

Fact Sheet | Working with Gen-Y: an introduction for Landcare Groups



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"Each generation imagines itself to be more intelligent than the one that went before it, and wiser than the one that comes after it." — George Orwell

Generation Y is widely considered to include those people born between 1981 and 1994: now the fastest growing demographic cohort in Australia. Gen-Y grew up with scandals and globalisation. The War on Terror. Mobile phones and websites. Their notion of family is fluid. They operate in virtual communities. Their society is one of extremely high housing costs, high debt and low unemployment. Everything is fast and convenient to Gen-Y's and nothing is reliable except technology. And they are the most unchurched (yes, we're talking religion) generation in history.

In recent years, many landcarers have commented that their groups are suffering because of a lack of new blood; that young people aren't getting involved in landcare activities and their local groups. In reality, if you want to engage young people you need to change the way your group runs its meetings and its on-ground projects. These tips are designed to help groups who want to interact with young people.

Some theories and facts about Gen-Y

- Generation Y is the most educated, entertained and materially endowed generation in history. They want to be involved with passionate and charismatic leaders who produce emotional and social experiences. (Mark McCrindle, www.ausport.gov.au).
- Gen-Y demands mutual respect: that is, they know you have something worthwhile to contribute, particularly in terms of knowledge and skill. But they expect you to also know that they have something worthwhile to contribute. Often passion, sometimes life experience, but something of value nonetheless.
- They want to work with people who LOVE what they do and are willing to teach them what they know, and share their knowledge and experience – THAT'S WHY THEY KEEP ASKING WHY? So, just answer their questions openly and honestly, ask for opinions and views, but then be prepared to listen, and just possibly change YOUR behaviour and way of thinking! (from a presentation by Avril Henry to the Fund Executives Association Ltd, www.avrilhenry.com.au)
- When asked to describe their attitude toward a retailer's environmentally friendly positioning, 46 percent said they'd shop at a retailer more if they were environmentally friendly. 47% said they'd be willing to pay more for environmentally friendly services, products or brands – mostly because they 'care about the environment'. (<http://www.environmentalleader.com/2007/09/14/47-of-gen-y-would-pay-more-for-green-brands/>)
- Generation Y don't like waiting. They value immediacy. If they want it, they want it now.
- There are approximately 4.5 million Gen Y Australians (as at July 2010). They grew up with mobile phones, SMS, the internet, pay TV, bottled water, terrorism, laptops, MP3 players, virtual communities, social networking, hip-hop, techno music, designer drugs, cosmetic enhancement and massive debt.

- A study by Monash University and the Australian Catholic University and the Christian Research Association found that 27 per cent of Gen Y's are involved in volunteer work on a monthly basis.
- a Decima Research survey of 1,300 Canadians aged 19 to 29 found that nearly 40 per cent of respondents are more concerned about global warming than they are about war (20 per cent), getting ahead at work (17 per cent), drinking and driving (14 per cent) or the opposite sex (six per cent). Two per cent of respondents expressed concern over an environmental threat of a different sort: the possibility of Britney Spears having another child. Humour and wit is valued deeply by Gen Y's. (<http://www.canada.com/topics/technology/science/story.html?id=c24b5194-2277-4d75-b32d-0ff37d5eac59>)

So, here are some practical ideas for making your projects more Gen-Y friendly:

- Generation Y are driven by technology. If you're able to have power at your project site, make sure your young recruits know where they can plug in their mobile phones and MP3 players to charge them.
- Young people communicate primarily through email, SMS and social networking sites. If you want to interact with young people and you don't have a Facebook page or a Twitter account, now is probably the time to start experimenting.
- Because Generation Y values immediacy, the methods for contacting you and responding are important. For example a process where you ask people to call a number to register only to receive a message won't work with this demographic. An email address probably will. A facebook page will probably work even more effectively – but it's a competitive space – you need to make sure whatever form of communication you use makes it easy, simple and quick for young people to interact with you.
- Gen-Y's appreciate inclusive leadership – that means that they expect to be consulted on all manner of things. And if you do ask their opinion, they expect you to take their responses seriously. They probably think the idea of having an executive committee make decisions for your group is archaic and they'll want to tell you how to improve the way you do business. Chances are, they'll have some good ideas too.
- Refresh your meeting formats – traditional landcare group meetings, which include agenda items such as approving incoming and outgoing correspondence are unnecessary. They serve a governance purpose, but your new young recruits won't be interested in that side of things. They'll want to find a way to make the meetings quicker, to the point and get straight into the business of talking about action. You could consider having the formal, constitutional parts of your meeting over and done with in the first 15 minutes and then open the rest of the meeting up to discussion, brainstorming and creative solution development – this is likely to get your young recruits involved in discussion and not bogged down in administrivia.
- Take your landcare and environmental message very seriously – Gen Y value honesty, particularly in community groups. So if you're trying to get young people involved in your environmental and landcare projects, yet you haven't thought about the environmental impact of your work, you're in for trouble. This means you need to run eco-friendly events – right down to ensuring you have recycling bins, use local produce for catering, and ensure you have no disposables. Gen Y's will pull you up on these things and many others – they're savvy when it comes to the environment and they'll wonder why you're not doing these things as a matter of course.
- Coffee – both Gen X and Gen Y are coffee addicts. They're used to being able to buy good quality coffee wherever and whenever they feel like it. In many cities, coffee vans can be booked to visit your project site during their normal catering runs. Alternatively, organise a person to do a coffee run (most people will be happy to buy their own) to the nearest cafe and return with fresh drinks.

- Other young people – Gen Y’s like to meet other young people and they consider social interaction very important. That doesn’t mean they won’t value time with older folk, it just means, if you want them to join you, they’re more likely to do so if other young people are involved. Where do you find young people? Universities, the kids of your own families and friends, bars and clubs and cafes, shopping centres, sports centres and gyms and in your workplace. Feature young people in media releases, let them have a say. Once you start attracting younger people, others will follow – particularly if you create a welcome and not-too-serious environment.
- Be funny – young people value humour and wit. They don’t take life too seriously. Try to instil a culture of humour and fun into your events and projects. Don’t be afraid to go out on a limb to attract young people. They’ll appreciate your efforts and they’ll probably tell their friends.