

A man in a grey polo shirt and blue shorts is standing at the front of a classroom, gesturing with his hands as he presents to a group of young people seated at desks. The room has a brick wall on the left and a wooden wall on the right. A sign on a stand in the background says 'TOTAL'. A large poster on the right wall features the 'A FOR A' logo and the text 'ACTION FOR AGRICULTURE'. The poster also shows icons for various Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at the top: 1 (People), 2 (Food), 3 (Health), 4 (Education), and 5 (Gender).

# YOUNG ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS

## A CASE STUDY OF AN EFFECTIVE ECOSYSTEM OF EXPERTISE

The Young Environmental Champions program is supported by the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation who are Backing Young People with innovative opportunities that advance their independence, social purpose and future security and the Office for Regional Youth.

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EMPOWERING *YOUNG ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS*



# Introduction

THE YOUNG ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPION PROGRAM IS A PURPOSE-DRIVEN, BESPOKE PROGRAM DEVELOPED BY ACTION4AGRICULTURE TO SUPPORT YOUNG PEOPLE FROM ALL BACKGROUNDS AND EXPERIENCES DEVELOP PROJECTS THAT ENHANCE THEIR 21ST CENTURY SKILLS AND CONNECT THEM TO THEIR COMMUNITY.

Young people may only be 16% of the global population, but they are 100% of the future. The Young Environmental Champions (YEC) program, helps young people tap into their potential by challenging them to create a local project that contributes to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), work towards that project for one school term and present their work to a panel of local judges and community members.

This eBook shares the story of how an Ecosystem of Expertise (EoE) supported the students who completed the 2023 program and led to a range of impressive results.

## How can this eBook help you?

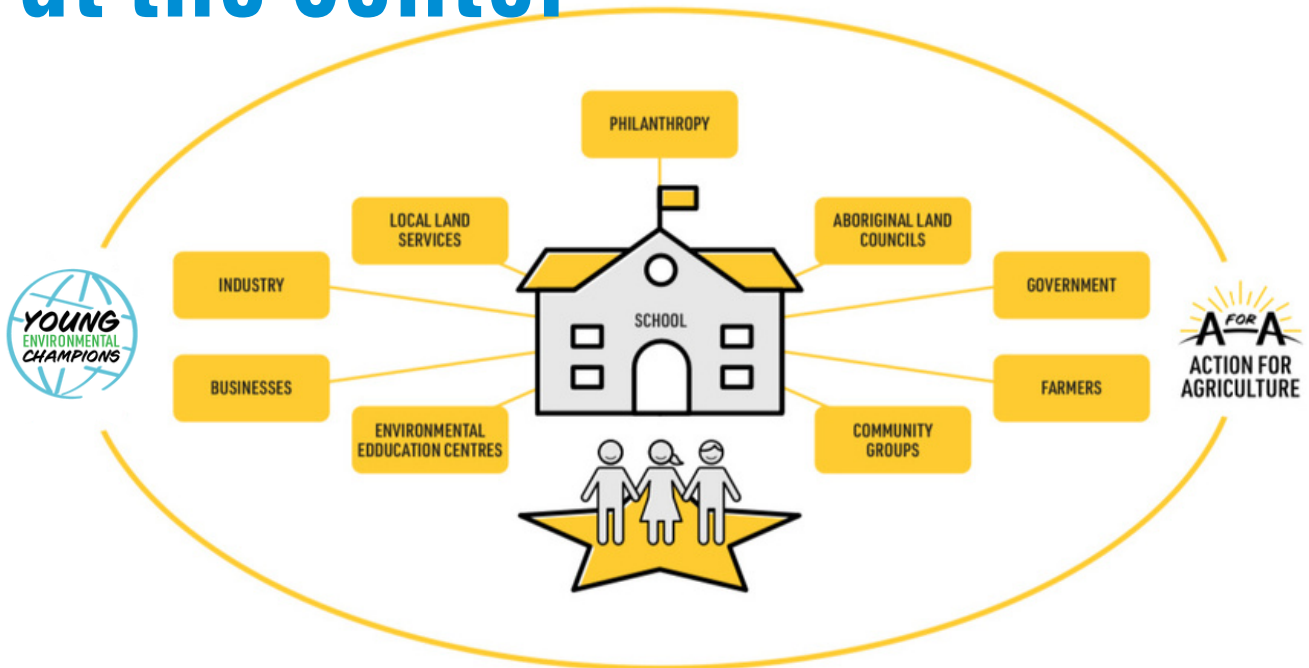
In today's education and impact landscape, harnessing collective strength is critical to the success of supporting young people to be their best. The **Ecosystem of Expertise (EoE)** encapsulates this idea by placing young people at the core, surrounded by a multifaceted network of supporters.

Without a system of support – such as an EoE – young people are 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 young people's journey and benefit themselves, as a more effective model of support.

Throughout this eBook, you will learn how an EoE operates and how the stakeholders mentioned throughout contributed to the success of the YEC program in 2023.



# The Star: Placing Young People at the Center



The YEC program revolves around young people. The Young Environmental Champions (YEC) are identified young people completing their Australian primary, secondary and tertiary education, who are supported to act on environmental and social issues important to them, their schools and their communities.

Through the YEC project, these young people and their communities are connected with the best minds and ideas in government, education, industry, not for profits and the research sector to sustainably translate complex challenges into concrete problems and feel empowered to solve real world issues at a local, state or national level.

This 10 week program that was completed in 2023 was open to young people in Stage 3 to Stage 5 in primary and secondary schools across NSW.



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# The Planets: Identifying Key Stakeholders in the EoE

Within the EoE, each stakeholder plays a distinctive role, akin to planets with unique attributes in a solar system. To successfully launch and run the YEC we were grateful for funding from Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation and the NSW Government's Office for Regional Youth.

To implement the YEC we drew upon our experience and relationships developed through previous in-school programs and engaged a range of diverse stake-holders including:

- **Workshop facilitators** – Josh Farr from Campus Consultancy ran seven workshops for students while changeologist Les Robinson ran a workshop for teachers giving them valuable tools to support their students.
- **Centre of Excellence in Agricultural Education** – enabled four schools in the Hawkesbury region to participate in the program.
- **Young Mentors** – students from the University of Newcastle and early-career agricultural professionals from the Young Farming Champions network provided mentorship to participants.
- **Government** – Newcastle and Maitland Councils, NSW Government's Office for Regional Youth, Hunter Local Land Services and RDA (Regional Development Australia)
- **Environmental and Community Groups** – Hunter Landcare, Greater Sydney Landcare Network
- **Environmental Champions** - AAEE (Australian Association of Environmental Educators) chair Sue Martin, Newcastle environmental advocate Alexa Stuart, Youth Community Coordinator (ORY) Dan Brown, CoastXP founder Dominic May and founder of theBEATS.org Tommy Viljoen.



# 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. Check out how this was done with the YEC.



## YEC CASE-STUDY: CREATING EFFECTIVE FUNDING PARTNERSHIPS



In 2023 Action4Agriculture launched Young Environmental Champions to support young people to be critical and creative thinkers, confident communicators and collaborators and prepared for green jobs of the future opportunities.

The success of this and other programs, such as Action4Youth, hinges on effective partnerships with a range of stakeholders. The ensuing challenges and opportunities are summarised in the booklet "Mastering Multi-stakeholder Projects".

From this we identified three keys to effective funding partnerships:

1. Treat the funding partnership as a **relationship**.
2. Bring **relationship capital** by identifying team members who can strengthen and value add to the partnership.
3. Be **proactive** and co-create a project neither the delivery nor funding partner could achieve alone.

These three keys were exemplified in the Young Environmental Champions program by the underpinning funding body Department of Regional NSW through the Office for Regional Youth (ORY) and supporting partner Hunter Local Land Services.

**YEC is a place-based program and for it to be effective it needs place-based knowledge. This is where ORY shines,"** Action4Agriculture director Lynne Strong says.

**"ORY has place-based centres, which means they know the wants and needs of participants, they know the "doers" in their region and can advise on the right people to bring to the table. They are also cognisant of the challenges and barriers in the**

**region and recognise the need to be flexible and support you to turn challenges into opportunities. They check in regularly and take feedback back to government to help tweak the process and ensure best outcomes for all involved."**

ORY project officer Varan Sureshan concurs.

**In order to deliver the best outcomes for youth in each region it is important to have place-based teams. This enables us to understand local community needs and challenges, to engage local community stakeholders, to source local knowledge and to introduce suitable programs from new providers."**

These benefits are reflected in underpinning Action4Agriculture collaborative project values, of which YEC was a part:

- A. To build sustainable relationships between all key stakeholders and service providers in the region that will last well beyond the grant period.
- B. To target areas of high need and assist service providers to connect and deliver services into new or existing communities.
- C. To identify the need and deliver new and unique children and youth wellbeing projects in regional areas of high vulnerability and high need.
- D. To acquire knowledge about innovative programs that may be available for the development of youth wellbeing directly and indirectly.
- E. To assist with reference and connectivity to other local on-ground service providers for potential collaboration.

Hunter Local Land Services is another partner that has worked with Action4Agriculture across multiple programs and brings strength to each one through locally based school engagement officer Jane Lloyd-Jones.

**As school engagement officer, I really enjoy interacting with and helping school students to learn in a fun, engaging way. I enjoy the close working relationship I have with a number of our partners, including local and state government, Landcare and not for profit organisations such as Action4Agriculture,"** Jane says.

Hunter Land Services provides financial support to Action4Agriculture programs but making the partnership successful comes down to the relationship developed over the years with Jane.

**Jane has a deep understanding of her community and its culture, which allows us to tailor our programs to meet the needs of that community. She has wonderful, trusted networks and is the reason we have so many good relationships in the Hunter,"** Lynne says.

Both the Office for Regional Youth and Hunter Local Land Services understand the value of proactive relationships that identify and harness local talent to create effective funding models.

**Alone we are smart, but together we can be brilliant."**



## CREATING EFFECTIVE FUNDING PARTNERSHIPS



### CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WELLBEING RECOVERY INITIATIVE GRANTS PROGRAM

The Department of Regional NSW (DRNSW), through the Office for Regional Youth (ORY) offered the grants program: Children and Young People Wellbeing Recovery Initiative (CYPWRI).

The program targeted NSW regional areas and formed the basis of Action4Agriculture's Young Environmental Champions Program.

#### DELIVERY MODEL

A unique two-step grant application process was used to promote early engagement with government and support applicants with planning their projects.

The first step invited applicants to provide an outline of their project. ORY Project officers then arranged first contact meetings and successful preliminary applicants proceeded to the next level to submit a complete application. Unsuccessful applicants were directed to other suitable programs (if available).

The next stage involved a full application, with Project Officer assistance, with complete project description and targeted questions that met merit criteria with costs, benefits and delivery details.

#### DELIVERY METHODS/BENEFITS

- A. To identify new and unique children and youth wellbeing projects in regional areas of high vulnerability and high need, and assist service providers to connect and deliver services into new or existing communities.
- B. To acquire knowledge about innovative programs that may be available for the development of youth wellbeing directly and indirectly.
- C. To assist with reference, connectivity and collaboration between local on-ground service providers.
- D. To provide finer clarity of grant program objectives to ensure programs delivered better outcomes for the youth communities.

- E. To provide feedback, at an early stage, to increase the number of applications that meet program criteria.
- F. To ensure higher volumes of complying applications, resulting in higher levels of approvals of the grant.

In order to deliver the best outcomes, place-based Youth Community Coordinators and Project Officer teams were recruited in the relevant regions. This enabled:

- Understanding of the local community needs.
- Appreciation of their challenges.
- Engagement with the local community and all local stakeholders.
- Introduction of appropriate/suitable new programs from new providers.
- Provision and input of local knowledge.

#### COLLABORATION MODEL

Assistance to applicants and service providers included:

##### 1. During initial and application period:

- Encouraging applications only from those deemed suitable for Department of Regional NSW grant funding schemes.
- Discussion of initial proposals for compliance and merit and, if deemed suitable, provision of recommendations and critical commentary to enable modification or fine tuning of grant proposals.
- Provision of clear and suitable instructions on full application requirements.
- Connection of external providers to local knowledge and local contacts.
- Recommendation of other available programs if applications deemed unsuitable.
- Revision and commentary of full applications.
- Assistance in collating of all relevant documentation before final submission.

##### 2. During contracting period:

- Assistance with correct completion of funding deed
- Provision of required supporting documents.
- Follow-up on any outstanding issues with Grant Management Office.
- Follow-up on funds delivery for timely funding.
- Assistance with queries relating to the funding deed and contractual matters.

##### 3. During project delivery period and at end of project:

- Assistance with monitoring and record keeping matters for compliance.
- Attention to time extension requests.
- Handling and securing permissions for scope change identification.
- Assistance with progress reporting.
- Attendance at critical events and interaction with the community, providers and recipients.
- Assistance with final acquittal reporting.



# Tools to Engage Stakeholders

Engagement is the lifeblood of the EoE. Building bridges with potential partners necessitates tailored strategies, ensuring resonance with their unique perspectives and objectives. The YEC program used **Mighty Networks** to build an online community and provide an online course platform to share wins, challenges and supporting resources.



Source: <https://action4agriculturechat.com/page/8/>

**Dione Howard** (2022 National Rural Ambassador and [Young Farming Champion](#)) had this to say, “Online communities like Mighty Networks have enabled me to share my story with a wide range of audiences. I can zoom into classrooms from the paddock, learn from experts, and collaborate with Young Farming Champions across Australia (and the world!) without having to leave the farm. These types of networks provide a sustainable way to collaborate with diverse audiences.”

Our members can connect and converse with each other inside Mighty Networks, we can set up media posts, group events, live stream and chat with each other as well as project mentors, like the YFC. The platform’s strength lies in its core focus on community design and engagement and the powerful tools it offers to this end.





# 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.

The flow on effects from the pandemic, teacher shortages, teacher overwhelm, movement of Naplan and changing rules for school excursions created challenges in the delivery of the YEC program. For example, we had schools signed up and participating but when a teacher was absent for an extended time the school had to withdraw.

In early 2023 the government announced Naplan would be bought forward from May to March, and this impacted schools' ability to participate in Term 1 and also caused nominated schools to withdraw. Another challenge was funding matched to financial years rather than calendar years. We identified that projects in schools need to run in calendar years with 6 months lead time to build the relationships and allow teachers to build the program into the curriculum.

We completed evaluation surveys and through these were able to identify areas where teachers struggled, such as program timing and number of students participating. All feedback will be used to refine and improve the YEC program in the future.

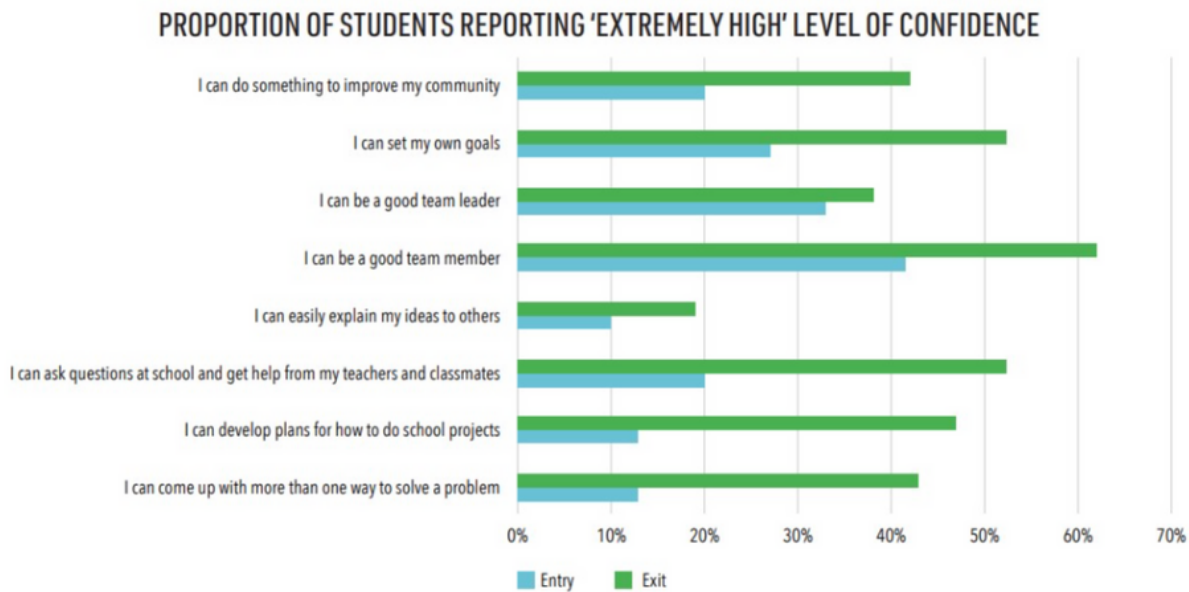
In overcoming our challenges were grateful for the Office for Regional Youth's flexibility, which enabled us, in turn, to flex and adapt.





# Monitoring and Adapting an EoE

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



A set of particularly exciting results included:

- I can ask questions at school and get help from my teacher, increased from 60% to 90% reporting high levels of confidence (50% increase)
- I can develop plans for how to do school projects, increase from 60% to 85% reporting high levels of confidence (42% increase)
- I can do something to improve my community, increase from 57% to 80% reporting high levels of confidence (40% increase)

As with any effective EoE, lessons can be learned from these insights to identify where more support can be offered. For example, the smallest total % was “I can easily explain my ideas to others” so for a future version, members of the EoE could play a role in creating space through mentoring, networking events, or practise runs to allow students to present their ideas simply and develop confidence.



# Celebrate your EoE Partners (1)



Champion Primary School  
Hamilton Public School



Reserve Champion Primary School  
St Brigid's Primary School

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 young people. Some of the ways this was done throughout the YEC program included:

- Featuring judges and sponsors on the website
- Inviting teachers and school leaders to the final pitch event
- Having key stakeholders present awards at the final pitch event

The YEC program would like to thank the following:

- Nate Brown, the Office for Regional Youth from Youth Community Coordinator
- Fiona Rowan, the Maitland City Council from Sustainability Officer
- Walter Mansfield, the Training Services NSW Senior Project Officer, Regional Industry Education Partnerships (RIEP)
- Jane Lloyd-Jones, the Hunter Local Land Services from School Engagement Officer
- Eliza Hoyland, the University of Newcastle from Student
- Heather Stevens, the City of Newcastle from Sustainability Manager
- The Hon. Kate Washington, the Member fo Port Stephens from Minister for Families and Communities, Minister for Disability Inclusion, Member for Port Stephens
- Lynne Strong, the Action4Agriculture from Program Manager
- Elise Budden, the City of Newcastle from Environmental Education Officer
- Danielle Fordham, Young Farming Champion
- Dan Brown and Varan Sureshan from the Office for Regional Youth
- UNSW Digital Sustainability Knowledge Hub (DS Hub)
- Brendan Hitchens, Global Guides Cohort 4



# Celebrate your EoE Partners (2)

We would like to make special mention of five judges who generously gave their time to judge the YEC final pitch competition. Thank you for your service!



**Sue Martin**

Sue is passionately involved in supporting environmental educators across NSW and is currently chair of AAEE NSW. Sue has worked across tertiary, local government, catchment management and the school sectors in a career that started in 1987 when she graduated as an agronomist from Sydney University. Sue chairs the local Landcare group in Cattai catchment part of Dyarubbin, (the Hawkesbury-Nepean River) . It is about connecting people to their local environment and finding ways to live and work more sustainably, caring for our common home.



**Alexa Stuart**

Alexa Stuart is a 19 year old climate justice activist who was a key leader in the Newcastle School Strike 4 Climate. Alexa was a co-coordinator of the Gas Free Hunter Alliance campaign and has provided critical insight and leadership for the new iteration of Rising Tide. In 2020 she was named Newcastle young citizen of the year for her environmental advocacy.



**Dan Brown**

Dan is passionate about supporting sustainable social change that enables strong, resilient, and healthy youth populations across regional NSW.

He is an experienced community development and health promotion specialist with more than 10 years of experience working within the youth sector. He has a demonstrated history working across government, health and education and holds a Bachelor of Education and a Master of Public Health.



**Dominic May**

Dominic May is the Founder of CoastXP, a nature-based adventure tourism company. CoastXP offers unique boat tours and guided nature walks along the stunning Newcastle and Lake Macquarie coastline. CoastXP is a multi-award winning and accredited quality/sustainable tourism business, and recently Dominic was recognised as Newcastle's 2023 Young Citizen of the Year for his active contribution to Newcastle's post-pandemic economic recovery.



**Tommy Viljoen**

Senior Partner, Cyber Risk Services Strategy and Governance at Deloitte and Founding Member of theBEATS.org (Biodiversity, Threatened and Endangered Species).



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# 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 young people. As you embark on this journey, let this case study 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

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## Action 2

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## Action 3

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## My support people are:

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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 young people in all they do.



# Teacher Resource

A great teacher resource to bring these programs to life are a set of 'cards' that can be flipped and used for conversation to drive curiosity, divergent and convergent thinking, enhance critical thinking skills and improve teamwork and communication between students from a wide array of backgrounds and experience levels. Encourage students to see 'both sides' of a perspective with questions such as, "What if the opposite were true?" or "If you had to think of one piece of evidence or logical argument why that was not true, what might it be?"

What is the goal of farming?	Is it easier to be a farmer today than it was 100 years ago?	Do farmers control the environment, or does the environment control them?	Is there truly such thing as ethical consumption?	Does the premise of farming differ in different parts of the world?	Do people in wealthier countries have a moral obligation to help those in poorer countries?	Does where we live dictate the food we eat?	Why do we eat some animals, but not others?
Does fast-food mean shorter food miles in the supply chain?	Has recycling made us less environmentally conscious?	What would happen if we focused on what was going well rather than what's going wrong in agriculture?	At what point does the world become classified as over populated?	What does the "culture" in agriculture refer to?	Do we need to know where our food comes from?	Who benefits the most from free trade and globalisation?	How are our values and perspectives around food formed?
							
							

Download your copy here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SnYOEg3a98mR0EjW5wA5421La1YmICUg/view>

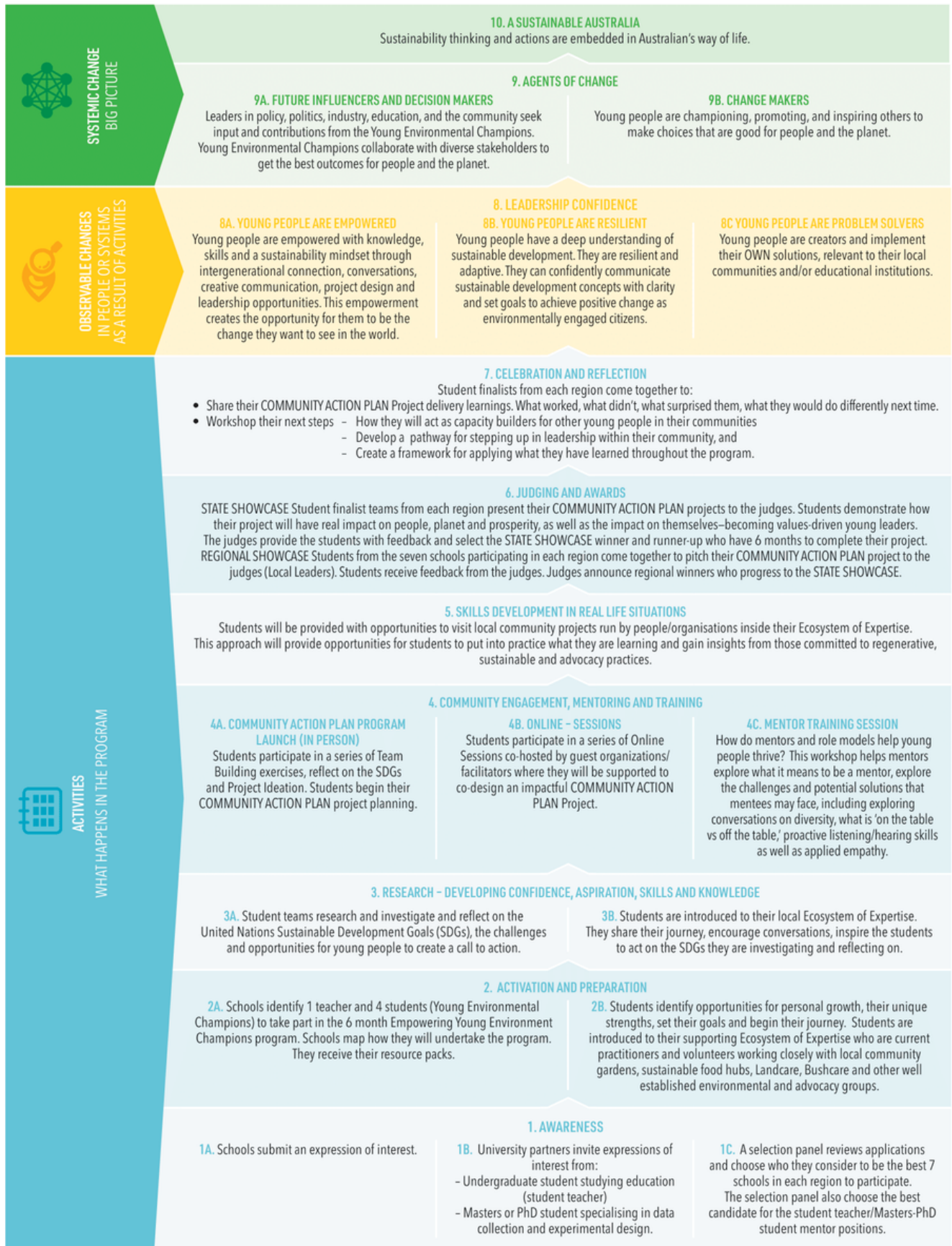


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# YOUNG ENVIRONMENTAL CHAMPIONS HIERARCHY OF INTENDED OUTCOMES





# 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 the young people who will benefit from this eBook as well as the Young Environmental Champions program.

Thank you for all that you do.

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## Would you like to know more?

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