

# OPPORTUNITY, ACCESS AND EQUITY FOR RURAL YOUNG PEOPLE

**Opportunity** (*noun*) - a time or set of circumstances that makes it possible to do something.

**Access** (*noun*) -the means or opportunity to approach or enter a place.

**Equity** (*noun*)- the quality of being fair

We would encourage all organisations both government and non- government that are seeking to enrich the lives of young people living in Victoria to consider important factors that are either *enablers* or *barriers* for enhancing the participation in community, education, the economy and improved health.

**Timely promotion** – Believe it or not some parts of rural Victoria have very poor connectivity! This can be due to not only poor internet access and infrastructure, but also includes families and young people living on very low incomes with limited or no home internet. Some young people only access the internet at school or work and promoting events successfully, as research shows usually requires more than one intersection with the promotional materials.

**School /Community Hubs** – particularly for small rural communities with between 400 and 2500 population (of which there are many in Victoria), school and community newsletters are often the best way to promote opportunities and advertise events to young people: these publications often come out only weekly or monthly – a two to four-week lead time for an event is not likely to yield participation or support access.

**Direct Marketing** - building the capacity of and engaging with more vulnerable cohorts to participate in opportunities takes direct and personal approaches by those working with or in contact with these young people: this requires time and effort across a large geographic area – in our case three LGA's and 22,000 Sq. kilometres.

**Transport** – most small rural communities in the North Central and North West have limited or no access to public transport. When transport is available it is often not a direct route (three + hours if direct) therefore it can take 3 to 5 hours to get to Melbourne. If a young person or their family has a car the cost is still quite significant as is the time commitment. Accommodation is often required for events that take a full day in Melbourne or a larger Regional Centre

Recently examples include both the Victoria Youth Summit and the Vic Health Staying on Track opportunities being promoted into rural Victorian communities with under three weeks' notice for registration. There are many more examples including arts and cultural events ,scholarships etc. Event organisers are encouraged to consider:

- the costs associated with youth participation e.g. transport, accommodation (most of these are not covered by organisers)

- The budget capacity (of key stakeholders) or grants that might support young people participating. Local champions and agencies often support events access however it takes time to explore locally
- The most effective media coverage to ensure young people and their families are aware of the opportunities (this might be a monthly newsletter or local paper that comes out weekly) and of course Facebook pages etc
- The ability to support more vulnerable cohorts in all aspects of participation e.g. awareness, transport, accommodation, fees and direct follow up etc...

We would like to encourage all event organisers to survey by post code young people who participate in what are often life changing events where both networks and aspirations are formed – both critical opportunities rural young people need. How many young people are participating who are not from large regional centres with direct rail, bus or tram access to events? This may provide a picture of ‘rural disadvantage’ that should be a consideration when looking at building equity in youth participation.

While access regionally to some opportunities is highly desirable, we are not advocating that all events and opportunities be offered locally; our young people tell us that the ability to understand and experience diverse and exciting opportunities beyond their local communities increases both their awareness and understanding of context and builds their capacity to contribute in new ways back into their local communities.

Our Request:

**Adequate notice of opportunities for participation** – ideally six to eight weeks; the longer the better

**Consideration of transport and accommodation costs** – Where possible support should be offered for these items e.g. vouchers

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Supporting young people in the Local Government Areas of:

Loddon

Buloke

Northern Grampians