

# Tech Girls are Superheroes

## Business Plan



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## Executive Summary

*“Children’s participation is more than just asking them for their ideas and views. It’s about listening to them, taking them seriously and turning their ideas and suggestions into reality. It is also about providing them with the ability to influence some of the things that affect them and at the same time helping adults understand children’s issues through their lens.”* (Aileen Ashford, Commissioner for Children Tasmania)

Australia is full of problems. Sure, adults are attempting to fix them all the time by debating, voting and making policies. But just think about it, do kids under 18 have a say? *Kids Speak Out* is focused on doing exactly that, giving kids a say and helping to fix problems that concern us.

Our app will do that by:

- helping kids to share and discuss ideas with each other (in the *Chat Box*)
- compiling these ideas (e.g. summaries and surveys)
- sending information to government and other groups.

The program will:

- help kids to develop ideas and skills in public policy
- help non-government and government organisations to understand what kids think
- lead to more kid-friendly policies.

Our strategy is to:

- submit this business plan and the prototype app to the *Tech Girls Are Superheroes*
- win the competition, and present the ideas to government and non-government organisations for further app development
- scale-out and use.

The business model is summarised in Figure 1 below.

## Background and problem

Children are the subject of a lot of public and policy discussions. There is a lot of talk about “future generations” and “what about the children?” in areas such as the environment, education, health, immigration, children’s rights, voting and planning.

Yet kids have little input in the discussions. It is assumed that we can’t understand or have good ideas, and that our parents and teachers can be our voices. Some teachers and families talk about social issues with children, but there isn’t much chance for kids to talk with each other (especially over long distances or different backgrounds) or to express views with leaders.

It is increasingly understood that children should participate in decision-making. After being neglected for many years, children now have human rights to express views and to be heard (UNICEF, 2014). Kids **can** have good ideas, **can** give a different perspective to adults and **want** to be involved. There are many examples where real participation of children has improved decisions. In addition, if children are given a chance, then we will develop skills and take more responsibility for our ideas (Lansdown, 2001).

These ideas are now being taken up by the Australian Government, all State Governments and by many children’s organisations (see the reference list in The Commissioner for Children Tasmania). There is a high demand for ways to increase children’s participation.

Initiatives currently being conducted include:

- Workshops and meetings (Unite Participation, 2008)
- Consultations (peer-to-peer, facilitated, classroom), youth journalists / bloggers, panel and surveys (NSW Advocate of Youth and Young People)
- Online submissions of ideas to government (Australian Childhood Foundation)
- Youth Parliaments (e.g. state YMCAs and Funky Dragon) although usually for older children
- Forums to make environmental submissions and blogs (Greenpeace)

While these initiatives are excellent, we have not been able to find initiatives that use computer apps to increase discussion and participation amongst kids.

## Product (and solution)

Recent developments in computerised and interactive technology (apps) provides new opportunities that don’t seem to have been taken up yet. In particular, apps provide an efficient and progressive way to collect and disseminate information in a form that kids relate to, and can be expected to take up more and more into the future.

The app under development by “Kids Speak Out” will work in the following way:

- The app is divided up into broad policy areas (e.g. the environment, health etc.)
- Within each of these areas, children or other stakeholders can raise particular policy problems or questions (“Add Problem”), for example “Should dredging be allowed on the Barrier reef?”

- Other users can see these questions or problems. This facilitates discussion between children from a wide range of backgrounds, locations and viewpoints.
- Some brief facts or resources about the issue may be provided under the areas of questions.
- Children that have access to “Kids Speak Out” can then provide input on that question (“Add solution”)
  - Through comments and interactive discussions
  - Through “likes” or other responses
  - In some cases, surveys could be added
- Basic descriptors on the user will be attached to the user – including postcode, age, and gender. No data will be collected to identify users.
- This data can then be filtered by the descriptors or key words defined by users (see below). Programs can be used to summarise survey data or quantitative data (such as Vivo). It is important that outputs are easily interpreted by users.

The current prototype app is programmed in “App inventor” and only accessible on Android phone devices. But in the scale out and commercialisation phases, the most effective programs and devices will be used.

## Funding and market

We do not aim to make a profit from the venture – it is not-for-profit. However, a great deal of funding and technical support will be required for:

- developing the scheme and consulting with stakeholders
- app development and programming
- Training
- dissemination and outreach
- program maintenance and administration.

It is difficult to see how these costs can be covered from kids – who may not be able to pay for the app on a widespread basis. However, the product has benefits for many stakeholders in society – children (and the education system), government (that receive better information) and the organisations in the middle (advocacy and interest groups). As outlined above, there is strong interest from many groups in increasing children’s participation and improving ways for them to do that.

These organisation have access to public, private and member funding. They will be asked to contribute to resourcing of the project. In addition, many groups will be interested in the data, which they could access on a user-pays basis. Armed with recognition from “Tech girls”, a prototype app and this business plan, we plan to approach these groups to check interest and opportunities. Figure 1 shows the model that could be used, but will probably change depending on responses.

When we do this, assistance will be required from “Tech Girls”, teachers and parents and possibly experts in the field. However, it is important that the product is designed by and for

kids and is not taken over by interest groups, government and adults. Measures will also have to be taken so that children’s privacy and safety is assured.

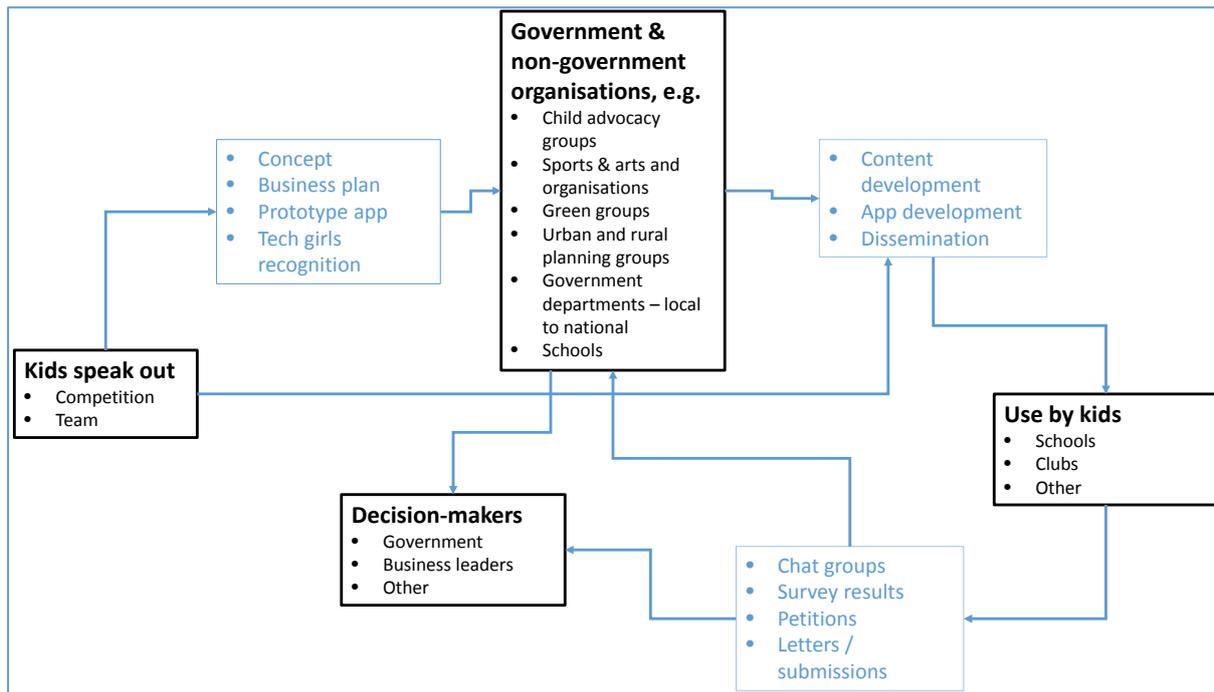


Figure 1. Kids Speak Out business plan. Black boxes are stakeholders and blue boxes are activities

## Summary

There is high demand for ways to increase children’s participation in decision-making and for kids to share ideas over distances or circumstances. Some ways to do this have emerged, but not yet through app technology, which provides a new and exciting opportunity. This will no doubt happen in the future as the system and kids become tech-savvy, but “Tech Girls are Super Heroes” and “Kids Speak Out” provides an opportunity to do it now, from a kids’ perspective and initiative. The general business plan seems feasible but, like any “big idea”, there is a lot of work to do and details to work out. Winning the “Tech Girls are Super Heroes” will be a big step in this direction.

## References and resources

New South Wales government Advocate of Youth and Young People.

<http://www.acyp.nsw.gov.au/engage>

Australian Childhood Foundation <http://www.childhood.org.au/take-action/ificouldvote>

Greenpeace. Kids party <http://www.greenpeace.org.au/kidsparty/> and Kids Care blog <https://www.greenpeace.org.au/blog/kids-care-dear-greenpeace/>

Lansdown, G. (2001), ‘Promoting Children’s Participation in Democratic Decision Making’. UNICEF, Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, Italy. <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/insight6.pdf>

Queensland government Framework for the participation of children and young people in decision-making. <https://www.communities.qld.gov.au/childsafety/child-safety-practice->

[manual/introduction/framework-for-the-participation-of-children-and-young-people-in-decision-making](#)

The Commissioner for Children Tasmania (? date) Involving Children in Decision Making: A Quick, Practical Guide. <http://www.childcomm.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Guide-to-making-decisions-booklet.pdf>

The Children & Young People's Assembly for Wales (2012). 'Funky Dragon Guide to participation'. Wales, United Kingdom. <http://www.funkydragon.org/en/> and <http://www.funkydragon.org/en/history/archive/campaigns/case-funky-dragon/>

UNICEF (2014) Rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund. <http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Participation.pdf>

Unite Participation (2008) Essentials: tried and tested, creative participation activities. <https://czone.eastsussex.gov.uk/supportingchildren/youth/youthparticipation/toolkits/Documents/Czone%20Essentials%20Participation.pdf>

YMCA youth parliaments. <https://ymca.org.au/what-we-do/Pages/Youth-Services.aspx> and <http://www.ymcaqyp.org/>