



City of Greater Dandenong Youth and Family Services

Young People and Remuneration Summary of Benchmarking Findings

Upholding transparency and consistency when engaging young people in consultation and participation activities.

October 2024

CITY OF GREATER DANDENONG YOUTH SERVICES

Young People and Remuneration Benchmarking Project

Local Government Youth Services

Introduction

The City of Greater Dandenong Youth and Family Services (YFS) has a long and proud history of working with young people to provide meaningful opportunities to actively participate in their community. To support this tenet, youth services tailors its program offerings to support young people's personal and skill development opportunities. Equally, young people are regularly engaged to provide their advice and feedback, share their lived experience, assist with co-designing programs and/or undertake a defined role based on their skills, knowledge, or experience.

The youth sector and local councils have a developing understanding that where the insight and contributions of young people go beyond that of participating and volunteering, they should be remunerated to recognise their expertise and cover the expenses that their involvement may bring.

Remuneration is compensation in the form of a gift card or direct debit payment in recognition of the time and expertise shared by young people with the City of Greater Dandenong. Whilst different to a gift, which is a thank you for a voluntary contribution to a program or project, the two function much the same when pertaining to young people involved in youth activities. Comparatively, a reimbursement is repayment for expenses incurred due to participation, such as travel costs. Throughout this report, the term remuneration will be used to describe the three payment types for youth volunteers involved with YFS activities.

While consultations at council are not universally remunerated across the organisation, the disproportionate disadvantage of young people places them in a unique situation. Often, young people do not have a disposable income, and YFS do not intend to disadvantage young people further by requesting their participation. In the 2023/24 financial year, 90% of 18–25-year-olds in Victoria experienced financial difficulties at some point.¹ As it is not uncommon for young people to incur costs by participating in consultations, such as transport costs, we do not wish to disadvantage them further.

Regarding an overall policy position, youth services' application of remuneration and reimbursement has, to date, included a comprehensive performance metric. However, there has not been an outlined structure for the remuneration of activities that sit outside of this. It is therefore the intention of this initiative to formulate a consistent approach to afford clarity and transparency.

Background Context

While there is research on the benefits of involving young people in decisions that affect them, and frameworks to measure youth participation, there are a lack of guiding frameworks on honorarium amounts. To date, Greater Dandenong youth services' formalisation of payments has been limited to 'youth performance payments' based on benchmarks for youth events.

It was therefore determined that we undertake a literature review and assessment of other youth organisations, as well as a benchmarking exercise to learn from the approach of other local council youth services.

Greater Dandenong Youth Services sees significant value in proactively looking outside our own experience to learn how other like-minded services are operating and meeting desired outcomes using approaches and resources that may be more efficient and effective.

The aim of this discrete activity is to assist Greater Dandenong Youth Services to benchmark its current service model and level of service provision among other sectors and comparable local government youth services. This benchmarking will illustrate the types of roles young people assume, and within these roles, what types of activities warrant remuneration, and how much. It is intended that the findings from this report will assist us in learning

how we can employ evidence-based program design to continue to enhance our existing remuneration strategies for youth participation in the City of Greater Dandenong.

Summary of Findings

Eighteen organisations across Australia were reviewed to understand current remuneration practice. It is important to note four of these organisations are in the youth mental health space, which is known for a progressed lived experience remuneration approach. As such, separate aggregate figures for youth and lived experience participation were derived. This produced a \$42 per hour average for youth participation remuneration, with 83% of organisations remunerating through direct debit and 17% via a gift card.

Many organisations align their remuneration plan to the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) Spectrum of Public Participation.² As such, they will remunerate differently (or not at all) depending on whether an activity fits the Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate or Empower level on their Spectrum.

YACVic, the peak body for young people and the youth sector in Victoria, provides guidance on when a young person should be remunerated for participation, but not by how much.³ YACVic suggest remuneration for consultation, focus groups or co-design projects and being a speaker or on a panel (including interview panel). YACVic do not highlight a need for remuneration for a training, event, forum or survey, and in the case of a peer worker, education or facilitator ask organisations to consider casual employment.

Aligned to YACVic's guidance, the overall trend of local government youth services is to remunerate for youth consultations and panel speakers, facilitators and presenters. Additionally to this, the Victorian Government have cited in the FReeZA 2025-27 Program Guidelines that they support remunerating young people for their participation in the program.⁴

Many organisations require young people to complete an Australian Tax Office (ATO) Statement by Supplier Form⁵ in the case where the individual does not have their own ABN when they are being paid. This is not necessary for a volunteer receiving an honorarium, in recognition that this does not constitute a payment but rather a gift. However, when determining honorarium amounts it is important to keep in mind that current minimum wage as of 2024 \$24.10 per hour.⁶

Approach

A literature review and assessment of the remuneration practices of young people at 18 other organisations across Australia was conducted. Data from 2020 onwards was collected from five government organisations, five non-government youth organisation, four mental health organisations, three health organisations and one education organisation.

A survey was then prepared and distributed by email to seven Victorian local government youth services. The scope of benchmarking questions encompassed:

- If councils remunerate young people,
- What type of activities are remunerated,
- How much young people are remunerated and by what metric,
- Any paperwork required by young people or tax implications encountered,
- If relevant, any current barriers to remuneration.

Reponses

A total of seven individual council responses to the survey were submitted by the closing date. Benchmarking findings in this report are presented as de-identified.

Framework for Remuneration

One of the areas of focus of this benchmarking activity was to understand whether councils remunerate young people and what, if any, policies or procedures govern this process. Of the surveyed councils, two out of seven have a structured and consistent approach or framework to remuneration.

All participating councils reported only remunerating via gift card, with two sharing that they use Visa Gift Cards and one securing procurement with Prezzy.

Remunerated Activities

Six out of seven of surveyed councils reported providing remunerated opportunities. Regarding activity types, the seven surveyed councils remunerate as follows:

- Five councils remunerate youth consultations,
- Two councils remunerate lived experience consultation,
- One council remunerates co-design,
- One council remunerates recurring youth advisory groups,
- Five councils remunerate panel speakers, facilitators or presenters,
- Two councils remunerate interview panellists, and
- Five councils remunerate performers.

Councils also expressed other remunerated activities, which include prize winners, photographers, award judges and in the case of one council, five casually employed Youth Ambassadors.

Remuneration Rate

Of the seven councils surveyed, four have a consistent per hour remuneration rate for youth consultations. Two of these councils remunerate at \$20 per hour, one at \$35 per hour and one at \$50 per 1.5 hours.

For panel speaking, facilitating and/or presenting, two councils reported remunerating young people \$50 per hour, and one at \$150 for four hours. All other activity remuneration figures are unknown.

Conclusion

This benchmarking report provides a summary of responses received from seven participating local government youth services, who are largely representative of metropolitan Melbourne Councils. The report presents a snapshot in time [August-September 2024] with the information shared, collectively revealing a strong commitment and investment by local government in remunerating young people for their time and expertise wherever possible.

This report encourages local councils to adopt a framework or structure for transparently remunerating young people where appropriate and feasible for their engagement. While the national research findings produced a \$42 per hour average for youth participation remuneration, the local council benchmarking suggests an average of \$25 per hour is a more realistic standard practice.

References

¹ Reid, B. "Young People in Victoria." Parliament of Victoria. July 2024. <https://apo.org.au/node/327453>

² International Association for Public Participation. "IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum." IAP2 Resources. September 2024. <https://iap2.org.au/resources/spectrum/>

³ Youth Affairs Council Victoria. "Paying Young People." YERP. September 2024. <https://www.yacvic.org.au/yerp/coordinating-youth-participation/remuneration/>

⁴ Victorian Government. "FreeZA 2025-27 grant program." Youth Central. September 2024. <https://www.vic.gov.au/freeza-2025-27>

⁵ Australian Tax Office. "Statement by a Supplier." Small Business – Tax, Super and You. September 2024. <https://smallbusiness.taxsuperandyou.gov.au/starting-a-small-business/statement-by-a-supplier>

⁶ Fair Work Ombudsman. "Minimum Wages." Pay and Wages. September 2024. <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/pay-and-wages/minimum-wages>