahi involved in youth leadership and advisory groups can access with information about existing groups.
- Compile resources for kaimahi managing and facilitating groups.
- Grow the number of kaimahi regularly connecting together to increase information-sharing.
- Develop a welcome pack or package of resources for young people who are part of groups.



**3 Collaborate with The Hive:**

- Build an initial map or online tool that shows formal mechanisms for youth voice alongside other ways young people can have their voices heard and influence decision-making.
- Suggest content about or from existing groups to feature in upcoming editions of The Hive quarterly newsletter.

# Recommendations – MYD YAG



1

Support Mana Mokopuna and MYD with **planning** for a **Youth Week 2024 pilot in-person hui** for members of youth voice and leadership groups including sharing insights from our engagements.



2

**Enhance connections between groups** by:

- piloting a **regular online hui** space where members of different youth voice and leadership rōpū can connect with an emphasis on peer-to-peer mentoring and support
- collaborating with The Hive, sharing ideas for social media and **newsletter** content that celebrates the mahi of existing youth voice groups.



3

Work with the Inspiring Stories Youth Advisory Group and Wellington youth council to explore opportunities to convene youth council members together in person at **Festival for the Future 2024** including workshopping ideas for a youth council Charter or guide.

