

## eSmart Resource: Student-led resources - Consultations

As part of becoming eSmart, schools commit to supporting meaningful student voice. This includes creating opportunities for students to develop and share resources and information about bullying, cyber bullying and cyber safety (Action 5.4) and the smart and positive uses of digital technology (Action 5.5).

One approach is through student-led consultations. Students can develop their own consultative resources – e.g. online surveys or hypothetical scenarios for discussion – and they can use the data and insights gathered to inform future resources.

By leading a consultation into their peers' strengths, risks and needs online, students can:

- Collect high-quality information that's relevant to them
- Build a clear and authentic picture of what's happening in their school community
- Develop actions or recommendations to school leadership
- Help shape the work of teachers, SRCs, and wellbeing staff
- Inform the school's planning in relation to tech use and community advice
- Build skills, confidence, and relationships with teachers and peers
- Deepen their connectedness to their school community.

### Before getting started...

When planning a student-led consultation, it may be helpful for students and staff to consider the following guiding questions:

1. What is it we want to find out? For example, we might want to know:
  - Which online and/or offline spaces make students feel safe or unsafe?
  - What sort of support do students need to use technology confidently and safely?
  - What do students want their teachers and parents to understand about their experiences online and/or offline?
2. Whom will we survey? e.g. a class, a year level, a diverse focus group, the whole school...?
3. What type of information are we looking for? Do we want statistics, opinions, stories...?

4. What sort of information is it OK for us to collect? For example, we should only collect information that's relevant to our survey, and we must work in line with our school's privacy policies and the law.
5. How will we make sure we're hearing from a truly representative range of students?
6. Which methods will we use to consult? Some consultations use written surveys, interviews, focus groups, vox pops, forums, graffiti walls, or discussions of hypothetical scenarios. Others invite students to express their thoughts through photography, art, message walls or creative writing. Some schools have also invited students to mark on a map the physical spaces where they feel safe or unsafe in relation to bullying, and a similar exercise might be developed to map 'safe' and 'unsafe' cyber spaces.

What are the pros and cons of different consultation methods, keeping in mind our priorities and capacity? For example:

- Written surveys enable us to reach large numbers of people anonymously, and can be analysed fairly simply, but they don't allow for much free commentary or interaction, and they can be hard for students with literacy barriers.
  - Focus groups are more interactive and accessible, but they don't allow for large numbers and may be inappropriate for discussion of sensitive topics.
  - Graffiti boards are easy, fun, interactive and relatively anonymous, but the data they produce can be difficult to interpret and not very in-depth.
  - Vox pops can reach large numbers and are relatively accessible and straightforward, but the data they produce may not be representative or in-depth.
  - Art projects can be fun, interactive, accessible and produce striking insights, but they usually don't reach large numbers and may not produce quantitative data.
  - Forums can be interactive and engage large numbers, but they can be hard to plan and may be inappropriate for discussion of sensitive topics.
7. How will we minimise the risk of a student being upset by our consultation? For example, we might:
    - Involve wellbeing staff
    - Keep our questions age-appropriate
    - Set rules about respectful language
    - Explain that taking part is optional

- Encourage students to use hypothetical language (e.g. 'Some students experience...', not 'I've experienced...')
- Be clear about disclosure – e.g. we will keep everything confidential unless there's a concern for a child's safety.

8. What will we do with the information we gather? Will we turn it into a resource? Will we come up with future actions or recommendations to the school?

For further guiding questions, see the resource 'Student-led resources: Getting started'.

Further reading

- [Student Voice Hub](#), VicSRC – covers topics including student-led conversations and forums.
- [Connect](#) magazine, Australian Council for Educational Research – advice and case studies about student participation, including student-led surveys and consultations.
- [Yerp](#), Youth Affairs Council Victoria – contains tips for young people and professionals on running consultations.
- [Engaging Children in Decision-Making](#), Victorian Local Government Association – covers different consultation models for younger children.