Introduction

The Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) - as the national peak body for youth affairs - strongly believes in young people and the powerful contributions they can make to the Australian community - both now and in the future. Our experience working with young people is littered with examples of young people working together to make a real difference to the world around them.

The youth-led movement has developed and grown in Australia, and is recognised as at the forefront of positive social change. These organisations are bound together by the strength of the ideas or goals that young people aspire to achieve. Some youth-led organisations like the Australian Youth Climate Coalition and Left Right Think Tank are set up with a philosophical commitment to the participation of young people and their leadership by young people is a core component of their organisational design. Other organisations in the youth-led space, such as Interns Australia, have been set up by young people and their target group is primarily young, however their structures are not necessarily youth specific and their mission has broader scope and appeal. Just as these organisations are important for young people and the broader community, so is their sustainability.

The process of developing, growing and creating sustainability in youth-led organisations can be difficult and taxing endeavours for the young people involved. In our work with established youth sector organisations, including youth service providers, youth peak bodies and existing youth-led organisations, we see a wealth of knowledge and in-kind resources that could be better utilised to contribute to a more vibrant and sustainable youth-led sector throughout Australia.

As such, AYAC has been working with members and supporters to provide suggestions for the support of emerging or expanding youth-led organisations seeking to find growth and sustainability within their work. The suggestions aim to support youth-led groups and established youth organisations to find the intersections between their work and develop mutually beneficial arrangements that make the best use of available resources across the sector.

We hope these guidelines will be of practical use for organisations thinking about providing support to youth-led groups, and a useful point of reference for young people and youth-led groups wishing to engage with organisations and seeking assistance.
Background
In November 2010, youth-led organisations from around Australia participated in the first ever Australian Youth-Led Convention (AYLC). The AYLC process identified a number of key challenges as well as areas that were working well across the youth-led sector. These included “Building Partnerships and Relationships” and “Organisational Infrastructure”.

Since then, AYAC has been working with representatives from across the youth-led sector to progress the aims identified in the AYLC convention report.1 In particular, AYAC aims to bring together the knowledge and networks within the traditional youth support and development sector with the vision, innovation and creativity that is apparent in youth-led organisations around the nation.

Why Provide Support to Youth-Led Organisations?
As an established organisation within the youth affairs sector, you are bound to have a wealth of untapped knowledge and resources that would be of great benefit to young people who wish to contribute to their communities and establish themselves within the youth-led sector.

Young people who are passionate about a cause and wish to set up a youth-led organisation have a lot to contribute to our community. However, there are a number of challenges that young people face in their work that could result in their enthusiasm and drive being underutilised.

Established organisations can therefore play a key support role for young people in emerging youth-led organisations, with your limited support resulting in greater outcomes for the community.

Those young people may also have a range of skills, perspectives & insights that could also be of benefit to your work. For example, the AYLC identified organisational structure and communications infrastructure as successful attributes of youth-led organisations, with the AYLC report noting that:

“...Youth-led organisations draw heavily on the best practice of other organisations in the private and community sector to design governance, management and staff structures. This formal and informal mentoring and transference of knowledge is coupled with innovation and creativity. Youth-led organisations adapt these practices to suit a voluntary workforce, greater inexperience, and time constraints.”2

As such, many youth-led organisations are at the cutting edge of innovative practice, gathering the best knowledge available from organisations in all sectors. Sharing this bank of insights would be of use to any organisation, particularly established organisations who wish to continue being innovative in their approach to their work, but lack the time or the networks in other sectors required to tap into these possibilities for ongoing improvement in their work.

AYAC encourages all established organisations in the youth affairs sector to develop your relationships with youth-led groups with similar interests to your own and see how you can work together to achieve greater outcomes for young people and the community.


What Supports are Required?

For organisations in the youth-led sector to thrive and survive the challenges they face in establishing themselves, a number of factors are required. A core group of young people must come together with a common purpose and desire to develop and sustain the group in a formal way. Appropriate resources and other support, such as mentoring and access to professional networks, are also vital for this process.

The AYLC report highlighted a number of areas where youth-led organisations could be supported, including the two key areas of building partnerships and relationships and organisational infrastructure.

In developing these guidelines, AYAC spoke to a number of young people with experience in emerging youth-led organisations on their experiences with in-kind support and partnerships with established organisations in the youth sector and beyond. The key areas where the provision in-kind support and partnerships by established organisations has been beneficial to their emergence and survival across two key areas identified by the AYLC report are discussed below.

A. Building Partnerships and Relationships

"The challenge of identifying appropriate potential sponsors or partners was raised by [youth-led organisation representatives]. The youth-led sector is strongly inter-connected but does not enjoy the same level of access to other sectors. The institutional knowledge and strength of networks within the sector is still developing. The bureaucracy of more established, hierarchical organisations can be difficult to access. Youth-led organisations face the disadvantage of all ‘start-ups’ combined with existing negatives perceptions of young people, such as inexperience, lack of reputation or proven ability, and gaining trust."

Young people from emerging youth-led organisations interviewed by AYAC discussed the following as some key areas of in-kind support that have been provided by other organisations, that have assisted their emergence and survival:

- **Mentoring**
  Representatives from a youth-led organisations stated support is not just about resources, but often about providing the confidence to make things happen. Established organisations provided one to one mentoring conversations with youth-led organisation members to focus their efforts on activities that would achieve their goals, in both formal and informal settings.

- **Access to networks / endorsements**
  The AYLC report noted that access to other sectors, navigating organisational bureaucracies and dealing with negative perceptions of young people and start-ups were challenges that youth-led organisations commonly faced. These challenges have been mitigated for many youth-led organisations through the support of more established organisations providing them with access to their networks through information sharing and introductions (e.g. via email) to appropriate representatives from other organisations, as well as both formal and informal endorsement of the work of the youth-led organisation.

- **Promotional avenues**
  Similarly, established organisations were able to foster relationships between emerging youth-led organisations and other sectors through providing them with promotional avenues, such as through profiles and articles in online and print newsletters highlighting their work.

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B. Organisational Infrastructure

"[Youth-led organisation representatives] prioritised the need for more adequate and sustainable organisational infrastructure. Youth led organisations expressed a preference for face to face meetings but noted a lack of physical space or financial resources to fund overhead costs such as office/dedicated meeting space. Internal and external communication infrastructure, such as access to reliable conference call software or knowledge sharing IT platforms, is expensive"4

Young people interviewed by AYAC identified the following areas where in-kind support could be provided to youth-led groups by established organisations in the youth sector:

- **Meeting space**
  As noted above, the AYLCC report highlighted that face to face meetings difficult for many youth-led organisations to convene due to a lack of dedicated meeting space. As many emerging youth-led organisations hold their meetings on weekends and after hours, established organisations can offer the use of meeting space during times when it would have minimal impact on their normal use of the space during office hours.

- **Printing, phones & computers**
  Many organisations have under-utilised desk space and often have unused phones and computers that could be offered for use by emerging youth-led organisations for minimal cost. Basic printing and teleconferencing infrastructure was also a big area of need for youth-led groups, and could be offered as in-kind support or on a cost-recovery basis.

- **IT platforms**
  Some emerging youth-led organisations require the infrastructure to establish information management systems for the purposes of knowledge sharing and retention, particularly with turnover of staff and volunteers. Many established organisations could utilise existing information management infrastructure to ensure that these systems are able to be put into place for youth-leds during their early stages of organisational development.

Managing Risks & Maximising Rewards

If you are considering entering into a partnership involving an established organisation supporting an emerging youth-led organisation, it is a good idea to consider how you can manage the relationship on an ongoing basis and what arrangements need to be put into place in order to ensure everyone gets what they want out of the partnership.

A. Risk assessment

Below are a number of things both groups may need to consider when assessing the risks and rewards offered by entering into an arrangement for the provision of in-kind support:

- **Ongoing communication**
  Communication was identified as the most important aspect of any partnership, and particularly important for organisations with a large number of volunteers and a high turnover of people. Opportunities for individuals from each respective group sharing space and resources to periodically connect with each other and open up formal and informal channels of communication was seen as an important way to ensure that conflict could be avoided.

- **Privacy**
  Both youth-eds and established organisations discussed the need to ensure organisations in shared spaces were able to maintain confidentiality and privacy in their conversations and other sources of information available within their offices.

- **Strain on resources**
  Providing in-kind support places extra strain on resources, particularly if the expected resources required becomes more than anticipated. Expectations in this area should be set at the start and managed on an ongoing basis through periodic reviews.

Organisational autonomy
Youth-led and established organisations often come together based on mutual goals and shared values, however this leads to uncertainty in relation to the role and autonomy of the youth-led organisation in any partnership. The vision of youth-led organisations are often driven by the need for young people to be the driving force behind particular causes and therefore it is important to many that they do not simply become subsumed into the established organisation, as their “youth wing”.

Reputation impact
The partnership between organisations can have both a positive or a negative impact on the reputations of either organisation. Many established organisations consider their support for the mission and work of youth-led organisations as part of their contributions to the community in general and young people in particular. However, as established organisations do not have control over the youth-led group, this may cause concern about possible association with activities beyond their control. The likely impact on reputations should be considered in advance and clear expectations should be set in order to avoid negative reputation impact.

B. Memorandum of Understanding
Once your organisations are looking to enter into a support arrangement between a youth-led and an established organisation, it is recommended whether a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the organisations should be written, either at this stage or later once the partnership has developed further. The MOU should outline the agreed understanding of the organisations involved in relation to the obligations that each organisation agrees to undertake when entering into the arrangement.

When writing your MOU, you may wish to consider including the following elements:
- The overall purpose of the arrangement
- The length of time that the arrangement will be in effect (and when it will end or be reviewed)
- Specific obligations that each organisation agrees to undertake, including the activities that each organisation will do in order to manage any risks listed above
- Agreed limits (e.g. hours in which space can be used, limits on telephone use, etc.)
- Anything activity that would mean the arrangement would no longer be in force (i.e. the deal breakers)
- Primary contact people to discuss about the arrangements
- An agreed process for solving any issues or disputes that may arise
Case Study: Youth Action NSW & Interns Australia

A group of young people who had connections with Youth Action NSW (the peak organisations representing young people and youth services in NSW) discussed the creation of an organisation to provide support and advocacy for interns in Australia and end exploitation of interns through empowerment of interns and awareness raising across industry, governments and the community.

Youth Action agreed to pilot the model for supporting the growth and sustainability for Youth-Led organisations by providing this group with a range of in-kind support, including:

- Operational advice,
- Administrative support,
- Use of spare computers,
- Use of spare office space
- Use of meeting rooms,
- Formal and informal external supervision,
- Coaching to focus strategic goals and maximise use of current skills,
- Utilising networks to find other skills required,
- Putting them in touch with sector contacts,
- Institutional backing to support their credibility

Youth Action worked with young people from the group to jointly develop submissions on issues affecting interns for a NSW Parliamentary Inquiry and collaborated on a number of other projects.

The partnership between the two groups supported the staged development of Interns Australia, which launched in early 2014. The inaugural Executive Director of the group said that the one on one conversations with Youth Action staff members meant that he was able to talk through how ideas could be put into action and gave them the confidence to make things happen.

As a result of the partnership, Youth Action are now looking at providing a “hot desk” for other emerging youth-led organisations and providing similar support to groups that are working on issues that are of relevance to youth affairs in NSW.