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# 3.1 What does a representative do?

*So now you're a representative who has been elected...*

...appointed or volunteered to represent a group of students. Maybe you're a class representative on the SRC, or perhaps you're a student representative on a school committee. This section contains some ideas about what being a representative means and how to be an effective representative.

But what does being a representative actually mean? Well, it's not something to take casually. You're not there to pursue your own interests or to make yourself look good. Your job is to voice the concerns of the students you represent and try to achieve the things they want. Think about how you would want your representative to behave – and act like that. It's quite a big responsibility.

You need to know what you intend to do in the job, have a plan for how you will fulfil the role and make time to carry it out. Your plan should include times to be visible and available to the students you represent, attend meetings, collect ideas and report to class and assemblies.

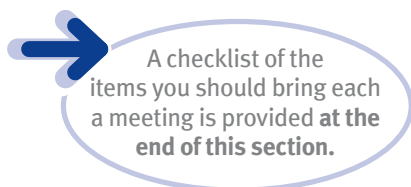
Being a good representative means always keeping in touch with what students want, and sometimes it means standing up for decisions and negotiating them with students, teachers or the principal.

## Before a meeting

Don't just walk into a meeting without thought or preparation.

*Think, prepare, organise!*

- **Think** about what was discussed at the last meeting (look at the minutes), what is to be talked about this time (the agenda) and what you might want to say and achieve. Talk with other students about this before the meeting.
- **Prepare** your folder of notes and previous minutes, any reports you need to make, any motions (or suggestions) you want to propose, and your arguments for or against the items on the agenda. If you can't turn up to the meeting and have a good excuse, make sure you put in an apology before the meeting.
- **Organise** a discussion of the agenda in your home group, other representatives to support your views and for your proposals to be put on the agenda (see the chairperson before the meeting).



**ATTENTION:** You will also need to find out more information about the issues being discussed by doing some research and by talking with other students – that's being an informed representative (see the following section).



## During the meeting



During the meeting, you need to keep focused on what's happening so that you can take an active part in discussions: giving ideas and putting forward other students' views.

Everyone is responsible for making the meeting a success – helping information to be shared and helping everyone to agree on what to do. That means everyone listens to others, considers their views seriously and tries to reach agreement.

If you want the meeting to decide something, you can put forward a motion and try to get support from other representatives.

It's a good idea to have a folder dedicated to SRC meetings. You can use this to keep all the meeting papers and notes together. Write down the important things that happen. Even at this stage, think about how you can make these things clear and interesting to your class group when you report back to them. This might lead you to ask questions that the meeting should consider now.



### GOOD PRACTICE



The SRC provides all representatives with a clipboard folder for meetings. During a meeting, the secretary keeps notes of what is happening and what has been decided (the minutes) on a laptop and these are run off immediately after the meeting. Within a day, all representatives have a copy of the minutes, including an action summary, to put into their folders. They can then use this as a reminder and an accurate record, to report to their classes and to assemblies in the next few days.

## After the meeting

You have two main tasks to do after the meeting:

- to *take any action that you agreed to* in the meeting; and
- to *report back to other students* about what was decided.

You represent other students so you need to let them know the outcomes of the meeting, whether their ideas were accepted and what other ideas came up.



**Section 3.3:**  
Getting ideas and reporting back gives you some ideas.

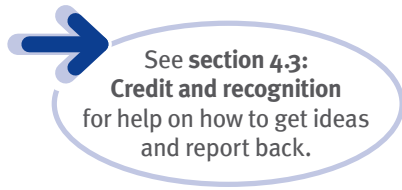
If the SRC meeting has decided on some action, you might have tasks to do: letters to write, people to see, activities to organise. There should be an action column included in the minutes. Make sure that you get these done by the agreed time.

## What do you need?

All this takes time. You will need time to read and prepare for meetings, attend meetings, and follow up the actions you need to take. Some of this time might be in class: time to report, discuss and debate.

In all of these activities, you will be learning and demonstrating different skills and knowledge. Many of these are already part of the curriculum: public speaking, writing correspondence, keeping minutes, making posters, contributing to discussions, teaching other students, keeping a budget, etc.

There might be ways of getting your time, effort and learning recognised as part of your schoolwork. You may be able to get time to work for the SRC in class time and get credit for what you do. But you will need to negotiate this with your teachers in advance.



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GOOD PRACTICE



Year 9 representatives can count the work they do for the SRC as part of the portfolio of achievements that they have to develop in class. The Year 9 teachers have agreed to recognise evidence of talks, meeting participation and reports about SRC business as equivalent to letter writing and other tasks within the curriculum.

## The tough side of being a representative

Not all your work is sitting in meetings and making decisions. Your class might want to work on something as a group and need a representative to organise them. It might want something raised for discussion with teachers, and ask you to be their representative. Students might just be angry and want you to 'do something!'. You might have to listen to complaints and problems. Often the hardest thing about being a representative is not to take sides and help the group work out its own solutions.

After a decision is made, it's sometimes hard to stand up and speak for the group and its decision, especially if you personally disagree. If these things sound difficult, find someone to help you. There might also be a more experienced representative or the SRC support teacher who can guide you. There might be other representatives with the same challenges — in that case a training session could be helpful. You could get someone from the local SRC cluster or network, or from a training organisation to come and help run this.

Being a representative isn't always easy, but there is always someone to help, if you look hard enough. And if it were all easy — maybe you wouldn't be learning anything!



## Checklist: Things to bring to an SRC meeting

### SRC meeting checklist

- Agenda
- Minutes from the last meeting
- Summary of ideas or responses from your class group
- Report on your actions from the last meeting
- SRC folder
- Pen and spare paper
- Laptop (if available and appropriate)
- Any documents relevant to topics being discussed
- Ideas of what you want to do and achieve in the meeting

## 3.2 Informed representation

When you're a representative, you don't just present your own ideas. If you are to represent other students, you need to find out what they think too. You also need to know what you're talking about. This means investigating or finding out about a topic, and finding out what has already been happening. We talk about this as informed or investigative representation. Here are some ideas to help you.

### Why is it important to be an informed representative?

To speak about a topic, you need to know something about it: the facts, what has happened before and what others think. Otherwise, you could come up with wrong ideas or ideas that are already happening. Any topic is likely to be more complicated than it appears at face value. You might know some details, but there's probably more to find out.

There are also likely to be different views on the topic. Other students will have different experiences and that means they will have different needs and ideas. You will need to represent these views as well as your own. The people you need to convince might also have different experiences and ideas, so you need to know and understand their views if you are to develop a convincing argument.

### What do you need to think about to become an informed representative?

There are three areas in which you need to become informed:

- **Views (breadth):** You need to find out what other students think about the topic. What is their experience? Do they have different experiences? What do they think should happen? Why? What is the range of views? Make sure you find out from a range of students – not just students who agree with you.
- **Topic (depth):** You need to find out as much about the topic as you can. What does it mean? Why is it important? What are possible complications? What is causing this issue?
- **Background (length, i.e. history):** You need to find out what has already happened about the topic as well as what is happening now. What have students tried before? What have students already suggested? What happened? Who else is working on the topic?

### How do you become an informed representative? How do you investigate?

Firstly, find out as much as you can about the experiences and views of *other students*. This is your special expertise. You can use formal methods like *surveys* or *interviews*, or informally *talk* with as many students as possible. Don't just choose your friends – choose students from different groups, different ages and different backgrounds, even different schools, if you can. You will need to ask them about what they have experienced on the topic, what they think about it, and what they think *should* be happening.

Secondly, you can *research* the topic in the usual ways: using the internet, looking in the media (newspapers, radio or TV), finding articles about the topic, interviewing people working in the area. Try to use a variety of sources and talk to a range of people. You can use professionals (teachers, researchers, community workers) to guide you to what will be useful.



➔ See sections 3.3: **Getting ideas and reporting back** and 3.4: **Organising a consultative forum** for further information.

Thirdly, make a special effort to **find others** who are particularly interested in, and already working on, the topic. You don't have to 'reinvent the wheel'. Others can help you with some history and background and let you know what groups have special interests in the topic – the 'stakeholders'.

Finally, **involve other students** actively in the topic. If they are actively interested and have different experiences, you could set up a working group of students to advise you and to act with you on the topic.

As you go, keep your ears open. You may never be completely informed, as the situation is often changing. Staying informed is an ongoing process. Even if you are at the centre of the SRC's action on an issue, you still need to know how the wider student body is responding to developments.

Also bear in mind that, as you find out more on a topic, other students may not have had the same opportunity to do this research. But they know things and have experiences that are different from, and just as valid as, yours. So make sure you continue to *listen* to them rather than just *telling* them what you now know.

Are they pleased with the SRC's actions? Dissatisfied? Or have they moved on to something else?

You don't have to change direction in response to every bit of feedback, but use each bit to shape your overall response.

Being a representative who investigates issues and stays well-informed will help both you and the SRC to be more effective.



## 3.3 Getting ideas and reporting back

As a representative, you will need to work closely with the group (e.g. class) you represent. You will get ideas from them to take to the SRC. They will then want to know what happened, so you should report back to them and let them know what did happen.

Standing up in front of a group might make you nervous – you might worry that they won't listen to you, they won't understand what you are saying, the topics are too complicated, or there is nothing interesting to report. But it doesn't have to be scary or boring. This section includes some ideas about making reporting to a group easy and interesting.

### Prepare

The key to having a successful discussion is to be prepared. Don't just walk in and hope all goes well. Prepare what you want to say, what sort of response you want, and how you will present your report or get ideas. If you want a response, have specific questions ready to prompt the group's feedback. If you are prepared, you will be confident, and this will make what you have to say more interesting. Be clear about whether this is just a report, or whether you want some responses from the group – such as further ideas.

Bring a copy of the SRC minutes, an action sheet and your own notes of the meeting. Write an agenda for the discussion on the board, so everyone is clear what the topic is.

### Make time

Don't be rushed. Plan when you can have this discussion, such as at a class assembly or in class. How much time do you have? Work this out with the teacher beforehand. Make sure everyone knows what is happening – don't spring it on the class or the teacher, or some people might resent it.

### Talk with students individually

You don't have to use group meetings as the only way to report or get ideas. You can meet with individual members of the class, or with small groups. In this way you can also get their help for when you do get up in front of the class. You'll find they take it seriously and contribute ideas. But make sure you *don't just talk with your friends*: you represent *all the students* in the group.

### Make a clear report

Remember that the group might be hearing about the things you report for the first time. Keep your language and the information simple and straightforward. What are the main points you need to tell them about? Don't get off the point and confuse them with lots of details. You can refer to these if students ask questions.

Don't use jargon (special language) that others won't understand. Explain what the SRC is trying to do. What is the main argument? What are the points against? What happened to your group's suggestions? What was decided? What action is now being taken?

Stop and ask the group to see if everyone understands.

## Break the group into subgroups

You don't have to talk to or run a discussion with the group as a whole. After you introduce the topic, you can break the group into smaller subgroups and ask them to discuss the topic. These can be called 'buzz groups'. After some time (which could be two minutes or 10 minutes), ask each group to report back on their discussion and write a summary of this on the board (or you can ask someone else to record the discussion). You can get the subgroups all to talk about the same topic, or give each a different aspect to discuss.

## Be creative



Some creative ideas are included on the opposite page.

You don't have to stand up and drone on. Don't just read out the minutes: talk about them or put up the main words on the board, hand out a summary or draw a diagram or picture. Think about different ways to give the report and get their interest.

## Relate it to their interests

You should focus your report on the issues your class is interested in, particularly anything in response to suggestions they previously made. Maybe tell a story that they'll recognise about a decision. Make sure you consult them before things are discussed at the SRC meeting, then they will feel part of the process and be more interested to hear what was decided. Ask them what they think before you tell them about a decision.



**If the SRC has been discussing a sports program, start by asking them about their sporting interests: Do they play sport already? What sports? When?**

## Use other students

Sometimes you might be able to get someone else from the SRC to come into your group to share your report. A different person can sometimes be taken more seriously: a Year 7 student to report to Year 12 and vice versa. But it's always better to have a student make the report than to get a teacher to do it.

## Listen to the group

Students will give ideas if they know you're listening to them and taking their ideas seriously. That doesn't mean you have to agree with everything they say, but listen first and argue later. Sometimes arguing with them (respectfully) actually shows you are taking them seriously. You can also put in ideas, but make sure others are supported to speak first. It's essential that you can *listen* as well as *speak*!

The most important thing is that ideas are accepted in a positive way and not put down. If you make fun of students' ideas, or if you allow other students to make fun of their ideas, or if you behave as if you know better than them, then they will not contribute any more ideas.

## Get others involved

If you can get the group active and involved, then you don't have to work alone on the topic. Can you set up a small subgroup to plan how the class might get involved? Use every opportunity to involve others actively.



GOOD PRACTICE

An SRC representative set up small task groups in her class around issues of cyberbullying that the SRC was considering. She persuaded their health teacher to allow time for these groups to meet and research in class time, and then she used the ideas they developed to bring proposals to the whole SRC for discussion.

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Here are some creative ideas that students have worked out for getting ideas and reporting back.

## Make a poster!

Put the main things that happened in the SRC meeting on a poster and pin it on a board in front of the class. Make it colourful and use cut-outs – it should leap out and grab them. Make a new poster for every meeting.

## Set up a formal debate

Ask members of the group to take sides for and against something that the SRC is discussing. Give them time to research and prepare and then present it to the group. (This might be something you can do in an English class.)



## Perform

Present your report as a performance.

## Student News Bulletin

Begin a student newsletter with information from the SRC, but also include contributions from other students. This could be handed out around the school, or read in all classroom meetings.

## School radio

Use the school PA system to set up a radio station during lunchtime and recess. This can play music as well as provide announcements and news from the SRC.

## Use the whiteboard

Start the session with a few words or a drawing on the board to get the group's attention. If you can make them start to wonder what you're on about, they'll start to get interested.

## Do a survey

Make up a simple survey for the class. This could be a 'rate yourself' quiz or a serious questionnaire. Hand it out to the group.



## Organise a role-play

Act out the situation to help students understand what's happening and what's involved. Students could then try acting out alternative endings to the role-play. This can suggest ideas and get students involved. At the end, discuss what the role-play showed: what would happen in 'real life'?

## Film

Record your report and screen it in class. Students will pay more attention because it's on a screen, or if they're away they can find it later. Plus you can rehearse and re-record it to get it perfect and then present it to several classes without having to repeat yourself.



## Make a T-shirt

Print your report or the question you want to ask on a T-shirt. Wear it around the school before the discussion.

## Say something outrageous!

Are they awake? Are they listening? Will they notice that the SRC wants to have school on Saturday?

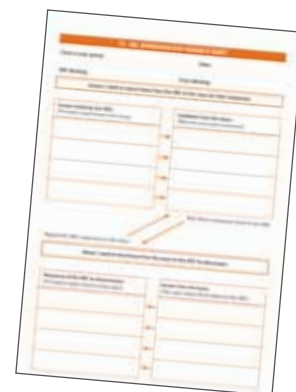
## Blog

You could start a blog with reports from each meeting. Students can post their ideas and feedback as comments.

## Email

Use the tools suggested in **section 4.2: Using technology effectively** to set up an email list connecting students. Use this to efficiently get SRC news to students.

## Using template T5: SRC representative feedback sheet



*This template is available in Part 5 of this kit and on the VicSRC website ([www.vicsrc.org.au](http://www.vicsrc.org.au)). It can be downloaded onto your SRC laptop and used in your SRC meetings.*

This template helps you keep track of what you need to report to your class, get responses, and bring back to SRC meetings.

The top half of the sheet is for you to take from the SRC meeting to class meetings. On the left-hand side, record all the issues that the SRC wants you to raise with your class. On the right-hand side, you can write notes about what the class said on each of these issues. You should then plan to take these responses to the next SRC meeting.

The bottom half of the sheet can be used to remind you of what to bring from your class to the SRC meeting. On the right-hand side, you can list the new issues that the class wants you to raise with the SRC. On the left-hand side, you can make notes about what happened to these issues at the SRC meeting, to remind you about what you need to report to the next class meeting.



The SRC asks the representatives to find out from their classes what they think about several issues: the date preferred for a mid-year student forum; views on the state of the toilets; ideas about language learning needs for next year. The representatives write these topics on the left side of the first form to remind them. When these issues are discussed in the representative's home group class, the class's responses to each issue are written on the right side of the first form, so that the representative can remember to report these to the next SRC meeting.

The students may also raise other issues that they want their representative to take to the SRC. These are summarised on the right side of the second form, so that the representative remembers to bring these up for discussion at the SRC meeting. When they considered at the SRC meeting, the representative writes down a summary of the SRC's responses or decisions on the left side of this second form – and these are later reported back to the class.

## 3.4 Organising a consultative forum

How does the SRC keep in touch with student issues and concerns? How do you find out what issues are of concern to students? Every SRC needs to get information from students. Individual representatives can do this through their classes (see **section 3.3: Getting ideas and reporting back** for some ideas on this), but the whole SRC might also organise some sort of consultative forum within the school. This section contains some ideas on how to do that.

### Why consult?

You need to be clear about the purpose for your forum. This will affect how you run it and the approaches you use. Here are two main situations facing the SRC – both could be good reasons for holding a consultative forum. The following table will guide you through the process for each situation.

*Figure 3.1: Process for a consultative forum for two common situations*



Situation	
An issue has come up but the SRC doesn't know exactly what to do about it. There might be two or more opposing views about what the solution is.	The SRC doesn't have a sense of what students think the issues are. There is a need to search for new ideas.
Purpose	
To hear a range of viewpoints and seek agreement, if possible, before taking action.	To get student input on what is most important for the SRC to be working on.
When	
When the SRC feels it's needed – when an issue comes up.	Best done early in the year, i.e. end of Term 1 or start of Term 2.
How long	
Give yourself enough time for students to raise and discuss issues, but don't make it so long that students get bored. Perhaps a half-day will provide enough time; however, if all you can negotiate with the school is one period, you can still use this time effectively.	

## Permission

This may require a major change to the school's timetable, so the SRC will need to propose the idea of a consultative forum to the school and get permission to organise it. You should do this very early in your planning. When you approach the school, you will need to be clear about why you want such a forum, as well as about all the organisational arrangements.

## Who for

The forum is for everyone affected by the issue. If the issue only affects some students in the school, make sure that they're the ones who attend. If there are two sides to the issue make sure they are both well represented and that both sides feel that the forum is for them.

You should have a broad cross-section of the students you represent at the forum. You could run this for each year level, provided the representatives from that year level are willing to follow up by themselves. Or you might decide there is a particular group the SRC never hears from and organise a special forum just for them.

## Promotion

You will need to work out some ways to encourage students to attend, especially if attendance is voluntary (if it's compulsory, you may have other issues about whether students will be cooperative or take it seriously). Work out what incentives you can offer: food is always welcomed, but also the SRC might be able to get movie tickets or other incentives through partnerships with local businesses or community groups.

## Where

Organise a space within the school where you can be comfortable — and where students feel comfortable to present their views. It might be possible to get a space outside the school by working with local youth workers or community groups.

## Format

You could have a debate by asking students with different perspectives to present their viewpoints, followed by questions and discussions. This might not reach a consensus, but it can enable the SRC to reach a decision based on an understanding of different student perspectives.

See the following section for more on how to run a debate.

You might run a small-group style forum where all students respond to questions in small-group discussion sessions and report back at different points. See the sample forum agenda for ideas on how to run this.

You could use a 1:2:4 process to collect action ideas from everyone and then prioritise them according to what students like the most or think are most important.

See section 4.5: **Tools for SRC decision-making** for ideas on how to do this.

## Follow up

Make sure that all participants know what will happen with the outcomes of the forum. You will need to make time at your next SRC meeting to discuss any recommendations and, of course, to find out how everyone thought the forum went. Also make sure you provide some feedback to the school staff, and show them how valuable the forum was.



### GOOD PRACTICE

The principal invited the SRC to conduct regular consultative forums for students on issues being considered by the school. One of these was organised each term. The school counsellor and some of the year-level coordinators attended to listen, but the SRC ran the discussion. At the end, they produced a report of what the students said and used this in SRC meetings to develop action plans – and these, in turn, were the basis for whole-school action plans developed by the principal and senior staff in partnership with the SRC.

## Ideas for consultative forum processes

### Efficient organisation

If the consultative forum has only a limited amount of time, make sure it's used efficiently and that it starts on time and ends on time. This is particularly important as students will have other commitments, such as classes, sport, lunch, etc., and it leaves everyone with a bad feeling if students are leaving before it's finished.

### Trained facilitators

You will also need to organise and train group facilitators. These are members of the SRC (or other students who are interested in the event) who will lead and support discussions. It's important that you have SRC facilitators who know what they're doing. Arrange a session a week or more before the forum in which you work through the details of the day, and also talk about how groups can be facilitated. It might be possible for the SRC to get someone to come to the school to help train the facilitators (local youth services might have someone available), or the SRC support teacher might be able to arrange or do this. It's also important that people who are facilitating the discussions know how to deal with distractions; make sure that the discussions keep flowing; that everyone gets a chance to speak; and that someone is recording the ideas being raised. A facilitator can also raise questions like 'What about ..?' to make sure that all matters are considered.

#### GOOD PRACTICE

A good facilitator knows that what matters in these consultative forums is getting other people's opinions, not giving their own.

### Forum program

Whether you are dealing with a specific topic, or searching for student ideas, there are some common elements of the forum program that you should include.

Firstly, make sure you introduce the topic or the question. Then plan to do some warm-up activities that are related to the topic, to get students talking and sharing – but still focused on the issues. Where possible, break into small groups, with an SRC facilitator for each group. Ask small groups to report back to everyone in engaging ways – use posters, skits, mime, etc. Make sure that someone from the SRC is recording ideas and opinions. Plan all this before you start.

Here are some specific suggestions of how you might conduct your forum, or of elements to include in it.

## *Running a debate*



If you have a specific issue to decide on, one way to do this within the forum is to have a debate, with students presenting different opinions.


Start by having someone neutral (perhaps the facilitator) outline the issue and establish any relevant facts. (Students with opposing views might see the issue differently so you might need to give them a chance to describe the issue as they see it.)

Then use a format that you've agreed on beforehand for students to present their views and suggested solutions for the issue. You could use a traditional 'three speakers' model including rebuttal, or allow just one or two speakers from each side followed by questions from the floor. Make sure that all speakers contribute something constructive to the debate.

After the debate, open the discussion to all who attended to seek suggestions and feedback on the points that were raised. If the debate is heated and oppositional it can be difficult to get everyone to agree on a solution then and there. However, the debate should provide an opportunity to air issues so the SRC can then go away and make an informed decision based on broad student feedback.

## *Running a search forum*

If you are looking for ideas about what issues to tackle or need to gather student experiences and proposals on a topic, then a 'search forum' might be more appropriate. Some ideas for the program of a two-hour forum are given in the sample forum agenda on page 93.



## Think about the risks

Why can it be difficult for an SRC to run a consultative forum? What are the risks?

Students who have run forums – some successfully, some not so successfully – say that they were worried about attendance (maybe no one will turn up); or that students would treat it as a joke (and not give serious opinions); or that students would be cynical (and not believe their views would be listened to seriously); or that they would have no ideas at all.

How will you deal with these fears and risks?

Many of these concerns may come from the past experience of students. If ideas have not been taken seriously, or if no action has resulted, then students are going to be cynical or suggest silly things – or not turn up at all. But if the issue is one that is really important to students, and you show that the SRC is taking students' views seriously and doing something about them, then small successes will build into very successful forums.

In particular, if there is an opportunity for students to express their views at a forum, and have them immediately responded to (e.g. by a panel of SRC representatives and teachers) then the SRC will come to be known as a group that organises worthwhile consultations. So it's vital that the SRC reports back to students on the forum outcomes – about the action that the SRC took and about the outcomes of this action.



### GOOD PRACTICE

In one area, students from a cluster organised regular half-day forums in each school. All students took part, with SRC leaders organising discussions in cross-age groups. Teachers were present to supervise, but weren't otherwise involved.

At a plenary session at the end – like a school assembly – a panel made up of students from each discussion group presented their ideas and recommendations to another panel of teachers and community representatives – who then responded. The recommendations were then put together and considered by the SRC after the day. The day involved some fun activities as well as the discussion groups.



## Sample forum agenda

Time	Activity	Details: how
1.00 pm	<i>Opening: welcome</i>	Open the forum and welcome everyone; explain why the SRC has organised the forum and what its hopes are, including what could happen with the outcomes.
1.10 pm	<i>Warm-up activity</i>	Run a quick warm-up activity, designed to get everyone relaxed and talking. See <a href="#">section 2.1</a> for examples of warm-up activities.
1.20 pm	<i>Small groups #1: Question: What is your experience of the topic?</i>	Break the participants up into groups of manageable size – the size will depend on how many students you have, the space/s available and the number of facilitators. Small groups (ideally six to eight students) will be more productive than big groups.  Write up the question that you want groups to consider, e.g. on a PowerPoint slide. Ask each group to come up with something concrete in response, e.g. make a poster or develop a skit.  The first question should be very concrete: ‘What is your experience of ..?’ ‘Show us what happens in the school about ...’.
1.40 pm	<i>Report back</i>	Ask each group to report back, by showing their posters and (if there is time) telling or showing everyone what their main point was.
1.50 pm	<i>Small groups #2: Question: What is causing the issue?</i>	Now it’s time to go deeper into the subject. The next question is: ‘What is causing this?’ Again, the same groups can brainstorm. You might want to ask: ‘What is your evidence for that?’
2.10 pm	<i>Report back</i>	Again, groups should report on their reasons. This time, you could summarise the main points (on a whiteboard or PowerPoint slide). Add new reasons and group similar reasons. An electronic whiteboard will allow you to drag points around, and group similar ideas together.
2.20 pm	<i>Small groups #3: Question: What should happen?</i>	Finally, ask the groups to consider ‘What should happen?’ They should be encouraged to present ideas in creative ways, but also to think of unusual possibilities as well as ordinary ones. This is a slightly faster session.
2.35 pm	<i>Mini-congress: decision-making</i>	Instead of reporting back, you could finish with a formal congress session. This is like a mini-parliament, in which each group formally presents their most important idea as a proposal for a brief debate and then a ‘decision’. It should be clear that these are recommendations to the SRC for further investigation, debate and possibly action. (After all, two hours is too short a time to get all the information you need about any topic.) You might not get through all the groups – but impress on the participants that all ideas will be looked at seriously by the SRC.
2.55 pm	<i>Close Thanks What now?</i>	Close the forum by thanking everyone and by being clear about what will happen with the outcomes. When and how will the participants hear from the SRC about these issues?  Do a quick evaluation of the forum, either with a short flier survey, or by asking for any comments from participants about whether it was worthwhile, or what could be done better next time.

## 3.5 Effective meetings

Effective meetings of the SRC are essential if you are to achieve anything. This section first discusses decisions you'll need to make about when, where and how often to meet. It then provides ideas about what should happen before, during and after an effective meeting. There is also information here about decision-making approaches, and about evaluating your SRC meetings.



Regular meetings are the lifeblood of the SRC. They are the times you have together to share information, to discuss issues and to make decisions. It's important that they are effective. This means that you need to be clear about your role and about the roles of others in a meeting. You also need to know what to do before and after meetings to make best use of the meeting time.



Could your SRC meetings run more effectively? Do you wish discussions didn't just become arguments or that students could get on better and work more constructively? Are your decisions clear, or do people come back to the next meeting wanting to discuss the same issue? This section will help you to solve some of these problems.

### Decisions about SRC meetings

The SRC might or might not have options about when and where to meet, but you need to talk about this and make clear decisions on it. If possible, the whole group should decide, so that everyone's needs are considered.

#### When to meet

SRCs can meet during **class time**, **before or after school**, or during **lunch or recess breaks**.

##### Class time

The best time to meet is during class time. This allows the SRC plenty of time. It also demonstrates that the school values the work of the SRC and believes the roles played by students and teachers are part of the core business of the school. Being on the SRC is a great learning opportunity too, so the SRC should be seen as part of the curriculum.



See **section 4.3: Credit and recognition** for more on this.

If you do meet during class time, rotate the time of day or week that you meet so that students aren't always missing the same class and getting behind in their work.

##### Before or after school

If you can't meet during class, the next best option is before or after school (however, this might be difficult in areas where students use school buses or have jobs). This demonstrates the level of commitment of SRC members! A good incentive is to provide some breakfast or afternoon tea to share at the meeting. Decide together on a morning or afternoon that suits most students.

##### Lunchtime or recess

If none of the above work, then you are left with lunchtime or recess. You can still run an effective SRC that meets then; you will just need some good strategies for managing your time. Perhaps you can provide lunch for everyone, or make a special arrangement with the canteen so that all the SRC lunches are delivered to your meeting room at the start of lunchtime.

eg

GOOD PRACTICE

The SRC meets during class time, when the SRC support teacher isn't teaching. The best time is just before lunchtime, so that meetings can keep going if necessary, and lunches can be brought into the meeting. All the representatives looked at their timetables and worked out the best days. They also let their teachers know (so they wouldn't be marked absent), and arranged for someone else to keep notes for them.



**Where to meet:** Ideally, you have your own SRC room with a filing cabinet and storage space.

See [section 4.1: Resourcing the SRC](#) for ideas on this.

You could see if a school meeting room is available, or you might be more comfortable in a classroom. Whatever you decide, try and meet in the same room every time so there's no confusion about where the meeting is.

eg

GOOD PRACTICE

The SRC has its main meetings in the school's board room. This is big enough to fit the whole SRC without too many problems, and it also means that everyone is sitting around one table. The SRC books use of this room with the school office, and has these meetings written into the school's calendar.

## How often?

This depends on how much you want to achieve and on the availability and commitment of SRC members. Some groups meet every week, while others meet fortnightly or monthly. It can be a good idea to alternate between meeting as a whole group and meeting in smaller subgroups. The small groups can be working groups to work on publicity or on planning a particular event – or they could be used to discuss something controversial and bring a recommendation to the whole SRC. This sort of discussion can save time in the bigger meetings.

eg

GOOD PRACTICE

The SRC meets every second week, but only once a month as a whole group. In the alternating weeks, it meets in smaller working groups to carry out tasks decided by the whole meeting. These working groups also meet at other times (mainly lunchtime) and then report to the main SRC meeting with proposals for action or simply to keep everyone informed.

“ ”

*The whole SRC and the executive meet on alternate fortnights (the executive also attends general SRC meetings). Meetings are for 50 minutes at lunchtime, plus one 50-minute lesson directly after lunch. Year-level SRC meetings occur during lunchtime.*

Secondary College SRC

## Making meetings effective

Now that you have decided *when*, *where* and *how often* you are going to meet, you're well on the way to having effective meetings. You will still need to agree on some basic guidelines for meeting behaviour, and decide what sort of decision-making process you are going to use (*see later in this section for more details*). This section will explain how to use those decision-making processes and some of the roles required in the meeting.

### Before the meeting

- **Notify people:** Make sure everyone knows when and where the meeting is being held. Use a couple of ways to let people know (e.g. school bulletin or SRC noticeboard) to make it easier for everyone to find out. Have a particular contact person as the meeting organiser so that everyone knows who to check with about any last-minute changes. This doesn't have to be the support teacher!
- **Set and circulate the agenda:** The agenda is the list of things to be discussed at the meeting. It's best if setting the agenda is coordinated by whoever is chairing the meeting so that they know what has to be discussed and can allow time to fit everything in.

There are some basic things that should happen at every meeting – these are called 'standing items'. But other items will change for each meeting. The chairperson or organiser can ask everyone to submit items for discussion by a set time (e.g. a week or two days before the meeting), write up the agenda and circulate it to everyone ahead of the meeting so that members can consult on any issues they need to. Sometimes it's useful to have a small group to set the agenda; this could be the SRC executive.

If you forget, you can set the agenda at the start of the meeting by simply calling for agenda items, allocating an amount of time for each item, and deciding on their order for discussion.

- **Organise the minutes:** Make sure that someone is organised to take minutes (a formal record) of the meeting. These don't have to be a record of everything that was said, but should include details of what was decided, and who is going to do what action. Sometimes it's also useful to record the main points of a discussion.

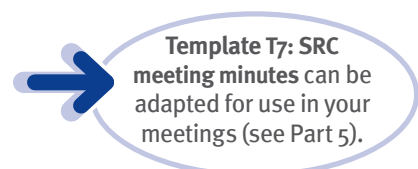


**eg**

### GOOD PRACTICE

The SRC's meeting organiser reminds members of the date and time of the meetings. She asks for suggestions for items to be discussed – these have to be handed in three days before the meeting. She then works with the SRC chairperson and the support teacher to make up the meeting agenda. This is given to all SRC members the day before the meeting.

It is clear from this agenda who is chairing the meeting and who is taking the minutes. It's also clear what information is needed from all other members and how much time it's expected each item will take.



## Beginning the meeting

- **On time:** Try to start on time but make sure you have enough students present so that you can make decisions that will be accepted by everyone. You might set a minimum number of students present – a quorum – before you can officially start to make decisions. As students are gathering, this can be a great time to catch up and check in to see how SRC members are going. If someone is having a difficult time at home or school, this could help them to keep participating in the SRC by making it a supportive environment.
- **Space:** If you're meeting in a classroom, set up the room for an effective discussion. Move the chairs and tables so that everyone is sitting in a circle and can see each other.
- **Welcome:** When you're ready to start, welcome everyone and record who is present and the name of anyone who couldn't make it and sent apologies. Some groups like to start with an Acknowledgment of Country that recognises the traditional owners of the land and is a way of seeking reconciliation with Koorie people. This can be a simple statement like: 'We recognise that we are meeting on the lands of the (insert the name of your local Koorie group) people and pay our respects to their elders past and present'.
- **Review the minutes:** The first item of business is to review the minutes (the formal record of what happened) of the last meeting. These should be confirmed as an accurate record of the meeting. It's then logical to hear reports about any actions that were agreed upon ('business arising from the minutes').
- **Reports:** You then should hear other reports: from any subcommittees that have met since the last meeting, from representatives on the school council, or a finance report from the treasurer. You could rotate these so that each person or subgroup reports every second or third meeting.



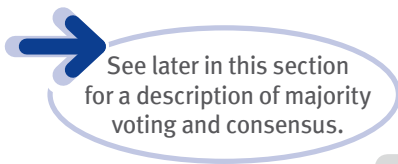
GOOD PRACTICE



It is clear to all members what has happened as a result of the last meeting. Students report back on action that they committed to take and explain what happened – or sometimes why they haven't been able to complete the work they undertook. This then means that they are asked to report to the next meeting.

## Decision-making in the meeting

The meeting then considers, discusses, debates and decides on the issues on the agenda. This is the main purpose of the meeting.



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GOOD PRACTICE



- Clear processes: It's important that you have a clear decision-making process that everyone understands and you can use efficiently. Without this, you might drift along with nothing being controversial but then not know how to decide on something big – and you might finish up debating the process instead of talking about the urgent issues. Without a process, you can also just talk without moving to a solution. On the other hand, if your process is too formal it can waste time and confuse and frustrate people.

There are two main processes that you can use to make decisions: majority voting and consensus. Of course, you can make your own modifications to suit your group.

Everyone in the SRC meeting is clear about how decisions will be reached. Early in the year, the SRC decided at a training day to try to reach consensus on proposals, and decided to vote on ideas if agreement couldn't be reached within the time available. They also agreed that, if a vote was close, they wouldn't make a final decision but ask members to consult further, to find out more and to think about ways that the next meeting could come to agreement.

- Clear about the issue: First though, whatever decision-making process you use, it's important to start by being clear about the issue. Ask: What is the current situation? Who is affected? Who is bringing the issue to the SRC? Don't start your discussion with a proposed solution – because this can be confusing for students who don't know all the background. Even if someone has already suggested a motion (proposal) for action, start from the beginning and allow enough time for students to ask questions before you move into the formal discussion. It will save a lot of time later if everyone starts on the same page.

The chairperson needs to let the meeting know that this is a time for general discussion – including questions and answers – before the formal debate, and also to decide how much discussion time is needed. If the decision is a small or obvious one and there is already a proposed solution, then the chairperson might decide to move quickly into making a decision on that proposal. Otherwise, you might need to spend more time having a general discussion about a range of possible solutions, and the pros and cons of each one, until a preferred solution emerges. However, even for simple issues, check that everyone understands it and that all questions are answered before you move to debate a proposal.

eg

GOOD PRACTICE



Everyone in the SRC meeting is clear about what is happening. The chairperson usually starts by suggesting an open discussion of the item, in which anyone can ask questions or put forward ideas. Within the time allowed, the chairperson then asks someone to make a definite proposal. This is then debated and a decision reached.

## Decision-making approaches

### Majority voting

This is the traditional approach used by many groups. In its most basic form, someone moves (puts forward) a motion (proposal) outlining the action the SRC should take. The chairperson asks if someone seconds the motion – to make sure that at least two people in the meeting are in favour of it. The mover and seconder are given the chance to speak in favour of this motion for a limited time, and then someone else is given the chance to speak against it. If the topic is controversial, you can have more speakers for and against – alternating. Each speaker should only raise new points for or against. Sometimes it's useful to restrict the number of speakers. Once you've heard all the arguments, the mover has the right to reply and sum up (but cannot introduce new points). Then the motion goes to a vote.

The simplest way is for the chairperson to call for all those supporting the motion to raise their hands, then all those against to raise their hands. You only need to count if the vote is close, or if someone requests this. The decision is made for the side that has a majority of votes; this is usually defined as the side having more than half of the votes, but you could require a vote to get two-thirds or 75 per cent support to be agreed on. Sometimes a secret ballot is used, where everyone writes their vote on a piece of paper and hands it to the chairperson. The advantage of this is that everyone feels free to vote as they want; since no one else will know how they voted, no one can pressure them into voting any particular way.

Majority voting can be quick and clear, but results in 'winners' and 'losers'. It can leave some members of the group feeling that their ideas and views have been ignored.

### Consensus approach

This approach is becoming more popular with many groups. It's based on the principle that we should try to include all points of view in making a decision, and therefore reach a better decision that has stronger support. Again start with a period of general discussion first – to make the topic clear – then a motion. Once you have a proposal, the chairperson tests for consensus on this by asking who agrees and who doesn't. If everyone at this stage agrees, then consensus has already been reached.

If there are students who disagree, one or more of them can be asked to state their concerns. If these are minor concerns, then they might be willing to respect the will of the majority, put these concerns aside and let consensus be recorded.

If they have major concerns, then the chairperson can ask for an amendment (change) to the motion to accommodate these concerns and again test for consensus on the changed proposal. You can repeat this process as many times as the meeting has time and energy for it. Sometimes this can be worth doing for a while, but it's important that everyone is committed to working towards a consensus resolution, not just stalling the process by talking forever.

If you can't reach a consensus because one or more students feel so strongly that they continually block the proposal (it is helpful if they are open about doing so), the meeting can decide to move to a vote. In this case, a 75 per cent majority is usually required to pass the motion to maintain the principle of only deciding if there is broad support. Alternatively, if the matter is not urgent, the proposal can be taken back to classes for consultation and then brought to the next meeting for further discussion and a decision. The extra time might allow the group to reach consensus.

## Ending the meeting

Once you have worked through all the items on the agenda, it's important to end the meeting well. Even if you have more business to discuss, you should take the last five minutes to do three important things.

**1. Action summary:** Make sure that all of the decisions that you made are recorded in the minutes and that specific students have agreed to be responsible for carrying out the actions that are required to make these decisions happen.



GOOD PRACTICE



At the end of the meeting, the chairperson asks the student taking the minutes to summarise the decisions made, and the actions decided on. The names of those who are to take action are recorded in the minutes.

**2. Evaluation of the meeting:** Take a couple of minutes to hear from everybody about how they thought the meeting went and how it could be improved. There are some questions below that you can use for this reflection. If your meetings aren't going well, they will only improve if you take time to evaluate them and work out how to improve them. Sometimes, the best way to do this is to hear from the students who don't speak as much as others do, as they might have observed more of what happened in the meeting.



## Evaluation questions

Here are some questions for students to consider before offering their evaluation:

- Did the meeting start on time?
- Did you get through the agenda?
- Did you finish on time?
- Is everybody having a say?
- Are some students talking more than others? Who? Why?
- Did everyone listen without interrupting?
- How do students respond to strong differences of opinion?
- Did the meeting feel friendly and cooperative?
- Did the chairperson do a good job? How could they improve?
- Were the decisions well recorded?
- Were decisions from the last meeting acted on? How did this affect today's meeting?
- Was the meeting fun?
- What was the biggest difficulty in the meeting?
- How could the meeting be improved?

**3. Next meeting date:** Hopefully, you have set these at the start of the year, and they are in your year planner, but always confirm these and remind students of the date and time of the next meeting.



GOOD PRACTICE



In each meeting, the last few minutes are spent checking with all members about how the meeting went. The chairperson asks all members to say what they think was achieved in the meeting, and whether they have any suggestions as to how it could have been better.

## Using template T6: SRC meeting agenda



*This template is available in Part 5 of this kit and on the VicSRC website ([www.vicsrc.org.au](http://www.vicsrc.org.au)). It can be downloaded onto your SRC laptop and used in your SRC meetings.*

Use this template to draw up an agenda for each meeting.

1. It starts by recording who is present at the meeting and who has presented an apology.
2. The agenda should name the purpose of the meeting and who is chairing or facilitating the discussion.
3. The previous meeting's minutes should have been circulated, so there needs to be space for these to be accepted as a true record of that meeting.
4. The agenda then includes items to allow SRC members to report on any matters that were followed up from the last meeting, any correspondence that has been received or sent, and any reports from representatives or working groups.
5. Finally, there is space on the agenda for any SRC member to raise other items under general business. If these are known, they should be named on the agenda. Don't forget to leave time at the end to remind members about the date, time and place of the next SRC meeting.

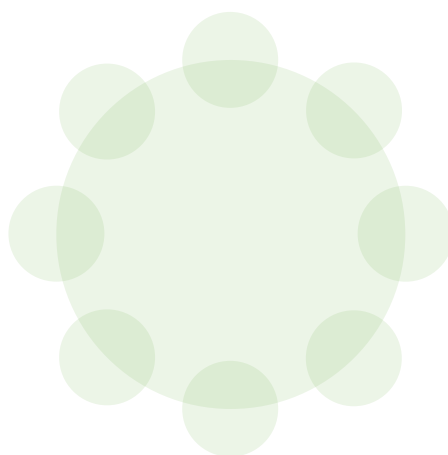
## Using template T7: SRC meeting minutes



*This template is available in Part 5 of this kit and on the VicSRC website ([www.vicsrc.org.au](http://www.vicsrc.org.au)). It can be downloaded onto your SRC laptop and used in your SRC meetings.*

Use this template to record what happens in the meeting: the minutes.

1. The minutes start by recording the date, time and place of the meeting, who is present, who has apologised, who is chairing the meeting and who is taking these minutes.
2. For each item, record the name of the topic, a brief summary of the discussion and then – most importantly – exactly what decision was made. You could include details here, like the name of the mover and seconder, or the vote.
3. The last column of the minutes is for a record to remind everyone what action is to be taken.
4. Finally, record information about the date, time and place of the next SRC meeting.





## Roles in the meeting

### Roles in SRC meetings

Here are some brief guidelines about different roles in SRC meetings:

- Chairperson** The chairperson is in charge of what happens during the meeting. They have the power to introduce a topic, say how it is to be discussed, decide who gets to speak and for how long, and call for a vote or test for consensus on motions put forward. Their job is to make the meeting run as smoothly and efficiently as possible and make sure that everyone gets a turn to speak. They might keep a list of students who want to speak and call on them in order. They should not speak for or against a motion in a debate. They need to keep the discussion focused on the topic and guide the meeting to a decision within the time allowed. A timekeeper can be appointed if you want to watch the time during discussions and keep the chairperson informed on how time is going.
- Co-chair** The role of the co-chair is to support the chairperson to run the meeting. Having a second person to help can be great moral support for the chairperson. It's best if the co-chair sits opposite the chairperson so that, between them, they can see the whole room clearly. The co-chair can also help keep an eye on the time and make sure the chairperson doesn't get caught up in the debate. If the chairperson wants to participate in a particular discussion, the co-chair can temporarily take over the role of chair to allow them to speak.

**eg**

GOOD PRACTICE



Chairing the SRC meeting is rotated between all members, so everyone learns that skill. The co-chair becomes the chairperson for the next meeting. They also keep a watch on the time and whether the meeting is keeping to the times allowed on the agenda. (They are not too strict on this – sometimes it's valuable to let discussion go on, and catch up time later, or defer some items until the next meeting.)

- SRC members** All SRC members have important roles to play in meetings. The most basic role is that of listening. Members are there to make decisions – which means hearing other students' concerns and then forming your opinion on the issue. Members need to read the agenda before the meeting and consult with those they represent to help form their opinion.



See **section 3.1:**  
**What does a representative do?** for more on this.

If you think something is being missed in the discussion, then speak up when you have something to contribute. There might be a whole issue no one has mentioned, in which case you should think about this before the meeting, ask for it to go on the agenda and be prepared to tell everyone about it. Perhaps you can propose one or more options for action that the SRC could take.

All members can also help to make meetings run effectively by not repeating what has already been said and by making sure that the discussion doesn't go around in circles or off the topic.



See sections 2.1:  
Building an SRC team  
and 2.4: Establishing  
SRC roles.

**SRC support teacher**

The SRC support teacher can play many roles in a meeting. This depends on the capacity of the students to run the meetings effectively and on what you agreed about the teacher’s role at the start of the year.

If the students are experienced and trained well, they should be able to run the meeting themselves. Some SRCs even have a rule that the teacher cannot speak without permission from the meeting. Then the SRC uses the SRC support teacher as a resource person who knows more about some of the school systems and processes. For example, students might have an idea but are not sure how the staff or the principal might receive it, and ask the support teacher for advice or comment. Remember, the SRC support teacher usually cannot speak on behalf of the principal. Other SRCs often find it useful to ask the SRC support teacher to comment more generally on issues within the meeting.

If students are less confident in meeting procedures, then the SRC support teacher might need to take a more active role to support the chairperson in running the meeting or keeping order. This should be seen as part of the practical ‘training’ of the SRC members in procedures, so that they are increasingly capable and confident to run their own organisation.



**GOOD PRACTICE**

The SRC support teacher attends all the meetings (or arranges for another teacher to attend if they can’t) but tries to remain silent. Sometimes, the chairperson asks the teacher for assistance or advice, and sometimes the support teacher asks to provide some information. In these cases, the teacher behaves like any other member of the meeting: puts up their hand and waits for permission to speak.

Before the meeting, the support teacher has talked with the chairperson and the meeting organiser about the agenda, what they want the meeting to achieve, and any areas of concern about processes. After the meeting, the support teacher spends some time with the chairperson, discussing how the meeting went, what was learnt, and what needs to happen now.

**Non-SRC members**

SRC meetings can and should be open to anyone in the school community, especially other students. Visitors don’t have the right to vote; you don’t even have to give them permission to speak. However, it’s sometimes really useful to hear a different perspective from outside the SRC. It can also be useful for other groups of students who want to understand why the SRC has a particular view to observe the SRC’s discussions. You can, of course, close meetings – where you don’t let non-members in, particularly when you are discussing something sensitive – but meeting in secret can also antagonise other groups or create an elitist reputation for the SRC.

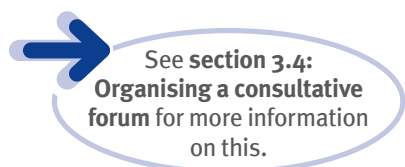


**GOOD PRACTICE**

All students know they can attend SRC meetings. The SRC lets other students know about the meeting. The agenda and the minutes of the last meeting are put on the SRC noticeboard so that everyone can read them. (They are also given to the SRC support teacher and the principal.) Sometimes, when there are items being discussed that are of particular interest to a class or to a specific group of students, these students are specifically invited to attend the meeting. Mostly they observe the discussion, but they can also ask and be permitted to speak when relevant.



## 3.6 Responding to issues

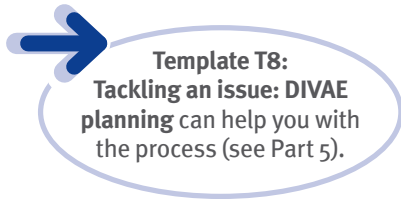
SRCs are often asked to respond to issues that face students in the school. These might be issues that the SRC itself becomes aware of, for instance a problem with the toilets, concerns about racism or bullying, boredom, etc.; or others might bring this issue to the attention of the SRC. Perhaps the issue comes from a request from the school's leadership team, or from a particular class, or even an individual student – or from an SRC consultation with the student body. This section contains ideas about the process that the SRC can go through to organise its action on an issue.



**How can the SRC respond?** There's a simple five-step method that the SRC can use to respond to any issue. It provides a checklist to make sure you haven't forgotten anything. As with any process, you need to adapt it to your circumstances. These steps could be done faster if you're already clear about the issue, or are certain that you know as much about it as you possibly can. This method is called DIAVE, standing for define, investigate, vision, act and evaluate.

### DIAVE Method

Step	Action
1. <b>Define</b>	Start by clarifying the issue and making sure you are all talking about the same thing: What is the issue about? Do you all agree on its definition? It's also useful to check the 'symptoms' of the issue: Why is it an issue? Why are students raising it? What are students experiencing?
2. <b>Investigate</b>	The second step is about finding out all you can about the issue, so that you have the information to go ahead and make decisions. Some of the key things you will need to find out include what is happening now, the background to the issue – what has happened before, what is causing the issue, etc.   <b>Section 3.2: Informed representation might help you here.</b>
3. <b>Vision</b>	In this third step, the SRC develops a view about what could or should be happening. What would the ideal solution look like? The SRC could ask others for ideas, brainstorm possibilities or even run a whole-school competition.
4. <b>Act</b>	After working through the previous steps, the SRC can now define the actions that it wants to take. A useful process is to write up some separate posters: the vision (aims or desired outcomes) on one poster, then a second poster on the changes (practical changes to get to the vision) that would be needed, then a third poster on the actions that the SRC can take to make these changes.   <b>Section 3.7 has some ideas about action planning to make sure you achieve your outcomes.</b>
5. <b>Evaluate</b>	The final step for the SRC is to look at what was achieved and decide what was learnt. Did you achieve what you wanted to? Have your actions made a difference to the issue that was raised originally? How do you know? You might need to repeat some of the steps to achieve an outcome you are happy with. And some of your questions will be about the processes you used and what you learnt for the next time you go through this process: What helped you to achieve your outcomes? What made it difficult? What could have been done better? What would you do differently next time?



**eg**

**GOOD PRACTICE**



The SRC never makes any decision without finding out as much about the issue as possible. Sometimes this involves postponing a decision until more information is available. They might ask the student who proposes an action to come back to the next meeting with a clearer idea of why it's important, what's behind the issue, what's already happening and what is proposed.

### Using template T8: Tackling an issue: DIVAE planning



*This template is available in Part 5 of this kit and on the VicSRC website ([www.vicsrc.org.au](http://www.vicsrc.org.au)). It can be downloaded onto your SRC laptop and used in your SRC meetings.*

Use this template to help you plan how to tackle an issue. It takes you through the five-step DIVAE process, where you first define the issue, then investigate it, develop a vision of what it could be like, work out what action you need to take, and finally evaluate what happened.

There are some prompt questions in italics in each box of the template. As you answer these, delete the questions.

You can also adapt this template if you need to add in extra steps to help your planning.



## 3.7 Organising events

After your SRC makes a decision about what it wants to do, you need to organise yourself to make it a reality. This might be action that you take in response to an issue you have been considering, or it might be an action to organise an event in the school or community.

This sheet has some ideas about organising an event to help you break it down into smaller steps, to get these into order, allocate jobs to students and check that you have thought of everything.



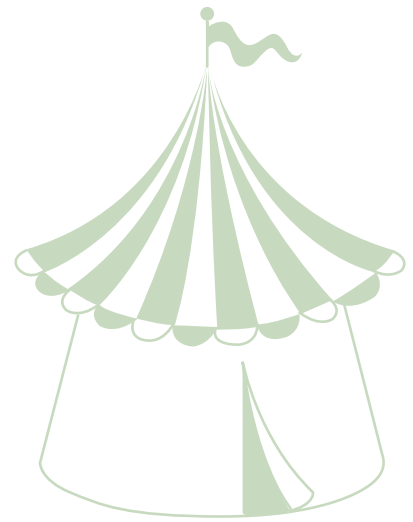
Use **template T9: Action planner** to plan events or other actions (see Part 5). In the steps below, this symbol shows where you should add some details into your SRC year planner.


### Event planning

There are four important stages in organising an event. The first stage is deciding on exactly what you want to achieve with the event and who it will be targeted at. Once you have a clear goal you can begin planning all the different tasks you need to complete to make the event a success. The third stage is actually running the event itself – which should be easy if you’ve done stages 1 and 2 well. Then there are important things to do after the event that will help make future events more successful.

#### Stages of organising an event

Stage 1: Deciding directions	
<b>Purpose or desired outcome</b>  	Make sure you have a clear vision of your desired outcome. What do you want your event to achieve? It could be to educate people on an important issue, to convince people about something, to find out something through a consultative forum (see <a href="#">section 3.4</a> for specific tips on this sort of event), to raise money, or just for fun – or it could be a combination of these and other purposes. How do you want students to feel when they leave your event?
<b>Audience</b>	Who are you targeting? Is this an event for students? What sort of event or action is likely to involve them?
<b>What's possible</b>	It's easy to dream big when planning events, especially when everyone has such great ideas. Before you decide exactly what sort of event you will run, make sure you do a reality check. Think about what sort of resources will be required to make your event run successfully. How many of these do you already have? Will it be possible to get what you need to make it happen? How?
Stage 2: Planning and preparing	
Once you are clear on your big direction and purpose, it's time to fill in the details that you'll require to make your event a success.	
<b>Brainstorm the action steps</b>	In preparing for any event, there are lots of small tasks that each seem quick and easy to do but, which put together, make up a really big project. The bigger the event, the more planning you will need to do and the more time you will need for it. But even with a small event, break it down into even smaller steps.
<b>Step 1</b>	On separate pieces of paper, write down all the things that you can think of that you might have to do before the event. Don't evaluate these – just gather ideas, e.g. 'Get permission from the principal', 'Book a room', or 'Put a notice in the bulletin'. Each idea will probably remind you of some other ideas that are needed before that one can happen, or as a follow-up.  Sort the action steps into order: Some tasks depend on others to have been completed, e.g. you can't do your publicity or sell tickets until you've decided on a date, time and venue for the event and have permission to run it.



<b>Step 2</b> 	<p>Spread these pieces of paper out on the table or the floor. Work out what comes before what, and what step could be happening at the same time as another step. Does doing one step depend on another step being completed? Add in any other action steps that now become obvious.</p> <p>This creates a timeline for your actions. When you have decided on this, write it down in order, e.g. in <b>template T9: Action Planner</b> (see Part 5), or stick your pieces of paper to a large sheet, and use this to check where you're up to.</p> <p><i>Allocate jobs:</i> There are lots of tasks to do so it's great to have a team of students for the different roles.</p>
<b>Step 3</b>	<p>For each action, decide who will do it. Write their name on the piece of paper. Also decide when it needs to be done by, and write that on the paper as well. Build some spare time into your timeline so that you don't end up doing everything at the last minute.</p>
<b>Put a summary of this into your action planner</b>	<p>You can also use this process to create a second timeline for the event itself – the <i>event plan</i>, starting with a welcome and finishing with a send-off. Use the same planning steps to write down the order in which things will happen, how much time is required, and who is responsible for different roles.</p>
<b>Resources</b>	<p>You need to think through all the physical, financial and human resources you will need for each step both in the planning and the event.</p> <p><i>Record what you need and where you will get these resources from.</i></p>

### Stage 3: Running the event

<b>The big day has arrived!</b>	<p>Make sure that everyone is feeling confident about their roles and that they know what they have to do and when. Everyone should have a copy of the event plan with times and responsibilities clearly marked.</p> <p>Make sure you have an overall event manager. This person acts as the communication point and can also make quick decisions about any changes that are needed in the schedule if things don't go as planned.</p> <p>Use your event plan to keep track of how you're going: Are you on time? Do you need to speed up? Does anyone need help? Don't forget to make time for cleaning and packing up at the end.</p>
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### Stage 4: After the event

<b>Clean and pack up</b>	<p>When the event finishes, make sure that you leave the space tidy – as you found it. This will ensure that your requests for future events are regarded positively. Your plan should include knowing who has responsibility for cleaning and packing up.</p>
<b>Evaluate</b>	<p>As soon after the event as possible – or if appropriate before the event formally finishes – you need to evaluate how it went – before people forget! As part of the event, seek feedback from the students and teachers who participated. Did they enjoy it? Do they have any ideas for improvement?</p> <p>Sit down with the organising group to debrief and swap your perspectives on what happened. What was achieved? Did we meet our goal? What were the overall impressions? Would we run the same event again? Ask for ideas on how the event could be even better. What have we learnt from this experience? What would we do differently next time?</p>
<b>Post-event follow-up and publicity</b>	<p>Follow up your event or action by publicising what you did. You might let students and staff members know about the outcomes of the event or action; you might share information in a school newsletter or website; you might write an article for the VicSRC. This helps to remind people that the SRC ran the event to meet an important student need and boosts the image of the SRC.</p>



## Checklist: the Ws

When you are planning your event or action, check that you have answers to the following questions:

- What?
- Why?
- Who for?
- When?
- Where?
- Who by?
- How?

## Using template T9: Action planner



This template is available in Part 5 of this kit and on the VicSRC website ([www.vicsrc.org.au](http://www.vicsrc.org.au)). It can be downloaded onto your SRC laptop and used in your SRC meetings.

Use this template to help you draw up your own action plan for organising events or responding to issues. This action planner follows on from template T8: **Tackling an issue: DIVAE planning**.



The action planner takes you through the steps you'll need to think about when you're organising anything – an event or a response to an issue. Before you start thinking about the steps involved, you'll need to think about what you want to achieve (*your goal*), *why* you're doing it, *who* the target audience is, likely *objections* and your *responses* to these.

Then you can think about all the steps that will be involved. Brainstorm these on separate pieces of paper, and sort them into order first. Use your action planner to record these steps.

Write in who is responsible for each step and a *timeline* for when they must be done.

Note what *resources* you need and who can help.

Finally, think about the *evidence* you'll need to *evaluate* how well your action plan worked, what was achieved and what you learnt.

## 3.8 Promoting the SRC

What do the students think of the SRC? What does the principal think? What messages are you sending them?

What others think about the SRC is important because it affects whether they will take you seriously and support what you are trying to achieve. If the student body and the principal think you are full of good ideas or persistent at getting what you want, they will take notice and support you.

This section contains some ideas about how you can promote your SRC to make it more effective.



You'll probably spend your first few months trying to understand the SRC from the inside. This is important – but you already bring a valuable viewpoint to the SRC. Remember what you thought of the SRC before you were a member – from the outside. Your view on this will be really valuable for advising the SRC on effective publicity. Publicity is about the SRC communicating its message to the rest of the school community. If you can maintain a fresh view from both perspectives, you'll be able to help shape that communication to maximise its effectiveness.



If you feel like your SRC isn't appreciated for everything that it does, or if you haven't been getting as many people to your events as you would like, this could be because you're not doing enough publicity or because your message is not getting through to your audience. You might need to check with students that are new to the SRC to get a fresh perspective on what students think of the SRC from the outside. You might need to look at the following ideas and rethink how you present the SRC to the school and community.

### Image



See **section 2.2: Finding common SRC purposes** for more information.

#### **What sort of image do you want the SRC to have?**

**Think about your key goals for the year.**

Do you want the SRC to be seen as being good at action? Fun? Listening and supporting? Whatever it is, come up with a few key words describing how you want to be seen. Use these to shape and inform all the publicity that you do – everything from posters to newsletter articles, to stunt advertisements.

You might have a recognisable SRC colour, a logo that you use on all SRC communication, or an SRC mascot. When people see any of these, they should immediately think of the SRC and what it does, so choose these images to carefully represent what you want to say about your SRC. If you don't already have a logo, you could design one that fits your image. You could commission a class to design a logo, or invite students to contribute to a competition.

This discussion could be with the whole SRC or start with just a small group who want to work on publicity and who then bring recommendations to the whole SRC for approval.

It's important that all SRC members work towards projecting the same image. If all your posters are about 'listening' and some SRC members don't make an effort to listen to students, then people won't believe your publicity and you will have a major credibility problem. Your publicity needs to be based on the truth.

## Practical ideas for promoting the SRC

### Appoint an individual or group

Once you've settled on an image, appoint a group or individual to be responsible for thinking about ways to promote the SRC. These should be students who have (or want to learn) skills in public communication.



#### See section 1.5: Who should be on an SRC?

If you have a group for this, appoint one student to coordinate the group and report back. This doesn't mean that they have to do all the work, but they have to lead the promotion group and the SRC in thinking about effective promotion methods.

### Tell others what you are doing

Make sure that the SRC reports to school meetings: assemblies, year level meetings, class meetings, roll calls, pastoral meetings, etc. This is the responsibility of all members of the SRC – to be an active, open and positive representative of the SRC, as well as a representative on the SRC.

### Recognise SRC members

Everyone in the school should know who the SRC representatives are. This could mean placing photos on a noticeboard, wearing special badges or holding a special induction ceremony. Certificates could be provided by the principal at the end of the year, recognising achievements.

### Note achievements

When the SRC achieves something, make sure that the role of the SRC is publicly noted. If, for example, the SRC successfully campaigns for improved toilet facilities, make sure that there's a notice in the toilets acknowledging the SRC's work.

### Publicise

Put up posters around the school about the SRC and the importance of its work. The SRC could run a competition for students to design this poster. If the school has a video-noticeboard, make sure that there are slides on it about the SRC. Develop an SRC website (see section 4.2) or an SRC section of the school's website. Have a regular SRC column in the school newsletter.

### Accessible members

Make it easy for all students to provide information and requests to the SRC. The best way to promote the SRC is to make sure that all its members are approachable, good at listening and focused on what they can do for the students who appointed them. The best promotion and publicity will occur when representatives meet with their home groups or class groups.



#### See section 3.3: Getting ideas and reporting back.



GOOD PRACTICE



When the toilets were painted, the SRC put a notice in the toilets publicising that this was the outcome of the SRC's work. They also wrote an article for the school newsletter about the process they went through and the importance of a healthy and safe toilet block.

## 3.9 Links to school decision-making

REMINDER: In this kit we refer to the relationship of the SRC with the school council, by which we mean the governing body of the school – whether it’s called a school council or a board of governors or a school board or some similar term.

If the SRC is to be effective and have influence throughout the school, it needs good links to the school’s decision-making people and structures. On a personal level, that means the SRC needs to have a supportive relationship with the school principal and other members of the school’s leadership team. But also, on an organisational level, the SRC needs to be connected to the school council, committees and working groups operating throughout the school.



*Older student representatives are involved in school council meetings and liaise with the leadership of the school in decision-making for the benefit and future of the school.*

P–9 College SRC



We talked in Part 1 about the ways that an SRC works: by doing, by asking, by sharing decisions and by raising awareness. See [section 1.2: What can SRCs do?](#)

The SRC needs to know who the appropriate people are to ask or the appropriate groups with whom to share decisions. This section will help you investigate the school’s decision-making processes and find out where to focus your requests and action.



At first, you might find it hard enough just to learn how the SRC works. However, the SRC can’t operate in isolation from the rest of the school. To understand the structures and decision-making processes of the whole school will take a bit of time, but doing so can make a big difference to the effectiveness of the SRC and to your effectiveness as an individual representative.



Do you find yourself arguing with people and getting frustrated that they keep saying no to the SRC’s ideas? Maybe you’re just confused about how the school’s decision-making operates? This section provides ideas on how to build a better relationship with other school leaders so that you can better understand their perspective and they can better understand yours.

In both cases, let’s start with who makes decisions in the school.

### Who are the decision-makers?



*Each year, our students select two proposed members for our school council. These representatives are then automatically members of the SRC. The SRC also proposes student representatives for appointment to the Buildings and Grounds, Curriculum, and Student Wellbeing subcommittees of the school council.*

Secondary College SRC

Decisions are sometimes made by *individuals*, but are more usually made by groups of people – often in **school committees**. Within these groups, some individuals will have more information and particular influence. Sometimes these groups can make a final decision, but they are often responsible to and advise a more senior group. For instance, a Buildings and Grounds Committee might be a **subcommittee** of the school council, and then can only make recommendations to the school council for a final decision. You need to understand how these groups relate to each other and where the power really lies.

The most senior group in the school is probably the school council. This group will be responsible for making the final decisions, but it might delegate some decisions to a person or to some other group. Who are the members of this council? Is the SRC represented on it? (If not, can it be?) How can the SRC present information and proposals to it? (When does it meet? Who organises the agenda for it?) Here, links with your school’s parent council or club will be valuable, as they are probably represented on the school council.

## Why is knowing this important?

Different people and groups in the school make all sorts of different decisions. If the SRC is to influence them, you need to know who to approach about a topic. You could waste time and effort if you are talking with people who aren't involved in decision-making in that area. And if you go to someone more senior (e.g. the principal), without consulting and discussing it with the people directly involved (going 'over their head'), they might not be receptive to your ideas.

Secondly, if you know what groups are working on a topic that the SRC is interested in, you might be able to get the SRC directly represented on that group – and take part in the final decision, rather than just asking others to act for what you want. Often these groups assume that students are not interested in their activities. Just establishing a relationship can create new opportunities by finding out what they are doing.

Thirdly, there might be groups in the school who can support the SRC in what it wants to achieve. For example, there could be several school bodies, like a parent council, association or club, or a Student Wellbeing Committee that you can approach to discuss your plans and ask for their support.

## Personal links

Members of the SRC should make sure that important members of the school know them well. Among these, make sure you report regularly to:

- the principal and the school daily organiser, who can help with rooms, timetables and supervision of activities
- the school business manager, who can help with financial matters, including SRC accounts
- the front office staff, who can provide access to mail, photocopying, greeting of visitors and you never know what else!

It will also be important to make sure that SRC members know active parents within the school, who might be on the parent council, association or club. And, of course, all SRC members should make sure that the teachers associated with their classes or home groups are fully informed of SRC activities.



GOOD PRACTICE



In one school, members of the SRC use an 'adopt a teacher' approach. Every SRC member is allocated one or more teachers to liaise with. After each meeting, the SRC members meet with their teachers to inform them about what happened and what actions are planned. This makes sure that there is good communication throughout the school – and 'no surprises'.

## Organisational links



The following training exercise – **Mapping the school** – will help you discover the organisational links in your school.

It's not just individuals who are important in making decisions in a school: different groups and committees exist – and these differ from school to school.

Do you know:

- Who makes the decisions in your school – individuals and groups?
- What bodies and committees exist? Who is on them?
- What do they make decisions about?
- Who else is involved in making these decisions?
- How do they link together?

An SRC should know the answers to these questions – or at least some of the answers. But your SRC might need to find out other answers before you start taking action.



## Mapping the school

This is an in-school ‘Students as researchers’ exercise that can be run with students of any age; the level of complexity can be adapted to the age range. It requires at least an hour; it may be better to run it in two sessions a week apart.

Finding out about who makes the decisions in your school can take some time but the process of mapping the school is a valuable one. You can use this training activity to help you do this. By spending some time doing this in detail, the SRC can work out how decisions are made in your school on topics that concern the SRC – and the SRC will be much more effective in knowing who to approach. This information should be kept by the SRC, so that you gradually form a large map about how overall decisions are made in the school.

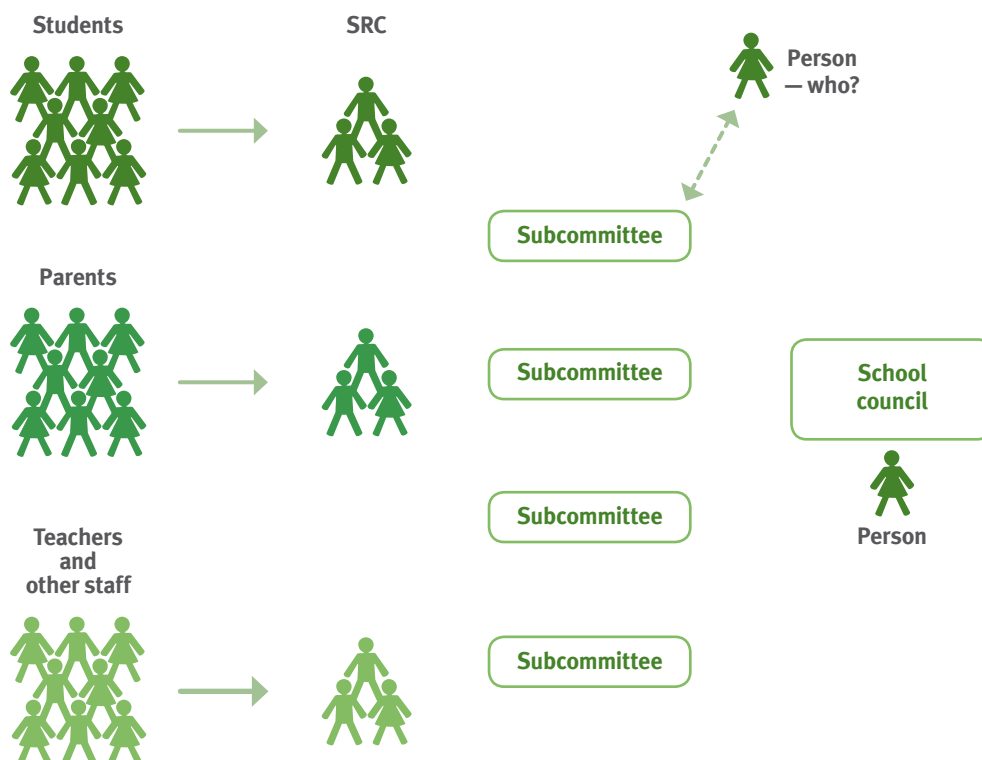
The aim of this activity is to draw up a ‘map’ of how decisions are made in a school by asking questions, such as:

- Who makes the decisions in our school  
- individuals and groups?
- What bodies and committees exist?
- Who is on them?
- What do they make decisions about?
- Who else is involved in making decisions?
- How do they link together?

Step	Action
1. <b>Brainstorm existing knowledge</b>	<p>Ask the group what they already know about who makes decisions in the school. Which individuals? What groups exist? What decisions do they make? Do the individuals report to and/or are responsible to others (e.g. other committees or individuals)?</p> <p>As students contribute information, map this onto a whiteboard, checking about details: ‘Who is on this committee?’, ‘What do they look at?’, ‘How often do they meet?’, and ‘Who do they report to?’</p> <p>This builds up a first map of what is known – a ‘box and arrows’ diagram (see figure 3.1).</p>
2. <b>Defining what we don’t know</b>	<p>Perhaps more importantly, your map also starts to define what is not known. It suggests questions like ‘Who would know what this group does?’ and ‘Who do we need to ask about this?’</p> <p>Ask students to look at the diagram and identify any gaps in knowledge about what bodies exist, meeting times, powers, etc. Mark these in a different colour or write these up on the map as research tasks.</p>
3. <b>Finding out from others</b>	<p>Then ask: ‘Who can help us fill in the gaps?’ Identify available ‘sources’ of information in the school that could provide information. Set up small volunteer research teams to undertake research tasks: a group of three members of the SRC might choose to interview the principal with some questions. Another group might volunteer to attend a canteen committee and find out who they are and what they do. (Someone might need to arrange for key people to be available at that time, so that the student research teams can go off and interview them and bring the information straight back. Or you could do this over a longer time period e.g. a week, and ask that the information be brought back and shared at the next session.)</p>
4. <b>Reporting back and improving the map</b>	<p>The research teams get together again and report what they found. This might mean they correct, clarify or add to the map: what a person or committee makes decisions about, who is on the committee, when they meet, and who they report to. Keep going until all are reasonably happy that your map represents how decisions are made in the school.</p>

Step	Action
5. <b>Examining the map – how does it help us?</b>	Look at the map and ask questions: ‘Where are students already represented?’ and ‘Where should they be?’ Also think about a particular topic and ask ‘Who do we go and see about this issue?’
6. <b>Sharing the map</b>	Discuss how you could <b>share</b> this information with other students, so that everyone knows who to approach, when to see them, and how to do it, in order to get things done. You might even be able to share it with supportive groups, like the parent council, association or club, who might not know about things like timetabling processes. This could be done by making your map public on a noticeboard, or including a summary of it in the school diary.

Figure 3.1:  
Example of a school decision-making map



## 3.10 Links to the wider school community

Ever think you could use more support? Ever feel that, as a small group of students, you are taking on really big issues? This section will help you think about other groups in your community that you are linked to or you could join.



As you start your journey with the SRC, making links with the wider school community might not be your first priority. However, read this section quickly to get a general understanding of what community groups are out there and how they might be able to help. Then, if an opportunity arises, you will be prepared to take advantage of it.



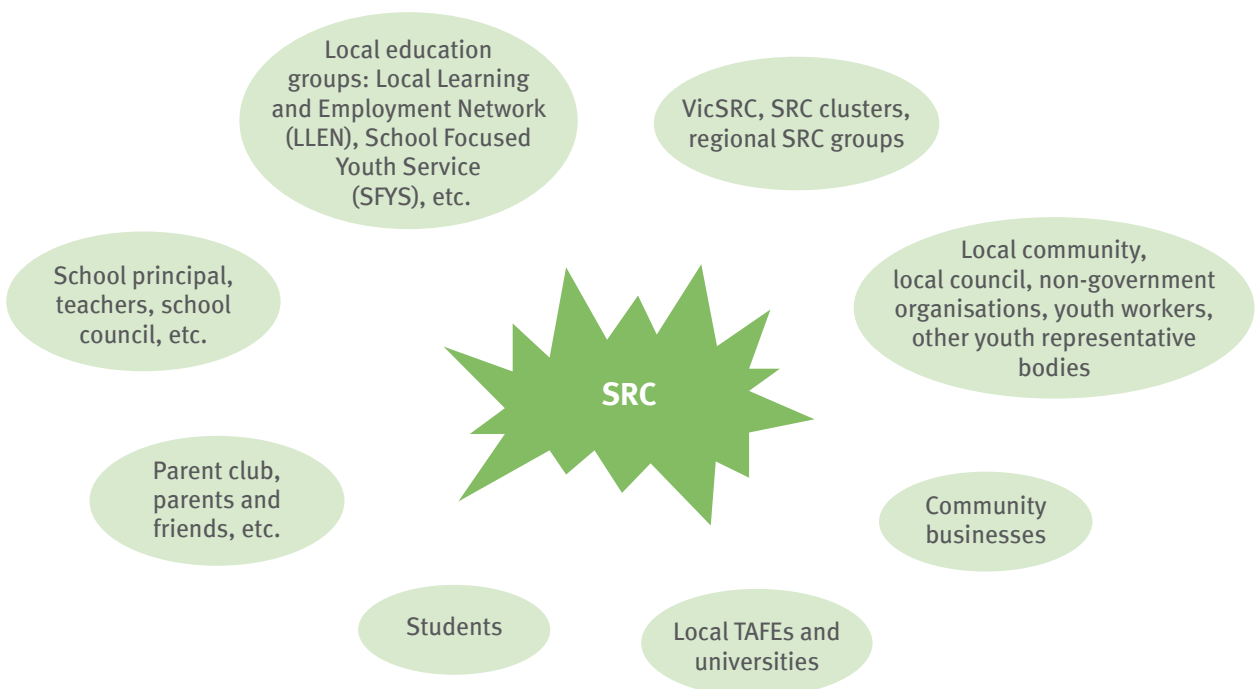
Do students raise issues with the SRC that are 'outside the school'? These bigger issues might be very important to them, and also have implications for their lives within the school. The SRC can do something to address these issues, but it might need your help to investigate and act on them.

*In both cases, here's how you might start, by looking at what groups and links exist.*



In the last section we looked at how you can be working with other groups within the school. But students' issues don't stop at the school gate; SRCs often consider issues that the school can't address on its own. Thankfully, there are many groups who work with schools who might be able to help you. In fact, as the following diagram shows, the SRC has a responsibility to communicate with a wide range of groups on behalf of students:

Figure 3.2:  
SRC's links to the wider school community



All of the groups shown in Figure 3.2 can help the SRC achieve its aims:

- Community or local government organisations can provide training to the SRC.
- Organisations and businesses can sponsor SRC activities.
- Local government or other organisations can provide space for SRC meetings and training outside the school.
- Many community organisations run education programs that are similar to the issues being discussed in your SRC; you might be able to get them to help you with your shared agendas.
- Local education groups such as the Local Learning and Employment Networks (LLENs) and School Focused Youth Services (SFYS) can provide support and sometimes funding – they are also very interested to hear from SRCs and groups of SRCs that can advise them about students’ needs.
- Individual parents and their clubs and organisations can assist with resources, supervision at training camps, transport and activities within the school.

When communicating with all of these groups, remember that they each have their own agenda – even the VicSRC. This is natural, but be upfront and ask ‘What do you want to achieve?’, ‘How can our SRC help you with this?’ and ‘How can you support what the SRC is doing?’. Work out which groups have similar aims to you and work with them. Some of these groups (like the VicSRC) have a specific agenda about listening to students. This is an opportunity for you to shape community attitudes or even government policy.



**Check section 4.1 for more ideas on resourcing the SRC and section 4.6 for information about the VicSRC.**

## Links with other SRCs

The SRC can also be linked with other student organisations, both locally through SRC clusters or regional groups (including Regional SRC Conferences), and statewide through the VicSRC.

*The VicSRC has a Cluster Kit available online with more information about how your SRC can take part in or set up a local cluster of SRCs (see [www.vicsrc.org.au](http://www.vicsrc.org.au)).* An SRC cluster is simply a local network – a group of students from secondary school SRCs who meet regularly to share information, to discuss common concerns and issues, to plan joint initiatives and to share resources. Clusters can be any size, though it’s suggested that at least three schools need to be represented for a cluster to exist. Clusters should also meet regularly – it’s suggested that at least once a term is useful, though this will depend on their location, purposes and the needs of its members.

Clusters are normally geographically based; that is, they are drawn from schools in the same area, where there are fairly easy travel possibilities. There are other possibilities, e.g. clusters can be linked by a common interest or characteristic; however, the shared nature of the cluster should be one that enables the SRCs to meet regularly.

## Why is this important?

Clusters provide important opportunities for students and their SRCs to meet and share information and support. Students have identified the need to network between SRCs and the VicSRC is establishing and supporting a cluster structure to enable this to happen. Clusters can feed directly into the VicSRC's decision-making processes through development of proposals to the **VicSRC Congress**, and reports to the **VicSRC Executive**.

Clusters exist so that SRCs can:

### Learn together

- get ideas from each other
- support each other
- reflect together on their processes, successes and difficulties
- learn how to improve their operations
- develop skills in organisation, leadership and training
- develop efficient training.

### Work together:

- gain information about other schools and about wider education policies
- learn about possibilities for student initiatives
- influence policy beyond individual schools
- enter into local partnerships in education decision-making
- provide student representation and voice on local networks, e.g. local councils, LLENs, etc.
- share resources
- enjoy the challenges and experiences ... and have fun!



## GOOD PRACTICE

Members of SRCs in one area of Melbourne meet at least once a term for an afternoon as an SRC cluster. They use this time to tell each other what they have been working on, swap ideas and sometimes have planned joint activities between SRCs.

In a regional centre of Victoria, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development was developing a plan for coordinated education provision across the town: a mix of junior and senior secondary schools. The SRCs formed a local cluster so that they could hear about these plans, discuss them and give student input. They invited the regional director and consultants to attend to tell them what was happening and to hear students' responses.

In a country area of Victoria, the SRCs found it harder to meet face to face because of the distances involved. After attending a regional SRC conference, they set up a network of SRCs who communicate with each other using the internet and video conferencing.