



CREATING AN ECOSYSTEM OF EXPERTISE:

HOW TO BUILD SUSTAINABLE SUPPORT NETWORKS FOR YOUTH

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Introduction

ACTION4YOUTH IS A PURPOSE-DRIVEN, BESPOKE PROGRAM DEVELOPED BY ACTION4AGRICULTURE TO SUPPORT YOUTH FROM ALL BACKGROUNDS AND EXPERIENCES TO THRIVE IN A CAREER IN AGRICULTURE.

Few areas are more critical to the security and well-being of youth [defined by the W.H.O. as the 15-24 year age group] than meaningful and purposeful work. It impacts every aspect of their lives: independence; mental health and well-being; and social interaction. Action4Youth aims to offer youth an enriching experience of work that sets them on the path to independence and future security.

Program outcomes include:

- Increased employer engagement in work-based learning pathways.
- Improved learning and skills development experienced by youth.
- Increased entry-level jobs offered to youth.
- Improved understanding of, and access to, meaningful work.

How can this eBook help you?

In today's education and impact landscape, harnessing collective strength is critical to the success of supporting youth to be their best. The **Ecosystem of Expertise (EoE)** encapsulates this idea by placing youth at the core, surrounded by a multifaceted network of supporters. This model, designed for those spearheading youth-led programs, positions the youth at the centre, with various stakeholders revolving around them, deriving and providing value in a symbiotic relationship.

Without a system of support – such as an EoE – youth is either left to 'make it on their own' (the individual **hero myth**) or heavily (perhaps too heavily) rely on a singular person of support (the **saviour myth**). To overcome these two limitations, this eBook makes the case for the value of a range of stakeholders, clearly defining how they can contribute to youth's journey and benefit themselves, as a more effective model of support.

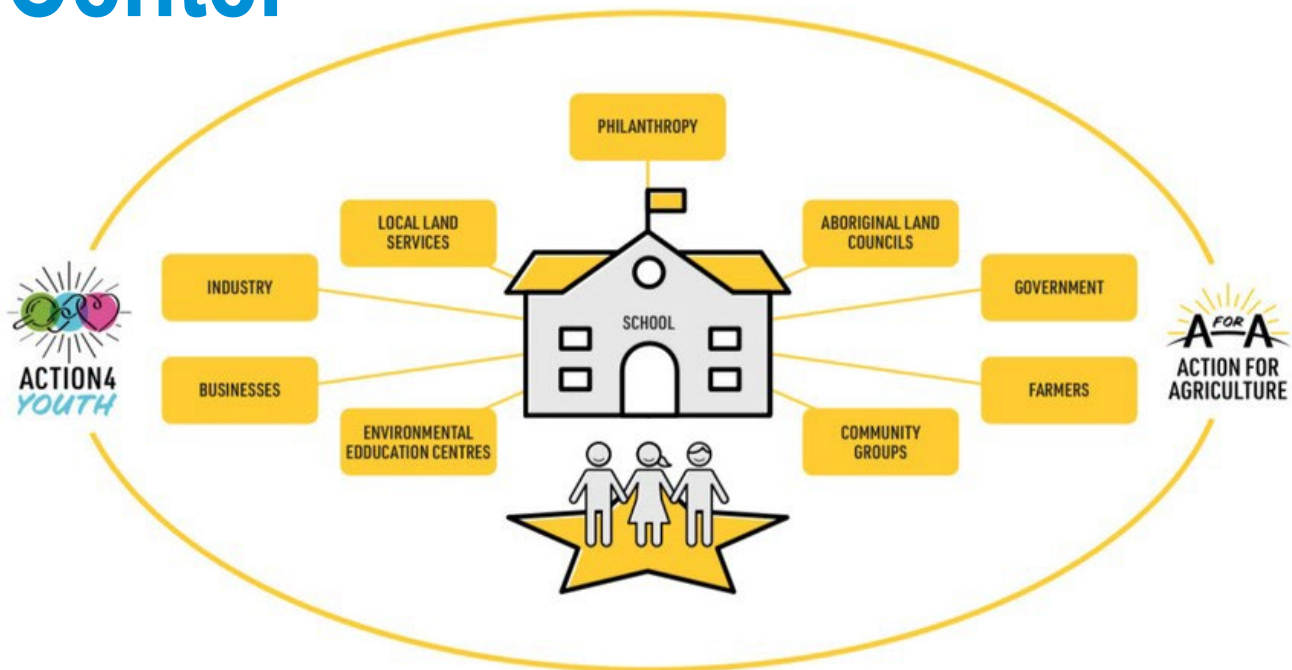
Throughout this eBook, you will learn how an EoE operates, how to establish your own EoE and what needs to happen to maximise win-win relationships.



The Australian Government supports ACTION4YOUTH through National Careers Institute Grant Program funding.



The Star: Placing Youth at the Center



Every solar system begins with a star, the primary source of energy and light. In our EoE, this star is the youth. Overflowing with potential and aspirations, they illuminate the path for every stakeholder in their orbit. Recognising their innate worth and centrality ensures that resources, strategies, and efforts converge to amplify their growth and success.

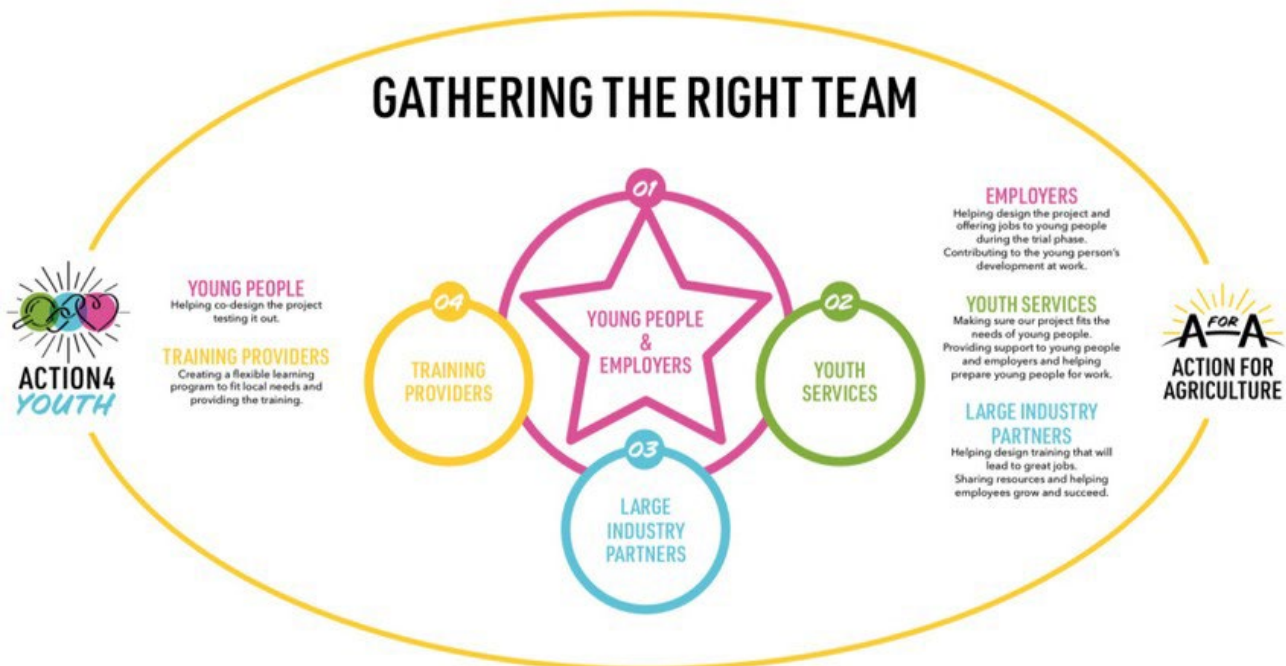
In the Action4Agriculture ecosystem, we play 3 core roles:

- Raise AWAREness about career opportunities in agriculture.
- Provide opportunities for youth to EXPLORE careers in Ag.
- SUPPORT youth to transition to careers with purpose and thrive.

We identify eight critical groups as depicted above to support in achieving these objectives. The groups will vary, depending on your project, but the thinking remains the same; every group listed benefits from youth thriving and every group listed can support the growth of youth.

The Planets: Identifying Key Stakeholders in the EoE (Part1)

Within the EoE, each stakeholder plays a distinctive role, akin to planets with unique attributes in a solar system.



From youth services aligning training programs to the needs of youth now and into the future, to training providers imparting wisdom through learning programs, each entity has specific gifts and gains. Understanding the nuanced roles and contributions of these stakeholders is essential to harmonise the EoE's functioning, ensuring that the youth's needs and aspirations are holistically addressed.

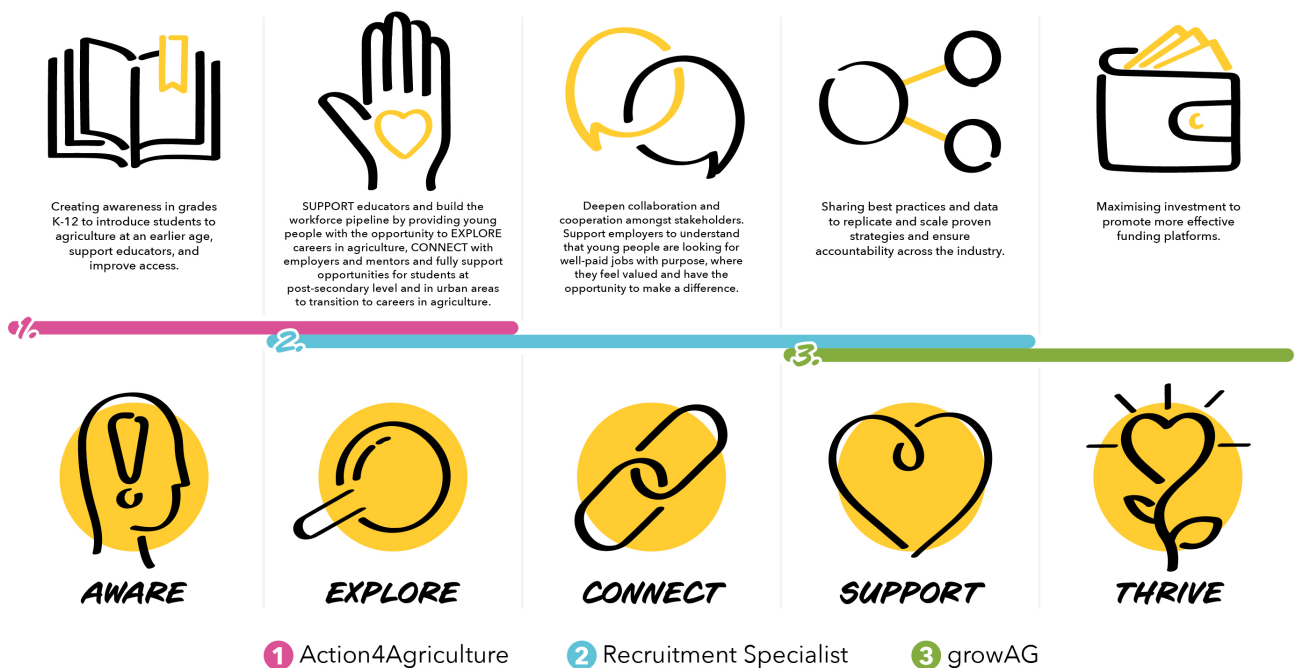
Key Questions for the Leadership Team

List down the current stakeholders involved in your youth-led program. Are there any vital stakeholders missing from this list, and how can they be integrated for a more cohesive EoE?

The Planets: Identifying Key Stakeholders in the EoE (Part2)

Take for example the Best Practice Principles that the Action4Youth program operates under. These five stages, as explored in previous eBooks, map out where and when stakeholders contribute.

BEST PRACTICE PRINCIPLES



For the graphic above, you will see Action4Agriculture leading the charge through the first 2 stages (AWARE and EXPLORE). At the start of the second stage, DairyNSW enters to picture, contributing across stages 2 to 4. Likewise, growAG operates across stages 4 to 5. Knowing where and how each stakeholder contributes is key to a strong and effective EoE.

Key Questions for the Leadership Team

Where are the points of cross-over or collaboration with your ecosystem of expertise? How could you create more to ensure effective collaboration and achievement of the collective goals?

Constructing Win-Win Relationships



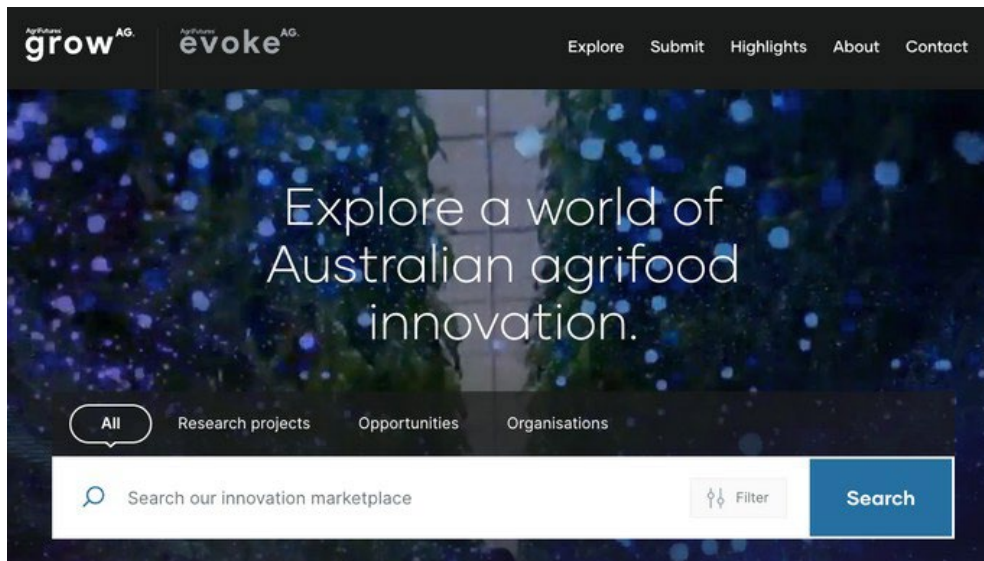
The EoE thrives on win-win relationships. This reciprocity, where every stakeholder not only gives but also derives value, ensures sustainable and fruitful engagements. Forging such relationships requires an understanding of mutual objectives, proactive communication, and a foundation of trust. In this way, each stakeholder feels valued, making them more invested in the collective vision.

Take **DairyNSW** for example. Action4Agriculture collaborates with its workforce attraction and retention project officers. The value they derive from supporting the next generation of talent in the industry (youth) is that dairy employers shape the design of a fit-for-purpose local workforce solution. On the other side, youth get to kickstart their dairy careers. Together creating a win-win solution, they build an enduring workforce solution for the critical NSW dairy sector.

Key Questions for the Leadership Team

Think about a current partnership or stakeholder relationship within your program. Is it mutually beneficial? If not, how can you restructure this partnership to ensure both parties derive value?

Tools to Engage Stakeholders



Source: <https://www.growag.com/>

Engagement is the lifeblood of the EoE. Building bridges with potential partners necessitates tailored strategies, ensuring resonance with their unique perspectives and objectives. Engagement techniques can include hosting/attending events, speaking at local meetups, direct outreach over platforms such as LinkedIn, X (formerly Twitter), blog posts, regular check-ins, awards and celebration events, or personal connections and introductions. Moreover, leveraging modern tools to map and manage these relationships can streamline efforts, making the process more efficient and impactful.

Take, for example, growAG. This is an online platform connecting the world to Australia's agri-food innovation by showcasing world leading agricultural research. Through this platform, a range of talented individuals and organisations are showcased and youth in the industry can learn, connect and start building relationships.

Key Questions for the Leadership Team

Which engagement strategies have you employed thus far? Are there any techniques mentioned in the eBook that you haven't explored and feel could enhance stakeholder engagement in your program?

Challenges in Building an EoE

Like any ambitious endeavour, constructing an EoE comes with its set of challenges. Differing agendas, resource constraints, 'silo mindsets' or communication lapses can sometimes obstruct the path. Yet, armed with foresight and equipped with problem-solving skills, these obstacles can be transformed into stepping stones.

Drawing lessons from previous success stories offers invaluable insights for navigating such challenges. A great resource to ensure you are building win-win relationships with stakeholders and funding partners is the Action4Agriculture eBook [*Mastering Multi-Stakeholder Relationships*](#). This eBook shares an 8-step guide to collaboration with examples and techniques to support your EoE.



Remember, part of your EoE's benefit to you (to support youth) is that you are not relying solely on youth or your own organisation as the single point of truth. Instead, you can identify your core challenges and present them to your EoE for insights. Say, for example, you face a funding challenge, you could take the issue to your EoE and ask for ideas, or introductions or strategies to ensure successful sustainability of the program.

Key Questions for the Leadership Team

Recall a recent challenge you encountered while collaborating with a stakeholder or building your ecosystem. How did you address it, and what lessons can you draw from that experience to fortify your EoE?

Monitoring and Adapting an EoE

Project Communication Plan Template

Project Name:

This is a sample text.

Start Date:

This is a sample text.

Completion Date:

This is a sample text.

Project Manager:

This is a sample text.

Project Objectives:

This is a sample text. You simply add your own text and description here. This text is fully editable.

Communication goals	Communication method	Audience	Frequency	Owner
You simply add your own text here.	You simply add your own text here.	You simply add your own text here.	You simply add your own text here.	You simply add your own text here.
You simply add your own text here.	You simply add your own text here.	You simply add your own text here.	You simply add your own text here.	You simply add your own text here.
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[COMPANY NAME]

Source: <https://www.getguru.com/templates/project-communication-plan-template>

An EoE is an evolving entity. As the needs of youth change, so should the strategies and collaborations within the ecosystem. Regular feedback mechanisms, such as surveys or stakeholder meetings, provide invaluable insights into the EoE's health.

A great tool to build is a communication planner. This is where you list every organisation in your EoE and one or two points of contact. Then, identify how often you need to communicate with them (weekly, monthly, quarterly, etc.), the method for communication (in person meeting, phone call, etc.) and the core metrics to update them on (budget spent to date, number of youth engaged, next event dates, etc.). This is a great resource for keeping your EoE up to date as well as to track the progress and impact of your youth programs. A great resource 'Journey Diagram' can be found [here](#)

Key Questions for the Leadership Team

Do you currently have any feedback /communication systems in place?
How often do you review and adapt your strategies based on the feedback received, and how can you make this process more efficient?

Celebrate your EoE Partners



A crucial step in maintaining the motivation and commitment of your EoE members is to celebrate their contribution and connect what they are doing/giving to the impact on youth. A simple way to do this is to name and acknowledge them across your physical and digital assets, including adding their logo and naming them in all formal documents, on banners, in flyers/PDFs, mentioning them at events, uploading their logo onto the website and social media.

You could introduce a weekly or monthly mention in a specific post, or an email to your email list. Events also serve as a great opportunity to highlight your EoE members, as well as get to know them in more detail. Inviting them as 'special guests' to judge events, competitions or present awards helps to connect your EoE to the youth in the centre of the ecosystem.

Key Question for the Project Delivery Team

In the next 90-days, how could you acknowledge, thank and involve your current stakeholders and help them feel connected to the impact of your work as a collective?

Conclusion

Building a robust EoE is not just an initiative; it's a commitment to future generations. By aligning diverse stakeholders towards a shared vision, we pave the way for an empowered, knowledgeable, and inspired youth. As you embark on this journey, let this guide serve as your compass, directing you towards creating a strong and sustainable EoE. As you reflect on your journey in building and refining an EoE, what stands out as your most significant accomplishment so far? What vision do you hold for the future of your program's EoE?

Action 1

Action 2

Action 3

My support people are:

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-
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Did you love this eBook?

Please share it with one employer or leader in your sector or industry so they can support their youth in all they do.

Acknowledgements

This eBook was only possible because of the input, support and guidance of a large number of people and organisations.

We would also like to extend our thanks to all the students, parents, schools, educators, employers and champions of youth who will benefit from this eBook as well as the Action4Youth program.

Thank you for all that you do.

Would you like to know more?

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