

YOUTH VOICE



OUR VOICE, OUR WAY: LISTENING TO YOUNG PEOPLE - PHASE 1 INSIGHTS

Background:

The Youth Voice Engagement Plan has been developed to work closely with young First Peoples to design a youth advisory model to Gellung Warl. As part of the Listening Phase (Phase 1), we aim to build relationships and capture insights from young people about their values, aspirations and ideas for how a youth advisory body to Gellung Warl could work.

Between September and November 2025, we ran a Youth Voice Survey to hear from young First Peoples on their experiences with youth leadership and engagement. The survey was open for two months and we received 58 responses from young First Peoples residing in Victoria or Traditional Owners of Country in Victoria. Below are the key insights we pulled for the survey data.

Across December 2025 and February 2026, we delivered a series of online mini workshops to deepen engagement with young First Peoples and create space for honest conversations about Treaty and youth participation. These workshops were designed in two age-specific streams, one for 12-17 year olds and the other for 18-28 year olds, to ensure age-appropriate discussions and accessibility. The sessions provided opportunities for young people to receive updates on Treaty, reflect on the information presented and engage directly with our Youth Voice Conveners.

YOUTH VOICE SURVEY 2025

Who responded:

- Young First Peoples aged between 12-28 years old, with most being between ages 15-26.
- A highly diverse representation of mobs (over 25 different mobs represented).
- Students were the largest group of respondents, followed by full time workers and part-time/casual workers.
- There was a small number of respondents who were young people in unemployed or unpaid roles.

**We asked: ‘What are your interests as a young person?’
Here’s what young people said:**

Culture, Sovereignty and Community

- Cultural revival, language, land back and truth-telling
- Deep desire for connection to Country, Elders and culture
- Interest in nation-building and governance
- Community care

Education and Learning

- Cultural knowledge and language
- High interest in education access
- Opportunities to learn about systems (Treaty, justice, cultural governance, economic, political etc.)

Justice and systems change

- Youth justice
- Anti-racism
- Accessibility
- Decolonisation

Health and Wellbeing

- Mental health
- Social and emotional wellbeing

Arts and Creative Expression

- Visual arts, theatre, crafts and dance
- Desire to create and engage with the arts

Country and climate

- Climate change
- Care for water, land and wildlife
- Helping others

We asked: 'What does good youth leadership look like to you?'
Here's what young people said:

1. Strong values and ethics

- Respectful, kind and values-driven
- Being a good role model

2. Being connected and grounded in community

- Walking with Community not ahead
- Listening to Elders and their advice
- Centring culture

3. The confidence to use their voice and amplify the voices of others

- Ensure marginalised voices are heard
- Speaking out against racism, injustices and harmful systems
- Brave to challenge normals or status quo

4. Willingness to learn and grow

- Owning mistakes
- Taking feedback
- Showing consistency

5. Good communication

- Active listener
- Not talking over people
- Communicate to wide range of people

We asked: 'What does good youth engagement look like to you?'
Here's what young people said:

1. Being listened to and taken seriously
2. Safe and culturally respectful spaces
3. Long term investment in young people, not one-off conversations
4. Clear communication (what's happening and why)
5. Diversity of voices are heard
6. Seeing impact from their input
7. Opportunities to lead, not just participate

We asked: ‘What approaches make you feel respected, heard and included?’ Here’s what young people said:

Build real relationships and trust

Young people want you to genuinely get to know them, their experiences, their community and what matters to them.

Follow up with action

Engagement needs to go somewhere. Young people want to see how their ideas and feedback are being used, what decisions are made, and what happens next.

Create space for meaningful conversations

Young people value safe spaces where they can speak honestly, tell the truth, and be heard without judgement. Engagement should aim for real change whether that’s personal, community, or system-level.

We asked: ‘What would help young people balance their commitments and be better supported to participate in youth specific work of Gellung Warl?’ Here’s what they said:

1. Young people want real power and influence, not token involvement
2. Engagement must be relational and long-term
3. Young First People are carrying a lot and need care
4. Learning is a key pathway to empowerment
5. Community, Elders and intergeneration connection matters

ONLINE MINI WORKSHOPS 2025-2026

Participants:

- A small number of young people participated across the online workshop series.
- Participants included students, workers, and those residing in rehabilitation centres

What did young people think about Treaty?

Young people described it as:

- monumental
- an acknowledgement
- an agreement

One participant compared Treaty to family rules that help people coexist and move forward together.

What this tells us: Young people understand the significance of Treaty but are cautious about how it is implemented.

Do young people feel their voice is heard?

Participants shared that their voices are often heard within their immediate circles – such as family, friends, school or university – but are not always recognised by the broader community.

One young person also spoke about the privilege that can come with living in major cities such as Melbourne, where exposure to diverse perspectives can create more opportunities for voices to be heard and to hear others.

What this tells us: This highlighted the importance of creating stronger pathways for young mob to connect and influence decision making that occurs beyond their communities.

Is the first Statewide Treaty a strong foundation?

Young people shared a sense of cautious interest and curiosity with some still grappling with the depth of it all. Participants viewed Treaty as an important foundation for change while acknowledging the need to protect its intent and ensure it leads to meaningful outcomes for Community.

What this tells us: Young people are engaged and curious but want to make sure they see meaningful change through Treaty.

What kind of youth representation do young people want?

We heard a strong preference for interactive and supportive participation spaces, particularly those focused on engagement and activation rather than highly formal governance environments.

Leadership groups were seen as positive, especially when young people are not expected to carry the burden of organising themselves or experience shame stepping forward.

Feedback also highlighted that representation models should be age and circumstance-responsive, providing opportunities that align with the needs and readiness of different cohorts.

What this tells us: Participation models must reduce barriers such as access, shame, uncertainty, and the pressure to self-organise.

Do young people feel their voice is heard?

Young people were clear; engagement cannot be one off.

They want:

- ongoing, two-way engagement
- consistent communication and follow-ups
- culturally safe environments and platforms where their voices are actively supported

They strongly encouraged grassroots approaches and spaces where young people already feel comfortable collaborating.

Most importantly they want to see the impact of their contributions. When they know their voices lead to real outcomes, they are more likely to stay involved.

What this tells us: Impact build trust and trust sustains participation

Key insight

Young people are ready to lead.

But participation must be designed with them – creating spaces that are safe, relational, age-responsive and focused on real outcomes