



 TOOLKIT RESOURCES

Youth
Co-research
TOOLKIT 

What is co-research?



Introduction to the Youth Co-research Toolkit

This toolkit is designed to support and guide young people in the early stages of their research journey, with a focus on social research. The toolkit compliments young people's research training and professional development. The aim is to support young people's meaningful role in shaping and conducting research that investigates the big challenges facing society. Building resilient societies should be by and for young people - their involvement as collaborative researchers is critical.



The resources within this toolkit provide information, advice and tools for young people to build their confidence and skills as co-researchers to contribute to real-world impact. It consists of:

- **Information** that outlines what it means to be a co-researcher, what it's actually like being on a research team, and the benefits that young people, the research, and the community can experience
- **Real experiences** and advice from other young researchers
- **'How to'** guides that provide **tips** to manage research challenges and get started in a research career
- Introductory **training guides** and activities that introduce the concepts of research ethics, social research methods and research project management
- Practical **tools** and **templates**, from managing wellbeing, to planning a research project timeline.

This toolkit has been developed as an outcome of engagement with young people, researchers and partners at the Centre for Multicultural Youth, through **research** at the Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies. The toolkit was identified as one key way to build effective youth participation in research about the issues that impact young people's lives.

The toolkit is a work-in-progress, to be refined, refreshed and added to over time, and supplemented with resources tailored for specific groups of young people and areas of research.

The resources in this toolkit have been developed in collaboration with the Young & Resilient Research Centre at Western Sydney University and young researchers engaged in **Explore**, a training program that develops research skills for young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, coordinated by the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) and funded by the Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies (CRIS). Some resources are based on work with the **WH&Y Commission** and reviewed by young people in Explore, researchers at Deakin University, and CMY.





Why would you want to be part of a research team?

This resource outlines what it means to be a co-researcher, what it's actually like being on a research team, and all the benefits you could experience.

Photo: Image provided by CMY and photographed by Harjono Djoyobisono.

Firstly, what is co-research anyway?

There are many ways in which young people can be involved in research, with varying degrees of participation, from participants, consultants, research team members (or 'co-researchers') to research leaders. There is no right or wrong way to participate in research, and the approach that a project takes depends on the research aims, the capacity of the research team members (young people, senior researchers and partners), young people's own priorities, and the context of the research. In reality, research projects often blend multiple approaches. The focus of the resources provided in this Toolkit is to provide guidance and support to young people as co-researchers.

Involving young people as co-researchers, who have shared ownership of the research process and outcomes, is a rights-based approach to research.¹ It meaningfully involves young people to research the problems and inform the solutions that impact their lives. Whilst there is not a single definition of co-research, the process involves young people with trained research skills collaborating with more experienced researchers to produce knowledge. Young co-researchers are fully included and embedded into the project team, beyond the roles of advisors, co-designers, or informants, by being involved across all stages of the research cycle, from design, data collection, analysis, reporting, dissemination, and evaluation. More experienced researchers collaborate with young co-researchers throughout the project cycle and provide support, training, and guidance to young researchers to build their skills and capacities. Their role is often to oversee project management activities and involve young researchers in decision-making along the way.

Young people as consultants

Adults seek young people's views to build knowledge about an issue and may obtain their contributions to the design and direction of the research, then adults conduct the research. Young people may be consulted across multiple stages of the research or at only one stage.

Young people as co-researchers

Young people are involved as collaborative researchers and are a part of the entire project in partnership with adults. Young people take an active part in shaping, planning and implementing the research and there is a shared generation of knowledge.



Youth involvement approaches in research

Young people as participants

In non-participatory approaches, this is a one-way process where adults conduct the research without any engagement with young people, other than as participants.

Young people as research leaders

Young people initiate their own research, develop their own processes and methods and maintain control of the research at all stages. Adults act as facilitators or advisors.

¹ Alderson, P. (2008) *Children as researchers*. In: Christensen P and James A (eds) *Research with Children: Perspectives and Practices*. 2nd ed. Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 276–290.

The principles of co-research are collaborative and youth-centered. In co-research:

- Equal value is given to all knowledge (lived experience and by education/profession) and diverse perspectives;
- There is shared decision-making power and understanding;
- There is mutual learning between young researchers and more experienced researchers;
- Building relationships and trust is prioritised;
- There are opportunities to build capacity and knowledge.²

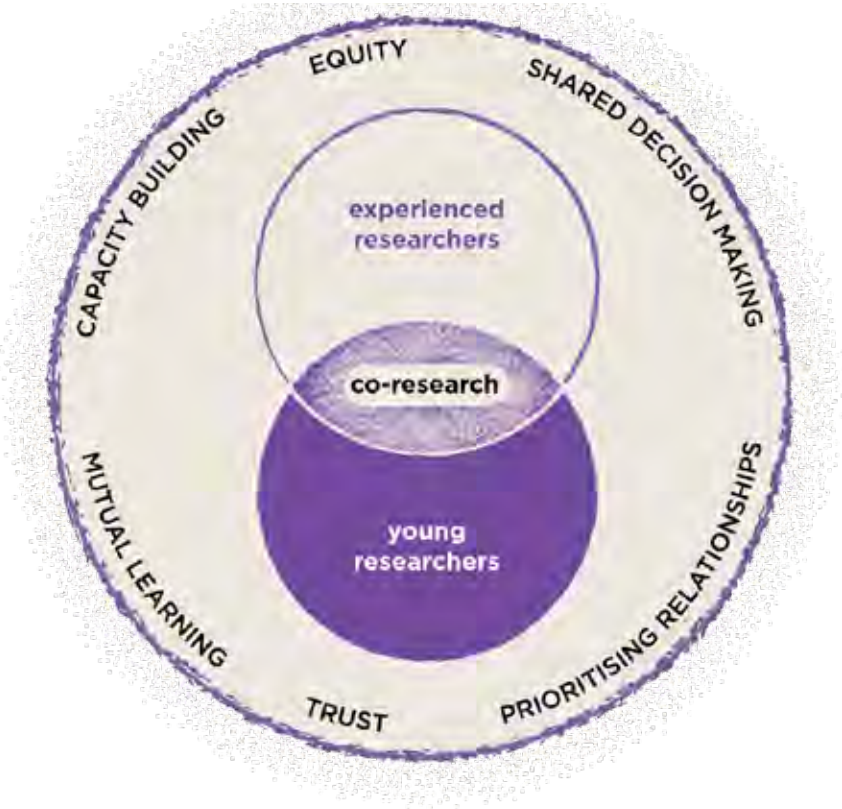


Photo: Image provided by CMY and photographed by Harjono Djoyobisono.

In the words of young researchers, co-research is...

Having visibility of how my role will make an impact

Working where I can share my unique experience and guide the research

Where I can interpret participant responses through my lived experience

Being involved in the research early, and later in the evaluation - not just when it is convenient

Having the support to take ownership

Being entrusted by senior researchers and given autonomy

Having a stake in the research



2 Hickey G., Brearley S., Coldham T., Denegri S., Green G., Staniszewska S., Tembo D., Torok K., Turner K. (2018) *Guidance on coproducing a research project*. INVOLVE, Southampton.

In sum, the overall goal of co-research with young people is to create spaces and opportunities for mutually beneficial partnerships where young people are empowered and their individual capacities and experiences are supported.³ It is much more than giving young people the opportunity to have their voices heard and their perspectives considered. It is about empowering young people to shape the way knowledge is produced and shared with communities.

Co-research is not an approach that aims for complete shared control between experienced researchers and young people. This is because there are often power imbalances between adults and younger researchers, different levels of research experience, and different levels of time and effort that can be committed to a project by different members. So, practically, the tasks of overall project management are often undertaken by adults. Crucially, the roles and responsibilities of researchers are explored and

defined together. This is so that young researchers can have a say in what their priorities, capacities, and interests are, and where they would like to be involved. It's also okay if these shift over time and over different contexts.

Conceptualisation

- ≥ Create, revise and prioritise research questions
- ≥ Environmental scans and literature reviews
- ≥ Attend project kick-off meetings
- ≥ Develop project descriptions for ethics applications

Project planning

- ≥ Identify the roles and responsibilities you are interested in
- ≥ Schedule meetings for the research team
- ≥ Provide feedback on research timelines
- ≥ Identify suitable locations for research activities
- ≥ Consult on budgeting plans

Design

- ≥ Brainstorm research methods and research instruments
- ≥ Test, review and refine data collection tools e.g. surveys, interview discussion guides, workshop agendas
- ≥ Collaborate to confirm participant sample attributes and recruitment method

Dissemination

- ≥ Draft sections of the report (under the guidance and support of the research team)
- ≥ Co-author journal articles
- ≥ Be involved in planning and executing events e.g. webinars, exhibitions, conference presentations

Analysis

- ≥ Data entry and coding
- ≥ Identify preliminary findings
- ≥ Collaborative analysis sessions with team and/or participants

Data collection

- ≥ Create recruitment materials and social media collateral
- ≥ Assist in communicating with participants e.g. scheduling interview times/locations
- ≥ Conduct fieldwork (with support from research team if necessary)
- ≥ Note-taking and transcription
- ≥ Collect and store data collection materials

Where can you be involved in the research cycle as a co-researcher?

³ Rutgers WPF and the International Planned Parenthood Federation (2013) *Explore toolkit: involving young people as researchers in sexual and reproductive health programmes*. Rutgers WPF and IPPF.

Co-research in action: Case Studies

1 | **Children’s voices in the time of COVID-19: An inter-generational collaboration co-research study.**⁴

Two senior researchers, in collaboration with 12 young people aged 12 to 17, conducted research to explore children and young people’s reflections on and perceptions of the COVID-19 outbreak. These 12 young people—from Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Democratic Republic of Congo, Mongolia, Romania, and Sierra Leone—were members of World Vision’s Young Leaders Advocacy programme which provides skills and tools for young people to conduct their own research. Young co-researchers interviewed participants (other children and young people) over social media and messaging platforms. The young co-researchers felt that their involvement was needed, useful, and rewarding, particularly to help recruit peers to the study in ways that adults did not have access to. Further, the co-researchers expressed that they valued their involvement in the project to use their skills and free time during social isolation for a good cause. They also greatly appreciated the opportunity to connect with other young people during a time when their friendships were restricted.

2 | **A community-based participatory research project with youth mental health service users.**⁵

This US-based study took a community-based participatory approach to develop a mechanism for young people to take part in designing and conducting mental health research. Their aim was to gain an understanding of the housing support needs of young people living with mental health conditions. Six co-researchers aged 18 to 25 were hired, provided with extensive training and paid at an hourly rate. Co-researchers were involved in research design, recruitment, data collection, analysis, and dissemination.

Involving young co-researchers with lived mental health experiences contributed to a strong rapport with participants, enhancing the types and quality of data gathered. Further, their involvement prompted adult team members to question their assumptions and provided different perspectives which allowed for a deeper interpretation of the data.

3 | **Living Life to the Fullest: An arts-informed co-produced research project with disabled young people.**⁶

This UK study co-produced disability research by forming the Co-Researcher Collective with six young disabled people. The young people were involved in: research design, recruiting and interviewing participants, planning the project’s impact strategy, building relationships with stakeholders, capturing the research process, and communicating the findings through writing blogs, making films, presenting at conferences and research festivals, and co-authoring articles for publication. In recognition of their work, the young co-researchers were given a budget to purchase technology of their choice, invited to become members of the university research centre, and provided certificates and references as evidence of their contributions.

4 Cuevas-Parra, P., & Stephano, M. (2020) *Children’s voices in the time of COVID-19: Continued child activism in the face of personal challenges*. World Vision International.

5 Lincoln, A., Borg, R. & Delman, J. (2015) Developing a Community-Based Participatory Research Model to Engage Transition Age Youth Using Mental Health Service in Research. *Family & Community Health*, 38 (1), 87-97.

6 Liddiard, K., Runswick-Cole, K., Goodley, D., Whitney, S., Vogelmann, E. & Watts, M. (2019) “I was Excited by the Idea of a Project that Focuses on those Unasked Questions” Co-Producing Disability Research with Disabled Young People. *Children & Society*, 33, 154-167.

What can I expect as a co-researcher?

Now that you know about what co-research is, what does it look like in reality? What kinds of responsibilities can a young researcher expect to have? What sort of activities would you be involved with? Who can you expect to work with? Here are a few practical tips to help you prepare for what it's like working as a co-researcher.

1 | **Every project is different.**

Firstly, whilst there will be some similarities, know that every project will be different. You'll most likely be working on different research topics, using different methods, and meeting diverse participants across the projects you work on. Go in with an open mind and expect to be exposed to a wide range of experiences and responsibilities.

2 | **Working independently and being self-motivated is key.**

As a co-researcher, you can be expected to work autonomously on certain tasks. You might be asked to take full responsibility to lead some activities, such as drafting research materials, data analysis and writing sections of reports. This does not mean that no one is there to help you - people are always ready to help if you ask. But, you need to be comfortable working by yourself, have the confidence to take initiative, make some decisions and solve problems by yourself, and be organised and self-motivated to meet deadlines.

3 | **With great research, comes great... admin!**

When you first start working on a research project, expect to spend the first couple of days doing admin and paperwork to get your contract sorted. Once you sign your contract, you may need to undertake training modules and quizzes to ensure that your understanding of topics (such as ethics) is up-to-date. Don't forget to regularly check your email and track your hours, so you can get paid!

4 | **Expect flexible hours.**

As every project is different, expect the hours associated with every project to be different. Ensure you are flexible with your schedule so that you can attend meetings with the team during business hours. Note that you may also need to be available outside business hours, especially during data collection, for example, to conduct interviews. Additionally, the hours you may be required to work may fluctuate from week to week.

5 | **You may need to have your own equipment.**

For research work, you will be expected to have access to a laptop and a quiet study space. As we continue to work from home and in the office, you may also require access to a webcam, and equipment like audio recorders for interviews.

6 | **Remuneration or pay rates will differ.**

It is important that as a young researcher you are provided with formal remuneration for your work and contributions. This helps to address power imbalances between senior researchers, and fosters a working environment that is grounded in equity and respect. Notably, pay rates for research assistants will be different - it can depend on your employer,

your experience, the area of research you are working in, and even on the cost of living in general. You might also be paid for your work via other means such as through reimbursements, honorariums, references, membership to research centres and vouchers. It's important to be aware of activities that you should be remunerated for, which include:

contribution to research design (e.g. development of research materials), literature reviews, data collection (e.g. conducting interviews or facilitating focus groups), analysis, report writing, and participant recruitment.

What are the benefits of being a co-researcher?

Being a part of the research team not only has direct benefits for you, but your involvement also benefits the research project and the wider community.

Let's first start with the benefits for you...

1 | You will contribute to producing knowledge that makes a difference.

You see the world differently to adults, meaning as co-researchers, you can provide unique insights and shape the research agenda. By bringing in these new perspectives, you can challenge the status quo and inspire informative change in policy and practice about the issues that affect the lives of young people. Plus, you can contribute to developing innovative solutions and improvement of the services you use, while gaining recognition and remuneration for your contributions.

2 | You will build a wide skill set.

Through research projects, you will gain experience in planning, listening, discussing, negotiating and problem-solving. These will help you build a wide variety of practical and transferable research skills (for example, applying methods, data analysis, formulating research questions, project management), and soft skills (communication, organisation, time management). Plus, having such a wide skill set can help you to increase your confidence to voice your opinions and improve your decision-making skills.

3 | You will develop socially and personally.

As co-researchers, you will have the opportunity to build personal and professional connections with other young people, and researchers. Plus, by working with diverse people and communities, you will develop a heightened awareness of democracy, diversity, social justice and equity. Combining this heightened awareness of social issues with feeling more empowered, more connected, and having a broader skill set, you are better prepared to become involved in advocacy and activism in your communities.

4 | You will gain valuable work experience.

As you build more connections with researchers, you will be exposed to many different projects and teams, gaining insight and experience in different research areas. These may then provide you with an opportunity to research an area that you are passionate about, increasing your expertise in the field. There may also be potential opportunities for you to gain professional and academic experiences through co-authoring publications and speaking at conferences. These are valuable experiences to have on your resume to increase your future job prospects and academic outcomes.

5 | You will feel empowered.

By being embedded into the research team and contributing to decision-making, you are empowered to be part of research that aims to improve our understanding of issues, and how they are responded to.

What are the benefits to the research project?

1 | **The research problem, questions, and design will more accurately reflect the way young people experience the world.**

It is important to look at issues from different perspectives, as each point of view can generate different kinds of knowledge about an issue, allowing us to gain a more holistic understanding. By working alongside others from diverse backgrounds, ages, and experiences, the whole research process can open up new ways of seeing and responding to problems. This means that even the research question steering the investigation will be more reflective of how young people experience the world.

2 | **The data will be of a higher quality.**

As young researchers, you see the world differently, meaning you can contribute fresh perspectives to data analysis and interpretation. In some cases, this may challenge the assumptions of older researchers and lead to new insights. If the research is focused on young people, younger participants may feel more comfortable to take part and be more likely to provide honest, real responses, improving the reliability of the data.

3 | **Research and development will be more relevant.**

You can identify research issues and questions that senior researchers may have overlooked, and provide new perspectives to better prioritise research questions and topics. Additionally, you may help to capture reliable data involving young people, by developing research methods and tools which are accessible to young participants.

4 | **Research findings will be more accessible.**

You can advise and make decisions as to how and where research is published, so that it is inclusive to more audiences, particularly young people.

What are some benefits to the wider community?

1 | You will help senior researchers to better engage with young people and the community.

Working alongside senior researchers increases and develops their understanding of youth issues. This will help them to gain a deeper understanding of young people's concerns and perspectives, and learn new skills in working and communicating with young people.

2 | You will improve the overall research effectiveness.

As you build positive relationships with other researchers and rapport with young participants, you are helping to design and deliver research that is built on more authentic and reliable data, ultimately improving the outcomes that communities experience.

3 | You can inspire new kinds of community action.

Research conducted with young people helps the wider community understand the nature and possible responses to problems and often inspires new action on issues.

Benefits to the wider community

- ≥ Better research-community engagement
- ≥ Research outputs are more authentic and reliable
- ≥ Access to co-produced knowledge prompting community action

Benefits to the research project

- ≥ Better quality data
- ≥ Fresh, new perspectives and ideas
- ≥ Access to diverse participants
- ≥ Research topics and questions are relevant to real-time issues
- ≥ Research dissemination is more accessible

Benefits to you

- ≥ Developed sense of responsibility
- ≥ Empowerment
- ≥ Contribute to innovative solutions for things that really matter to other young people
- ≥ Developed negotiating and problem-solving skills
- ≥ Enhanced organisational, planning and team-work skills
- ≥ Developed practical research skills
- ≥ Build personal and professional connections
- ≥ Valuable work experience

