

## Changing the Landscape: Involving Youth in Social Change





# Guidebook

## Changing the Landscape: Involving Youth in Social Change



## **THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR CHILD RIGHTS AND DEVELOPMENT**

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“Another world is not only possible, she is on her way.  
On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.”

— ARUNDHATI ROY

The McConnell Foundation believes that engaging young people in local decision-making is critical: it develops and draws upon their knowledge, skills and values, and in doing so, serves to enrich democracy in our communities.

YouthScape tested models for engaging marginalized young people in several communities. It created space for young people to initiate local projects and to learn more about how their community works. In each community a handful of projects forged new relationships with unlikely allies that have led to durable changes in behaviour, policy and perception.

One of the significant lessons from YouthScape is that the real challenge in creating space for youth participation is to engage adult-led organizations in looking closely at their values, structures, and policies. Inclusion is not just about welcoming “strangers” into our midst on our terms; it is about appreciating the qualities, skills and values each person possesses. It is about belonging and contributing, to be fully a citizen with rights and obligations.

In an experimental initiative like YouthScape, learning from our collective experience and sharing these lessons across communities became a priority. In this respect, the International Institute for Child Rights and Development and the developmental evaluation team built strong common spaces for people to test out ideas, to challenge each other, to capture stories and to celebrate.

The YouthScape team has produced a series of reflections and resources to inform and inspire other communities about our experience. The YouthScape Guidebook could be very useful for community organizations, municipalities and funders which are seeking ways of creating space for young people to develop their own skills and to build more resilient communities.

— JOHN CAWLEY, SENIOR PROGRAM OFFICER, THE J. W. MCCONNELL FAMILY FOUNDATION



Inclusion is about  
belonging and contributing,  
to become a full citizen  
with rights and obligations.

preface

# acknowledgments

This “Guidebook” is a collection of the experiences gained over four years across several Canadian sites in an initiative entitled YouthScape. The International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD) at the University of Victoria, British Columbia worked in partnership with HeartWood Center for Community Youth Development in Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM); Boscoville 2000 in Rivière des Prairies (Quebec); United Way Thunder Bay; Child and Youth Friendly Calgary; and YouthCore in Victoria; as well as Communities for Children in Saskatoon, and Youth Engagement & Action in Hamilton, to create more resilient communities through the engagement of young people.

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Finally, we would like to thank all the young people and their adult supporters who participated in YouthScape for their energy, enthusiasm and critical reflections. Without their experience and insights, this guidebook would lack the practicality and authenticity it now embraces.



# Imagine...

Imagine a world where each and every citizen has a say, where young people and adults work together to create organizations, services and programs that meet the needs and perspectives of everyone they serve.

Young people are major stakeholders in society. They have ideas, strengths and vitality that come from their diverse experiences. Unfortunately, young people's voices have often been absent from community-building. This has deepened miscommunication across generations, contributed to exclusion, and weakened the social fabric of communities. Given a chance, young people can contribute to improving their own well-being and that of their communities.

This guidebook shares the knowledge we gained from a four-year initiative called YouthScape – community based, youth paced. YouthScape brought together the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation (JWM), the United Way of Calgary and Area, the International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD) and several communities across Canada, including Halifax Regional Municipality, Rivière des Prairies, Thunder Bay, Hamilton, Saskatoon, Calgary and Victoria, to create stronger more resilient communities by involving unengaged youth.

This social change initiative emphasized the importance of linking different sectors of the community and allowing them to experiment with models and strategies to engage young people with diverse lived experiences.

Five overarching lessons included:

- Youth engagement is a critical component of community development
- Sustained involvement of all citizens requires tangible action, and a vision for long-term impact
- Youth-focused engagement tools and ideas appeal to many age groups, and work across generations
- Youth are allies for adults, as much as adults are allies and supports for youth
- Engaging marginalized young people requires relationship-building

Through case studies, stories, activities, real life lessons and practical recommendations, this guidebook offers insights and tools to bring youth engagement to life in organizations and communities. Whether you are experienced in youth engagement or are just beginning to think about how to involve young people, this guidebook will help you design or refine your practice.

The following guide will be a valuable tool for:

- Practitioners doing front-line work with youth
- Managers of organizations or local officials wanting to engage youth
- Youth leaders seeking new approaches and ideas



*“I felt like I really mattered.  
I finally realized the project was  
for real...I felt I was growing up,  
was finally doing something con-  
structive, and had become  
a responsible adult.”*

—YOUTHSCAPE GRANTEE

## Our Knowledge Pool

YouthScape was initiated by the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation in 2006. Its overall goal was to increase the resiliency of communities by including young people, particularly unengaged and marginalized youth, in the process of planning and implementing community development initiatives.

Envisioned as a multi-sectoral initiative, its aim was to bring about social change. We intended the impact of this initiative to be broader and longer-lasting than singular youth engagement projects that have largely characterized the youth engagement field in Canada and around the world.

YouthScape’s aim was to:

- Create more opportunities for young people to participate in and shape the development of their communities
- Expand the number of Canadian communities actively pursuing comprehensive initiatives with a focus on youth engagement
- Link communities in a process of collaborative learning
- Test and assess the efficacy of a variety of approaches to comprehensive community initiatives and youth engagement
- Distil and document lessons learned from the initiative to share and positively influence attitudes and policies that affect young people

Each YouthScape community began their journey from a different place, and used different tools and approaches to create new partnerships and engage unengaged young people. For example:

**HALIFAX REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY** focused on strengthening the youth service sector.

**RIVIÈRE DES PRAIRIES** focused on mobilizing key actors in the community as well as engaging youth to participate in the decisions that regard them.

**THUNDER BAY** focused on creating community with Aboriginal young people.

**CALGARY** focused on strengthening community and intergenerational relationships in the context of an economic boom.

**VICTORIA** focused on asset-mapping and connecting service-providers.

**SASKATOON** focused on establishing bridges between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, with a focus on social entrepreneurship.

# Five Steps to Changing the Landscape

1.0

## Understanding the Value of Youth Engagement

Learn about the multiple benefits of youth engagement, especially for marginalized young people, and understand the value of working from principles that recognize youth as agents of change.

2.0

## Preparing A Strong Foundation

Understand the importance of preparing an environment that supports youth engagement and learn effective ways to assess organizational readiness, make a plan and establish a management structure.

3.0

## Taking Effective Action

Discover how to implement YouthScape's five engagement strategies: youth-led granting, hiring youth staff, infusing youth in decision-making, creating youth-friendly spaces and working in partnership.

4.0

## Nurturing Relationships

Find out how to support and sustain youth engagement, and learn about practices that can help youth and adults work together, build trust and establish allies.

5.0

## Measuring Impact

Learn key strategies to reflect and document the impact of your efforts to involve young people in meaningful social change including tools for tracking change, and leveraging and sustaining impact.



YouthScape is based on the idea that all young people can make important contributions to their communities that result in more inclusive, adaptable, healthy, diverse, protective, collaborative spaces and places for all members of society.



# 1.0

## Understanding the Value of Youth Engagement

This chapter outlines why it is important to involve youth in social change and presents key principles to guide your work so that youth involvement can become a reflex in your organization and community. There are five issues involved:

- 1.1 The positive impact of involving young people
- 1.2 Working with unengaged/marginalized young people
- 1.3 Identifying supportive laws, policies and strategies
- 1.4 Establishing principles for your work
- 1.5 Recognizing young people as agents of social change

engage





YouthScape allowed adults and organizations to see new possibilities and take steps to involve and engage young people. It also let young people come to the table to work together, overcoming:

- Bad experiences with organizations or adults in power
- Mistrust
- Transience and lack of community support
- A primary focus on survival

*“B-boying is an outlet for all my energy...I have ADD...I was always hyper and could not pay attention... Break-dancing is really good for that...it gives you a certain confidence...after a dance class I hold my head high because I did my best and created my own.”*  
—YOUTHSCAPE GRANTEE HRM

# The Positive Impact of Involving Young People

Youth engagement brings multiple benefits, not only for individual young people, but for the community as a whole.<sup>1</sup> In YouthScape, we saw impacts of youth engagement within individuals, communities, organizations and across society, including:

## ENHANCING INDIVIDUAL YOUNG PEOPLE’S SKILLS AND SELF ESTEEM

- Becoming involved with issues that personally affect them
- Contributing to solving a community issue
- Building problem-solving and social abilities
- Learning how to adapt to different situations or contexts

## HELPING COMMUNITIES SOLVE PROBLEMS AND CELEBRATE STRENGTHS

- Building citizenship and leadership skills
- Building capacity for community renewal
- Improving relations between generations
- Decreasing crime
- Building on passions and energy for action
- Increasing community spirit and vibrancy

## PROVIDING ORGANIZATIONS WITH SKILLS AND CAPACITY, SO THEY CAN BETTER RESPOND TO GROWING DIVERSITY IN THEIR COMMUNITY AND CITY

- Increasing street credibility
- Strengthening capacity to run programs that respond to client needs
- Enabling and supporting diverse perspectives and needs
- Increasing organizational vitality by focusing on vision, values and relationships
- Building leadership to strengthen succession

<sup>1</sup> For information on the benefits of child participation see Lansdown, G. (2005). Promoting Children’s Participation in Decision-making, Italy: Innocenti

## IMPROVING POLICY EFFECTIVENESS

- Helping policy makers better understand the lived realities of young people, marginalized and otherwise
- Bringing diverse perspectives together and sharing knowledge and understanding
- Providing data that responds to the nuanced needs of distinct and challenged communities

The broad impact of youth engagement, from improved individual self-esteem to better policy development, shows the importance of youth engagement, even if, as with YouthScape, these benefits may be realized to different degrees.

# Working with Unengaged or ‘Marginalized’ Young People

To fully benefit from the positive impacts of youth engagement, it is critical to work with young people from diverse backgrounds and experiences.

Although young people from all backgrounds can become unengaged, young people from privileged backgrounds are often more engaged in their communities. This is important to note as their perspective can be limited and they cannot necessarily speak for those in more challenging situations.

Experiences of poverty, racism, homelessness, unemployment, under-education, addiction, abuse, different countries of origin, and gender preference have a profound impact on young lives. They can make it difficult for young people to engage in organizations and communities unless they have appropriate support.

In YouthScape, we intentionally focused our efforts on these more ‘marginalized’ young people, often referred to as ‘at-risk’ youth. We learned several lessons from working with ‘at-risk’ youth<sup>2</sup>: ‘Marginalization’ is a loaded term, but it can be useful to describe inequalities and systemic power differences. We discovered that:

- Experiences of ‘marginalization’ vary tremendously
- It is important to acknowledge differences
- Experiences with ‘marginalization’ often leave people hurt and resentful
- Engaging ‘marginalized’ youth requires ongoing commitment

While supporting young people who are healing can be challenging and somewhat frustrating, we cannot reap the full benefits of their engagement without this support.

Some communities in YouthScape avoided using the word ‘marginalized’ finding it was offensive, and disregarded the strength of young people.

Others found it useful to bring attention to the diversity of young people’s lives and the fact that many experienced exclusion.

Engage your community in this discussion!

An organizational reflex moves the involvement of young people from an afterthought to an automatic response.

<sup>2</sup> Blanchet-Cohen, N & Salazar, J. (2010). Empowering practices for engaging marginalized youth. *Relational Child and Youth Care Practice*. 22:4, 5-19.

# 1.3

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the most widely ratified international human rights instrument in history.

It sets out minimum legal and ethical standards as well as aspirations for all state parties with respect to the rights of children and youth 0-18.

It can be used by citizens and organizations to support programming and funding requests.



## Identifying Supportive Laws, Policies and Strategies

Across Canada and around the world, the number of formal and informal structures that support the participation of young people is growing. The following are some areas where change is taking place.

### MUNICIPALITIES

Many programs and services that affect young people's lives directly, such as recreation, libraries, and transportation, are under municipal jurisdiction. It is important to find out how existing local laws and practices mandate and support young people's participation. Some municipalities are:

- Becoming more child and youth friendly <sup>3</sup>
- Developing youth engagement strategies <sup>4</sup>
- Establishing youth councils

### THE PRIVATE SECTOR

The private sector plays a large role in communities, and its influence on young people is increasing. Identifying positive youth engagement policies and practices in place in your community can help support your agenda. Some promising practices include:

- Internship placements
- Funding opportunities
- Youth-friendly work policies

### PROVINCIALY

Important areas in young people's lives such as education and health are under provincial jurisdiction. Structures that support youth participation include:

- Child and youth advocates <sup>5</sup>
- Provincial youth policies and strategies to engage youth on specific issues like education and community policing
- Youth secretariats <sup>6</sup>



## FEDERALLY

Several areas under federal jurisdiction affect young people's lives including issues pertaining to First Nations, Inuit and Métis rights, as well as the criminal code. While there is currently no federal commissioner for child rights, there are mechanisms that support youth engagement, such as:

- Youth secretariats for First Nations, Inuit and Métis
- Senators who act as spokespeople for children and youth
- A criminal code that facilitates testimony by young people

## INTERNATIONALLY

Several international documents support child participation. Many of these documents also include an accountability mechanism that requires signatory states to report on the status of their implementation. The following are key documents that support the right of children and youth to participate:

- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) establishes minimum standards for the well being of children and youth, including several articles on the right to participate and a general comment on The Right of the Child to be Heard. It stands as the most ratified international treaty worldwide. As a signatory, Canada reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child every five years <sup>7</sup>
- The Declaration of Human Rights compels State Parties to respect the rights of all peoples, irrespective of age and origin <sup>8</sup>
- The Millennium Development Goals set a global standard to be reached by 2015 for all children <sup>9</sup>
- Agenda 21 calls for the involvement of young people in the protection of the environment <sup>10</sup>

As support for young people's engagement increases, it will be helpful for you to familiarize yourself with relevant laws, policies and strategies, so you can leverage support for your work.

<sup>3</sup> In Quebec, Carrefour Action Municipale du Quebec promotes Child Youth Friendly Cities at a municipal level, with numerous cities having joined:

» [www.carrefourmunicipal.qc.ca/m\\_ae-municipalite-amie-des-enfants/definition-mae](http://www.carrefourmunicipal.qc.ca/m_ae-municipalite-amie-des-enfants/definition-mae)

<sup>4</sup> For some examples see Halifax: » [www.halifax.ca/districts/dist16/](http://www.halifax.ca/districts/dist16/).html, and

Vancouver: » [www.vancouveryouth.ca/who\\_we\\_are/civic\\_youth\\_strategy](http://www.vancouveryouth.ca/who_we_are/civic_youth_strategy)

<sup>5</sup> Most provinces/territories have child and youth advocates. While their mandates vary most have an independence from government with an authority to represent the rights, interests and viewpoints of children and youth entitled to receive services and access programs.

<sup>6</sup> Youth secretariats are government departments established to support youth and youth serving organizations. For the mandate and programs of the youth secretariat in Nova Scotia: » [www.gov.ns.ca/coms/families/youthsecretariat/](http://www.gov.ns.ca/coms/families/youthsecretariat/)

<sup>7</sup> For a full copy of the Convention and related documents, see the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights website: » [www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/index.htm](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/index.htm)

<sup>8</sup> See » [www.un.org/en/documents/udhr](http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr)

<sup>9</sup> See » [www.un.org/millenniumgoals/](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/)

<sup>10</sup> See » [www.gdrc.org/ngo/agenda21/ch-25.html](http://www.gdrc.org/ngo/agenda21/ch-25.html)

The CRC's four guiding principles are important to consider when designing engagement strategies and programs. They include:

### 1. Non discrimination

All rights apply to all children without exception

### 2. Best Interests of the Child

The best interest of the child must be the primary consideration in making a decision about a child

### 3. Life, Survival and Development

Recognizes and supports the holistic needs and rights of the child

### 4. Participation

The child should have the right to express his or her views and have them taken seriously when decisions are being made including administrative and legal proceedings, with the weight of their opinion varying depending on age, maturity and capacity

# 1.4

CRC Articles that may be relevant:

Article 3: the right to have their best interests be central in all decisions affecting them

Article 5: parental provision of direction and guidance in accordance with respect for children's evolving capacity

Article 12: the right to express views freely in matters that affect them

Article 13: the right to freedom of expression

Article 14: the right to freedom of conscience, thought and religion

Article 15: the right to freedom of association

Article 16: the right to privacy

## Identifying Principles for Your Work

Practitioners and organizations trying to support youth engagement cannot use cookie-cutter methods or tools.

In YouthScope, we found that focusing on foundational principles was critical. They guided us as we created values and developed decision-making practices, becoming our Guideposts. These were reference points, helping adults and young people, practitioners, organizations and community members see whether they were on the right track.

The YouthScope Guideposts are presented below to inspire your own processes.

### RECOGNIZE YOUNG PEOPLE AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

Young people are already actively shaping their own lives, and the life of their communities. Recognizing this can help you harness the potential and energy of youth to enable positive change.

### START FROM STRENGTHS

Begin by identifying existing skills, gifts and opportunities of individuals, peers, families and communities. Adopting an appreciative attitude opens doors to new possibilities, empowers young people and their communities and makes training and capacity building more effective.

### VALUE DIVERSITY

Strength and health come from diversity. Intentionally involving young people with varied life experiences, in particular those who have been discriminated against or who have chosen not to engage, enables stronger, more relevant solutions. Embracing differences is key to creating long term change.

### LEARN BY DOING

Young people have a lot of energy and a passion to act 'now'. Finding ways for them to become actively engaged early on keeps them interested and produces immediate results. Learning by doing creates capacity for positive action that will



remain with young people for life.

### SHARE THE LEARNING

Creating a support network or learning community is critical to ensuring that youth engagement becomes an integral part of programs and organizational culture. It allows young people and adults with a common vision or goal to share triumphs and tribulations, to exchange ideas, articulate the lessons they have learned, and hold each other accountable to a larger vision. Shared knowledge helps everyone grow.

### WORK IN PARTNERSHIP

To maximize the potential for long-term change, it helps to work with individuals and organizations from different sectors, ages and skill sets. Think about how each partner individual, organization or sector can contribute, and about how Each initiative you undertake will have its own characteristics and its own unique Guideposts. In YouthScape, our Guideposts evolved over time, beginning with principles drawn by a review of best practices by the J. W. McConnell Family Foundation, which we tailored and refined as the project unfolded. Checking in with your Guideposts can build ownership, and support the collective to embed principles and values into their practice.

## Recognizing Young People as Agents of Social Change

Central to youth engagement is the fact that young people are agents of change across all the different spheres or environments that impact their lives. As well as being shaped by the people and places around them, young people also act to shape their surroundings.

Figure 1 is an adaptation of IICRD's Child Rights Ecology. It shows youth at the center surrounded first by peers and family, then by community and other young people, the private sector and academia. Finally, the young person is surrounded by municipal, provincial and national governments. Key principles of children's rights remind us of the presence and interconnectedness of human rights.

In YouthScape, we used this framework to:

- Identify partnerships that could be created or strengthened
- Create strategies to increase the potential of young people
- Map the impacts of projects and interventions

We asked ourselves how we could harness the potential of youth to help build the resilience of communities.



Figure 1: Working in Partnership to Influence Social Change



2.0



# 2.0

## 2.0 Preparing a Strong Foundation

Here you will find guidelines to help you prepare to engage young people in social change initiatives. Knowing that youth have the ability to enrich people's lives, places, and services is important, but it is also vital to take concrete steps to engage them in creating that change.

The basic steps you will need to take to create the foundation of your work are similar for all organizations or practitioners, regardless of individual strengths and skills.

Based on our YouthScape experience, the three key steps to prepare a strong foundation for youth engagement are:

- 2.1 Assessing organizational readiness
- 2.2 Making a plan
- 2.3 Establishing a management structure



# 2.1

It is important to draw on strengths, but it is also important to realize that engaging unengaged youth is a slow process.

There is a constant struggle to understand young people's reality and there are many barriers to overcome. Tangible results may be slow at first.

Be realistic and measure success in small accomplishments.

## Assessing Organizational Readiness

Begin by determining your organization's operating principles and level of readiness. If you are a large organization, this starting point may be different than if you are a small organization.

### CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING READINESS QUESTIONS YOUTHSCAPE USED

- Do the leaders of your program or organization understand the need for participatory processes and big picture thinking, and do they have experience working with different organizations and sectors?
- Are your decision makers willing to support the learning and risk associated with youth engagement, and to adapt the structure of the organization to accommodate new ways of doing things?
- Is your organizational culture healthy? Are the executive director and board supportive? Are there mechanisms for change?
- Does your organization have credibility in the community and with other organizations?
- Do you have the resources you need to carry you through the time required for change to occur?
- Is there a history of youth involvement in your organizational decision-making?
- What are your organization's dominant cultural beliefs about young people? Are your values and practices in line with youth engagement principles or guideposts, such as an openness to respect diversity, learning, and partnerships?

The answers to these questions will not tell you whether or not to act on an initiative, but will help you better understand the scope of your work, and the kind of challenges you may face.<sup>12</sup>

### CLARIFY YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

Once you have answered the readiness questions to your satisfaction, it is time to clarify any assumptions that may exist about your initiative. Clarifying expectations and assumptions about structures, strategies, operating principles and outcomes with your partners and funders at the outset helps ensure that everyone shares realistic goals. Because youth engagement initiatives involve many partners, a shared commitment is critical.

### PLACE YOUR INITIATIVE ON THE YOUTH ENGAGEMENT SPECTRUM

Once assumptions are clear and shared among partners, it is time to discover where your organization or initiative fits on the youth engagement spectrum. YouthScape adopted the spectrum of youth engagement, outlined on the next pages, to show how young people can take on progressively more challenging roles within an organization. It helps identify where your current practices stand, and what type of involvement you could attain.



<sup>12</sup> For more information see Latendresse & Blanchet-Cohen (2010). A guide for engaging youth in organizations. Boscoville: Montreal

# Spectrum of Youth Engagement<sup>13</sup>

## PROGRAM PARTICIPATION

Young people participate in programs offered by adult-led organisations. They use these programs to improve their life, upgrade skills, have fun, or gain self-confidence.

Examples: Participants on a youth exchange program  
Students in a school  
Youth who access an employment centre

## PROGRAM OR ORGANISATIONAL ASSISTANCE

There are leadership development opportunities for young people as they take on tasks in the organisation. Youth may also contribute their ideas through informal discussions, and may be responsible for tasks, but they are not involved in planning, evaluation, or decision-making.

Examples: Fundraising for a charity  
Helping to set up equipment and furniture for an event  
Photocopying resources for information packages

## INFORMAL INFLUENCE IN ORGANISATIONS AND PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Youth help plan and run programs and are involved in a range of organizational activities – but on an informal basis. They act as advisors and advocates on various issues.

Examples: Members of a youth council attached to a town council  
Advisory committee members at a youth health centre  
Youth involved in public education initiatives

*“If I were to start YouthScape over again, I would look more closely at our ‘organizational readiness’. For example, we had a number of policies that went against the principles of YouthScape.*

*As an organization we struggled with giving money directly to young people instead of registered charities. It took a year and a half to move from a risk adverse organization to one that was willing to change its policies to ensure that they didn’t limit the kind of youth engagement work that YouthScape wanted to do. This involved working with champions within our organization.”*

—UNITED WAY OF THUNDER BAY

*In Saskatoon, the convening agency withdrew from YouthScape after 2 years as a result of the board wishing to realign their programming with their mandate of serving children under 5.*

—YOUTHSCAPE SASKATOON

<sup>13</sup> The spectrum was originally created by HeartWood: [www.heartwood.ns.ca](http://www.heartwood.ns.ca)

## activity 1

### Young People's Level of Civic Involvement

This activity will get you thinking about the different levels of civic engagement and where youth engagement can fit in.

» see Appendix 2



### STRUCTURED CONSULTATION

The organisation consults young people in a structured way to identify community problems and potential solutions. Young people have greater influence over policies, programs and strategies at this level.

Examples: Focus groups on youth employment programs  
Surveys of youth concerns and interests

### POLICY-MAKING INVOLVEMENT

Youth are recognised by adults as important resources in the organisation and are involved for the benefit of the organisation as well as for their own development. They vote and are respected as equals on formal decision-making bodies such as boards and committees. Young people are in staff positions with a high level of authority.

Examples: Youth members of a board of directors  
Youth in senior-level staff position

### YOUTH-ADULT PARTNERSHIP

Youth are fully integrated into the structures of the organisation and have an equal share in decision-making. Adults recognise youth members as full partners, sharing responsibility, authority and accountability.

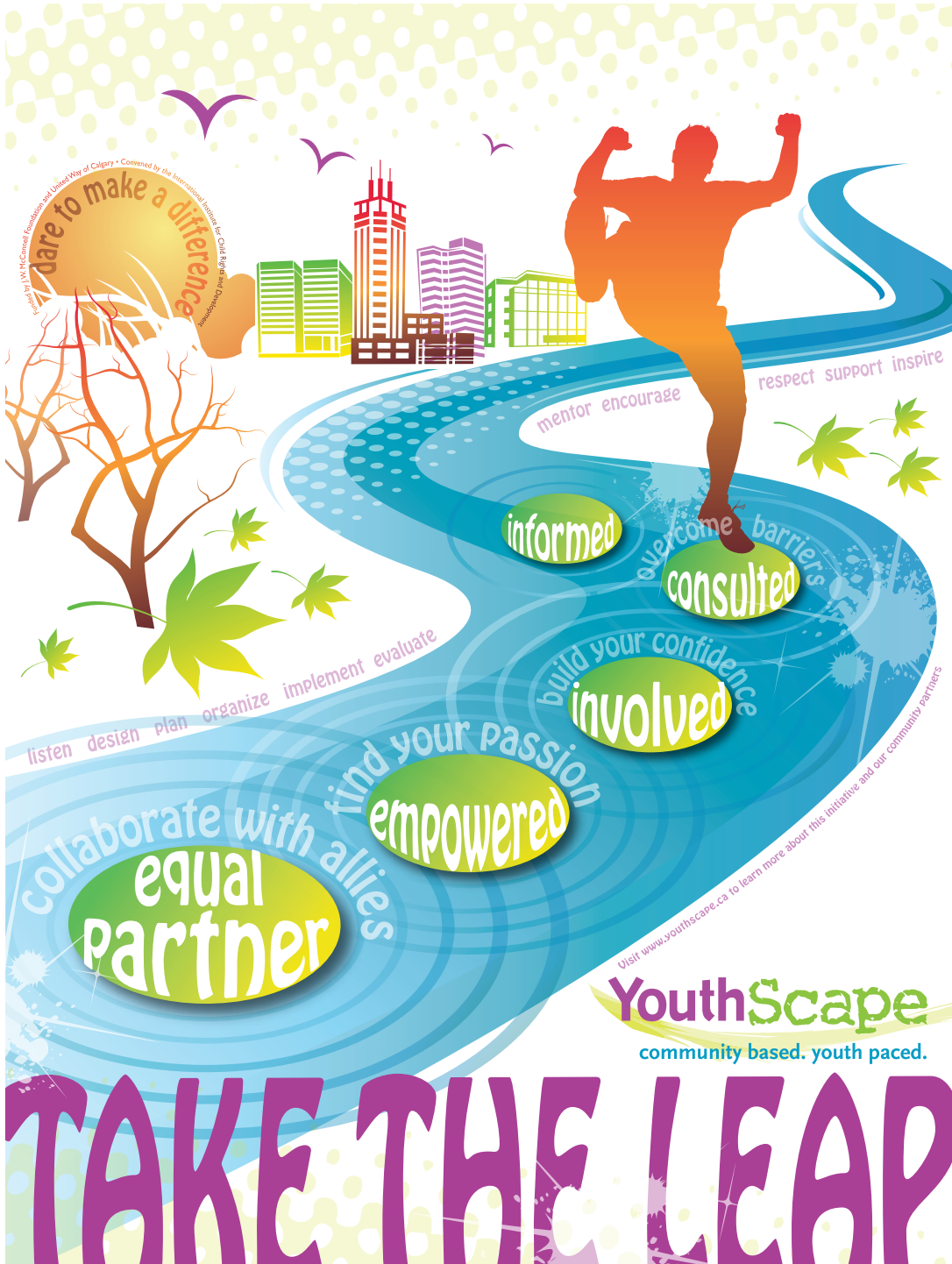
Examples: An organisation in which half of the board members are youth  
A community youth centre which is designed and implemented by adults and youth working as partners

### YOUTH-DRIVEN

Young people govern and make organizational decisions, and adults, if present, serve only as resource people or advisors. All organisational responsibilities – from program creation to finance – are carried out by youth.

Examples: Youth-governed drop-in centre  
University student union with full student governance





In YouthScape we encouraged young people and organizations to consider the spectrum of youth engagement with our Take the Leap Poster.

The more young people are meaningfully involved, the greater the ripples in the community.

# 2.2

Tools to gain an understanding of the key issues and opportunities:

- Social mapping
- Youth forums
- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Open houses
- Surveys
- Review of past funder and media reports and other documents

## Making a Plan

The second step in creating a strong foundation for youth engagement is to gather the information you need to move forward strategically, by:

- Mapping
- Identifying energy points
- Establishing a working group, vision and action plan

### MAPPING

This involves identifying key information about your organization’s history, people, and resources to create an accurate map or overview of the situation. You may want to map key young people, adults and organizations that:

- You already have a relationship or link with
- View youth engagement and change as a priority
- Are already taking actions to include young people

There are a number of ways you can record the information that emerges. Whichever way you choose, mapping helps identify your focus and outline a strategic direction.

Remember that your plan for youth engagement is unique to your organization. It is important that it reflects your values and goals, as it will guide interventions and support strategic decision-making and innovations.<sup>14</sup>

### IDENTIFYING ENERGY POINTS

In addition to mapping key people and partners, it is important to identify existing resources in your organization or community that you could build on. There may be energy and enthusiasm for a particular issue, or an issue of importance to the community, that provides an opportunity for youth involvement. Ask:

- Where do you see energy or passion?
- What is getting media attention?
- What community issue are people talking about?
- Is there a successful project or initiative that can be built upon?
- Are there policies, practices or activities that make engagement difficult?
- What small changes can be done to increase engagement?

<sup>14</sup> See the Change Handbook. The Definitive resource on today’s best methods for engaging whole systems (2007) for a description of 61 change methods.



### Try not to think only about groups or activities that currently serve youth

You may be able to find new allies when you look beyond the youth-serving sector. There are community groups that have established relationships with a cross section of the community, including youth. For example when Child Youth Friendly Calgary wanted to engage street-involved young people, they worked with artists, the municipality, local shelters, and drop-in programs.

It is important that young people see the importance of the issue and are excited by the opportunities they see. Energy points like these make it easier to create momentum for your initiative.

### Be creative in identifying momentum around an issue

- Speak directly with young people you know or work through local connections, organizations or friends
- Contact a community organization in a targeted neighbourhood
- Connect with established youth-serving groups or informal youth networks or clubs
- Identify individuals, groups, and organizations that have a passion for the issue you have identified

## ESTABLISHING A WORKING GROUP

As your map begins to provide a clearer picture of what is going on, existing opportunities and resources, and gaps in service, you should begin to draw together a core group of people, or steering committee, who will work together in moving the initiative forward.

Look for individuals or organizations that are:

- Eager to engage young people in social change
- Committed to working collaboratively
- Able to provide the expertise you need. Challenge yourself to think outside of the box – perhaps you need a finance person, a business leader or a local government official to contribute specialized knowledge or skills
- Community ‘movers and shakers’ with a positive track record
- Affected by the issue
- Able to provide a youth voice

Your working group or steering committee may come from a single organization or represent a cross-section of the community.

## YouthCore initially developed Victoria’s program through a broad-based asset mapping initiative in the fall of 2006.

This initiative showed that although Victoria was rich in resources and supports, there wasn’t a way to support collaboration and partnership-building or to ensure that youth could access resources and supports in an efficient and effective manner.

One of the first tools we created was a web-based portal.

» [www.youthcore.ca](http://www.youthcore.ca)

As we built a database of resources, we also started building a database of wishes and dreams and shared visions for the future.

The first impact areas that YouthCore incorporated into our change initiatives included:

- The environment
- Young parents
- Poverty reduction
- Enhanced collaboration and communication among and between youth services and youth service providers

Issues and opportunities can vary greatly from community to community.

Look for those that directly affect young people, such as the need for a shelter for young people on cold nights downtown, a municipal government looking for input on a policy initiative, gang violence in a neighbourhood park, a call for volunteers at a local school or recreation program, tension between youth and city staff around vandalism and graffiti, a lack of youth representation on a board of directors, or young people who feel they have no place or voice in their city.

## VISION

Once you have established a working group, you will need to select a skilled facilitator who can maintain the group's excitement and passion and bring everyone together to clarify a collective vision. This shared vision creates a foundation for future collective and collaborative work. It is a touchstone that everyone can come back to and use to measure the success of your initiative. Creating a vision that completely encapsulates everything that is important to your initiative is not necessarily an easy task, but it is essential in creating a strong foundation.

Your vision should:

- Set a tone of empowerment that encourages group members, including youth, to be actively involved
- Ensure that everyone has a clearly defined role and purpose

In YouthScape our vision became:

Imagine **acknowledging** young people as competent and enthusiastic contributors. Imagine **engaging** young people in building and managing our communities. Imagine **involving** young people in policy planning and legislation. Imagine **seeing** marginalized and diverse youth as problem-solvers, instead of problems. Imagine **inspiring** young people to learn new communication and leadership skills. Imagine **creating** a society where the engagement of young people is an automatic reflex...

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Agreeing on common values and guiding principles is particularly important when you are working to involve youth in social change. Operating by a set of agreed upon principles can help keep complex initiatives on track even in the face of frequent change and unpredictability. Guiding principles were critically important to the success of YouthScape.

## DECISION-MAKING

Clarity about who makes decisions and how decision-makers will be accountable to stakeholders is extremely important. You need to decide:

- How you want decisions to be made, by consensus or hierarchically
- How young people will exert their influence on decisions

Your decision-making processes should reflect the values and goals of your initiative, and enable action. Once you have agreed on a process, write it down.

*Decision-making structures that are more participatory and democratic tend to be more successful. If these processes are new to your organization, you may want to bring in an external facilitator to support the development and implementation of these structures and processes.<sup>15</sup>*

## TAKING EFFECTIVE ACTION

Your shared vision serves as an important rallying call, but for your initiative to succeed, you need to avoid vagueness and ambiguity, because it can lead to frustration and disenchantment. Success depends on developing specific actions.

### Involve young people throughout the process

- Review possible action strategies outlined in Step 3
- Build on the energy points you have identified, and provide the action opportunities to targeted groups that are keen to engage with the issue

Examples:

- A local high school leadership class may be interested in an alternative education program
- A skate park initiative may resonate with municipal government
- An informal group might want to help source local food for a recreation department event

### Begin with small actions that are likely to succeed

Early success builds confidence and enthusiasm.

### Stay true to your common vision and values – and be selective

It is OK to say no to a group or person if what they want to do is a diversion from the vision or values your group has established.

**In YouthScape, once a vision had been established, each community selected an area to focus on. Youth engagement as a whole was too broad and resulted in vague strategies and a lack of action, which led to frustration. Concrete areas of focus helped enormously.**

**To feed the passion and the commitment there needs to be tangible ACTION!**

*“Consensus is a group decision arrived at without voting, whereby issues are fully aired, all members feel they have been adequately heard, and everyone has equal power.”*

–HW BOARD POLICY / APPROVED 1999

<sup>15</sup> For more see Centre for Human Resource and Community Studies, Concordia University: » [www.chrcs.concordia.ca](http://www.chrcs.concordia.ca)

Here's what some young people identified as transportation-related issues:

*"We need a better deal on student bus passes – it shouldn't be dependent on whether or not you're near a school – and we need them in the summer too."*

*"Vandalism of bus shelters needs to stop. It's not safe for kids to be around all that broken glass."*

*"Bus shelters don't feel safe – more lighting would help."*

*"We need 24 hour service on all major routes – some of us do shift work."*

*"Because there's so much traffic in Calgary now, the typical bus ride is usually longer than an hour and a half, so they need to extend the time on the transfers."*

*"The new areas have crappy service."*

—YOUTHSCAPE PARTICIPANTS  
CALGARY

## Choosing a Focus for a Youth Engagement Social Change Initiative

In Calgary, we chose a focus where we saw a clear need, where there was existing energy and opportunity, and where we felt there was a real potential for impact. What was our focus? Transportation!

### NEED

Calgary was not addressing public transportation in a comprehensive and coordinated way. We felt there was a gap that we could fill.

### ENERGY & OPPORTUNITY

Young people seemed to be taking this issue on at local and national levels, suggesting that there was momentum and energy around this issue. We also had already undertaken a small project with Calgary Transit, so there was an opportunity to build on an existing relationship. A city representative who sits on our Steering Committee was also able to serve as a potential 'door opener' to the transit system.

### IMPACT

The impact of transportation on young people is significant, especially in a growing city like Calgary, where many youth rely on an over-burdened transit system to get around.

### ACTION STRATEGIES

With the general action focus on transportation in place, we then worked with young people and adult partners to develop a range of action strategies to address transportation-related issues in Calgary. These included the following:

#### Go-Grants

This is a youth granting-program for transportation-related projects. We defined "Transportation" very broadly, and didn't limit it to public transit alone. Grants included a bike-sharing program for homeless youth, and support for the Parkour community (jumping and climbing in urban areas).

#### Partner-supported projects

This action strategy provided support for youth-led projects in other organizations. Projects included a video produced by young people with disabilities to inform Access Calgary about the challenges they face using public transportation, and a photo-story project undertaken by immigrant youth to highlight safety concerns to the Transit Safety Commission.



## 2.3

Be sure that the way you have positioned and defined the coordinator's role does not inadvertently block a flow of communication and relationship building that is at the core of social change.

*"The coordinator is key. Get (and keep) the right one and you can move mountains; get a less-than-perfect fit, and you've got problems."*

*"[A coordinator] requires such a weird skill set – you need to be organized and detailed to get the job done, but you also need to be able to work with people, and you need to be able to see the big picture."*

*In some ways, you need to be able to direct people who are more senior than you, and direct them in a way that they feel happy about. You have to 'boss' the committee around without disengaging them – so you need to be charismatic and have good people skills."*

—YOUTHSCAPE STAFF CALGARY

# Establishing a Management Structure

After you have created a working group, established a vision and values, set up a decision-making process, and decided on an action plan, you will need to establish a governance or management structure that embodies the key principles of the initiative.

There are several ways to do this. In YouthScape, we explored two models: the co-ordinator model, where decision-making rested mainly with one person; and the management team model, where decision-making was shared across organizations. We have set out the benefits and challenges of each of the models below, and provided tips to help you succeed.

### COORDINATOR MODEL

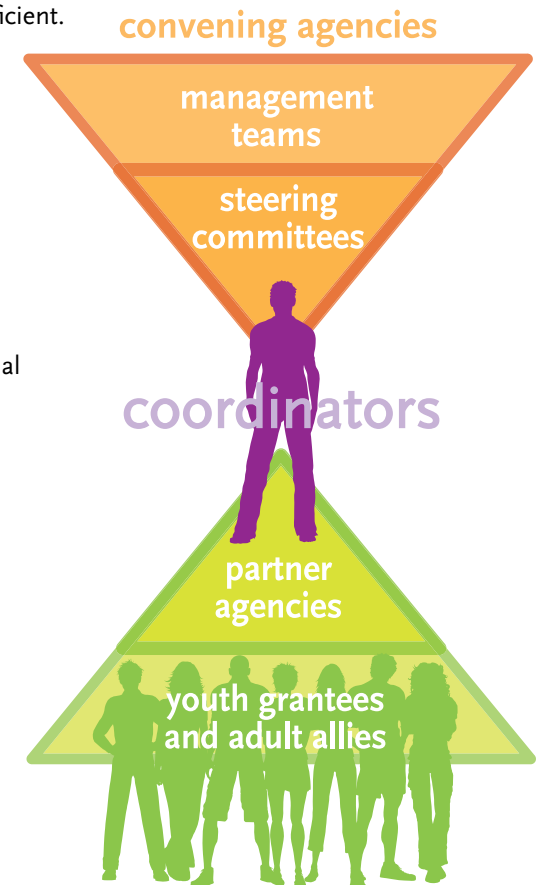
In the coordinator model, the responsibility to channel the energy and resources of multiple partners, and keep the initiative moving forward lies with one person. Most traditional program and organizational design structures use this model. Having a key person overseeing an initiative is often considered to be more efficient.

#### Potential Benefits

- Roles and responsibilities are clear
- Decision-making is efficient
- The organization maintains control of hiring
- The coordinator is empowered to implement action plans
- Information and history about the initiative is centralized
- Relations between youth and community are connected to a single individual

#### Potential Challenges

- The coordinator must meet high expectations
- Demands a diverse set of skills which can be difficult to find in one person
- May attract people with limited experience in the field
- Knowledge from senior staff is often channelled through a less experienced coordinator
- Success depends on a single person
- There is potential for gate-keeping or withholding of information
- Broader engagement may be more difficult





## MANAGEMENT TEAM MODEL

In YouthScape, we based management teams on principles of community development, drawing together diverse stakeholders within a sector or community. The team is usually a small group that operates like an Executive Committee to make key decisions that do not need to go to a larger working group or steering committee. Those sitting around the table may be clients, practitioners, and/or funders.

### Potential Benefits

- Increases stakeholder representation
- Helps increase feelings of ownership
- Incorporates participatory decision-making processes

### Potential Challenges

- Requires skilled facilitation and coordination
- Convening organizations may not fully support its implementation
- It can be difficult to get everyone together to make decisions
- Major decisions may be left to people without the information and background they need

# Setting up Structures for Success

## COORDINATOR MODEL

- Ensure the coordinator has the support of the executive director and other staff members
- Look for a coordinator with adequate skills, and a mandate to establish a vision and collective planning process with partners
- Assure the coordinator is in service to the initiative's collective vision and principles
- Choose someone who has experience working with marginalized young people
- Look for someone with the ability to empower young people and other stakeholders rather than exerting control over them

You may also want to consider splitting the coordinator's position to lessen the workload, ensure a diverse set of skills, and provide support and backup.

**Traditional management and decision-making structures were a challenge in YouthScape. So communities created alternate means of decision-making:**

Halifax Regional Municipality used organized marketplaces where youth organize conversations on hot topics. These open spaces encourage inclusivity, partnerships between youths and adults, and meaningful community engagement, including youth as planners and facilitators.

» [www.youthscape.ca](http://www.youthscape.ca)

**Being intentional about your structure can help you avoid some of the challenges voiced in YouthScape:**

*"There was an identity crisis!"*

*"They were not youth-friendly..."*

*"There was a disconnect between the convening organization, the steering committee and the youth they were supposed to represent."*

*"No one really understood the role."*

—YOUTHSCAPE PARTICIPANTS

*“In situations of emergent program development that require fast and complex structural change, the more channels of open communication and understanding available the better.”*

— DEVELOPMENTAL EVALUATOR

## MANAGEMENT TEAM MODEL

- Establish a very clear communication system suited to the local way people keep in touch
- Give time and attention to build strong relationships and respect among team members
- Set out clear and specific roles, responsibilities and principles
- Establish a clear system of accountability

Understanding the benefits and challenges of these two models will allow you to develop alternative structures to manage youth engagement and community initiatives. Be creative. Adapt them as you need – to best support a culture of learning and empowerment, fit with your values and principles, and allow for inclusive decision making.

## YouthScape

calgary

A supportive manager really understands the requirements of the role, has a good sense of people’s strengths and limitations and knows how to complement and support the skills of the coordinator with other resources

## Staffing Social Change Initiatives

In YouthScape Calgary, it was a struggle to attract and retain staff with the kind of leadership our initiative needed. On reflection, it is easy to see why; we needed someone with the people skills of a facilitator, the thinking skills of a strategist, and the organizational skills of an accountant. It is difficult to find all those very different skills in one person.

Those of us who have worked on other collaborative initiatives know that this tension is common. Here are some strategies that might help:

- Job-sharing and creative staffing that draws on people’s strengths
- Supportive supervision from a manager who really understands the requirements of the role, has a good sense of people’s strengths and limitations and knows how to complement and support the skills of the coordinator with other resources
- Shared ownership that builds on a clear compelling vision, a shared financial or other investment, and supportive communication and decision-making protocols

# Preparing a Strong Foundation: A Checklist for Success

To establish a strong foundation, you need to:

- Step back and take a good look at your organization
- Consider how ready your organization is to involve youth in a meaningful way
- See where you are on the spectrum of youth engagement
- Develop a plan for the future
- Map what is already happening in your community and/or local organizations that you can build on
- Collate and organize your findings
- Establish a working group to carry the initiative forward
- Determine a shared vision of what success looks like as well as principles to guide your work
- Clarify your decision-making process and set up a management structure
- Focus on action and celebrate your successes



# 3.0

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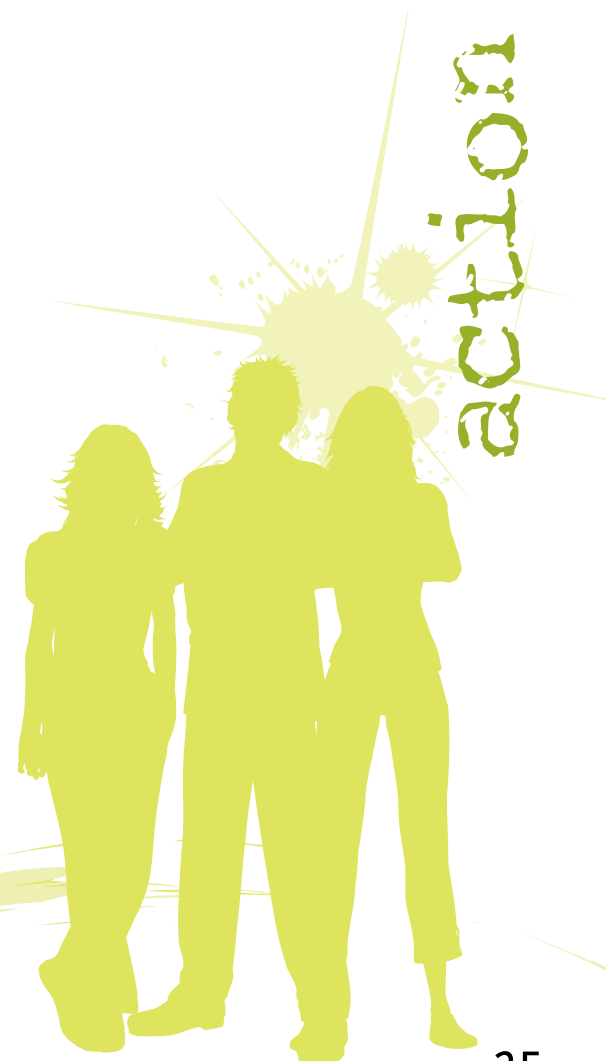
# 3.0

## 3.0 Taking Effective Action

There are many ways to engage youth in a meaningful way. To help you decide which strategy will be most useful in your situation, we present the benefits and challenges of each, as well as details about how best to implement them, and a checklist for success.

In YouthScape, we learned about five effective action strategies:

- 3.1 Youth-driven Granting
- 3.2 Hiring Youth Staff
- 3.3 Infusing Youth in Decision-making
- 3.4 Creating Youth Friendly Spaces and Places
- 3.5 Working in Partnership



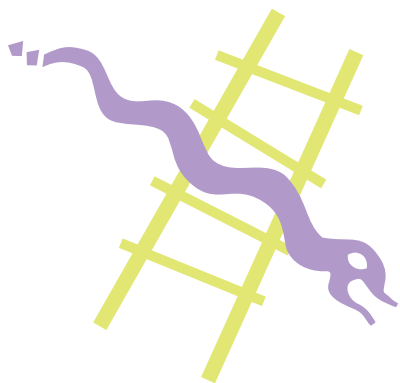
# 3.1

A Youth-driven grant can be revolutionary in a society that hesitates to trust young people.

## activity 3

Slippery Snakes and Ladders to Success

The ability to identify challenges and opportunities about a project is central to this game from Thunder Bay. Youth are able to brainstorm about their projects and visually display its evolution. » see Appendix 2



## Youth-driven Granting

Youth-driven grant projects are conceived of, and led by, youth. They allow young people to implement their own ideas about how to create stronger and healthier communities, how to transform their dreams and visions into concrete actions, and how to define and act upon initiatives that are important to them. This kind of grant can be revolutionary in a society that hesitates to trust young people.

### YOUTH-DRIVEN GRANTS

- Provide an opportunity to demonstrate the project's values or principles to the larger organization or community and show that young people can be agents of positive social change
- Enable youth to influence, own and control all the stages of a program or project from the idea through design, implementation, evaluation and documentation
- Offer the potential for significant change in a community



Megan's Story: Starting iUnique

I used to imagine life as one gigantic river; the water forever flowing, never taking the time to truly embrace all it was surrounding.

It seemed as if I was the something waiting to be embraced, wanting to be noticed for all the things I dreamed to achieve; wanting adults to look at me like an equal, not just some teenager. But they never stopped to ask me about my dreams, never told me that I could succeed in changing the lives of the people around me.

All this changed last year when two amazing organizations believed that I could change the lives of my own peers; they knew that I could follow my dreams. And with their support I have done just that.

Throughout my own life, I have seen too many tears, too many people willing to give up their lives because they didn't belong. I have heard people getting picked on because they appeared "crazy" or "weird" when in reality that person was just emotional from having to watch their mom being thrown over a high pole by their stepfather, or having to watch him beat their mom until she called the police. Who are youth supposed to turn to if the people they face every day in school bully them because of what they appear to be, and home life may be the issue?

When I was 16, I created iUnique with a grant and the help of YouthScape Halifax Regional Municipality and Mavericks. I decided to tackle this challenge and see what change I could create that would improve the lives of other young people. I started off by getting three other people to help me with this project. We started holding events called Wii are Unique Lunches. For this event we brought a Wii Nintendo System into the learning center at the high school, every second Friday at lunch to bring the learning center kids and the other students together. This worked great and encouraged us to increase the number and type of activities.

YouthScape didn't just give us money; they supported us in many ways to ensure we were successful. They hosted workshops called Act Outs to help us connect with and learn from other grantees, and provided us with adult connections. Whenever I needed help, or I just felt like giving up, they were always there to talk to. They always showed me why it is so important that iUnique continue.

YouthScape didn't just give us money; they supported us in many ways to ensure we were successful.



# What We Learned About Youth-driven Granting

## THE BENEFITS

Youth-driven granting can benefit individual young people, organizations and communities. Knowing how grants can have positive impacts across various levels can help you gain support for grants.

*“The young people sat there and scrutinized their grant applications to the point where if I was writing a proposal I wouldn’t want to put it in front of them because they were so meticulous and deep and understanding about what makes a good grant.*

*They were asking questions about sustainability, about if this is really a grant that is going to create change rather than just provide some charity work to a community. They were asking questions as to whether or not the people who lived in a particular community were the ones who had identified a problem and wanted to embark on this particular project to address that problem.*

*All 25 young people who were sitting in that room were able to engage in this conversation at an equally deep level. It was astounding.”*

—PROGRAM COORDINATOR  
YOUTH INNOVATION FUND

### INDIVIDUAL YOUNG PEOPLE

- Enhances and develops leadership skills
- Teaches responsibility with money, planning and outreach
- Builds passion and interests
- Fosters a sense of pride, trust and acknowledgement from parents
- Contributes to building community

### ORGANIZATIONS

- Develops organizational structures and practices better suited for engaging youth
- Models effective youth, adult and adult-youth communication, interaction, teamwork, and cooperation
- Demonstrates young people’s capabilities to others (including funders)

### COMMUNITY

- Challenges assumptions about youth
- Inspires communities with young people’s positive contributions
- Enables better access to and use of community resources
- Builds social capital

## THE CHALLENGES

There are several challenges to keep in mind when you are considering youth-driven granting. Knowing about them will help you address them before they become problems.

### INDIVIDUAL YOUNG PEOPLE

- Requires a cause to be passionate about
- Demands continued enthusiasm
- Requires follow-through with a project
- Requires the right skills for success
- Demands overcoming obstacles such as negative attitude or unsupportive policies

### ORGANIZATIONS

- Takes significant time, energy, and human and financial commitment
- Requires organizational readiness
- Requires the willingness to do things differently and to take risks

### COMMUNITY

- Needs adults willing to help anticipate obstacles such as sensitive issues or power challenges
- Requires adequate support to maximize impact
- Needs adults who are able to build on existing strengths and resource to help people navigate these challenges



# Implementing a Youth-driven Granting Strategy

## Selection

Selection involves setting up a selection team, establishing selection criteria, and defining an application process. The selection team can include:

- Youth only
- Youth and adults

### CONSIDER

#### How to choose team members

Should they represent a particular group or network, or have prior knowledge about grants? Consider a peer review process, and be sure to create spaces and processes that allow less engaged young people to participate.

#### How to balance youth and adult input

Consider youth-friendly language and guidelines that build on your initiatives values or principles.

#### How to connect with supportive adults

Connect with adults who are invested in the community and can act as mentors to young people. It can be helpful to create a list of potentially supportive adults to draw on during the project.

#### How to compensate team members for their time

Find out how young people would like to be compensated, and assess with them what is possible within your budget.

Consider providing space and food, training or other exchanges, or an honorarium.

» See Appendix 1: Compensation

### SELECTING PROJECTS FOR GRANTS

As your team prepares to provide grants, you need to work together to set up a process that works for everyone.

#### Set the scope for grants

What age range will you fund? What is the maximum dollar amount you will allow? What is the theme or focus you want to support?

#### Decide about time frames

Will you set a deadline for applications or receive them any time? How long will it take you to make a decision after you receive an application? You need to let applicants know how long they must wait to find out if their application has been approved.

YouthScape discovered three key steps to establishing a successful youth driven granting program:

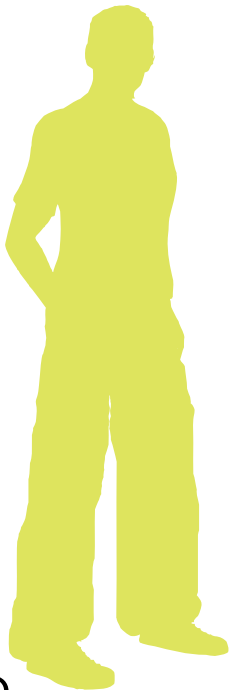
1. Selection

2. Outreach

3. Support

*“There is a notion that youth are our ‘tomorrow’, but young people are just as much of ‘today’ – and adults are as much of ‘tomorrow’ as young people.”*

—YOUTHSCAPE ADVISOR



#### Determine who can apply

- Individual youth applicants
- Groups of youth applicants
- Youth applicants connected to an organization

#### Establish a team meeting time and place

A consistent space and time commitment can be very useful. Remember you may need to be flexible around young people’s schedules.

#### Determine roles and responsibilities

You may decide some team members will support potential grantees in their application, and others will work with them after selection.

## Examples of YouthScape’s youth-driven grants

### INDIVIDUAL GRANTEES

- Theatre facilitation: A week-end workshop to provide theatre training initiated and organized by a young person
- Community Bike Project: A mobile repair program managed by a street-involved youth in Calgary
- Mural: A community mural project organized by a young person in commemoration of her peer who died tragically

### GROUP OF YOUTH GRANTEES

- It Takes A Village Young Parents Resource Map: 6 youth under the age of 30 years engaged over 100 young parents in Victoria to create a resource map (e.g. friendly places to breast feed)
- Hair salon: 6 young people set up a low-cost hair cutting service for youth in Rivière des Prairies
- Police dialogue: 5 youth initiated a series of focus groups in Rivière des Prairies to address gang violence
- Video: 2 youth made a video to raise awareness and acceptance of the challenges of different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds in Thunder Bay
- Social Change workshops: Young people organized a full day of fun and engaging workshops for junior high school students about how youth can make a difference in their community

### ORGANIZATIONAL GRANTEES

- Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society engaged 10-20 newcomer youth to educate and empower them with creative methods of exploration and self-expression (e.g. creating a mural)
- Aboriginal Youth Hoops: Four organizations were involved in this event showcasing the talent of roughly 150 Aboriginal youth of Calgary
- Portail de l’immigration en Alberta: This project created a comic strip to break down the barriers caused by discrimination in two local francophone schools
- Sackville Boys and Girls Club in HRM: Expansion of a weekly rock and roll club for young people age 6 to 15

### 3.0 TAKING EFFECTIVE ACTION

## Circle of Awesomeness: The Important Work of the Selection Team

Halifax’s youth selection team uses a collaborative decision-making process for grant approval. This fun and incredibly important task begins when an application is received.

The team reviews the application – often after a member of staff has met with the applicant to explain the grant opportunity and process, and discuss what they understand to be the goal. If the team has any questions, someone will call the applicant for answers.

YouthScape HRM calls their assessment process the Circle of Awesomeness<sup>16</sup>, using it to ensure each application meets the criteria of youth-led community engagement for long-term and positive change. The Circle of Awesomeness is actually the HeartWood Community Youth Development Framework; a framework developed from research based on the voice of youth from all across the province of Nova Scotia over a 15-year span. It guides the group as they look for opportunities for Meaningful Contribution, Supportive Peers, Adventuresome Learning, Adult and Youth Partnership, and Empowering Culture in the application. At the centre of the circle are the values of Connecting, Contributing, Acting, Passion, Fun and the need for community partnerships and support.

The Circle of Awesomeness hangs on the wall, the backdrop to the team’s meetings. It serves as fuel for discussions and as a lens to help applicants see the potential in their ideas, and often to stretch an idea so that it can have a stronger and longer impact.

With some experience and support from Sabrina, YouthScape’s Project Manager, and Jess, YouthScape’s Grants Facilitator, the Youth Selection Team has become adept at seeing the opportunities and possible ripple effects in each application.

In the case of an application for a movie night, the team was clearly able to see the purpose and desire behind the idea and to help the applicants extend the idea with a few good questions and some encouraging feedback.

A good process and the right questions can really make the difference in how meaningful a community project can be for those it is trying to reach. Community members of all ages can benefit from a process that allows enough time and support.

YouthScape Halifax calls their assessment process the Circle of Awesomeness, using it to ensure each application meets the criteria of youth-led community engagement for long-term and positive change.



<sup>16</sup> For full document see » [www.heartwood.ns.ca/downloads/cyd\\_framework.pdf](http://www.heartwood.ns.ca/downloads/cyd_framework.pdf)

# Selection Criteria

## SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR GRANT APPLICANTS:

- What will you do when you first get the money?
- Who do you know who could help you? Have you considered partnering with your community centre or library for free space, to help you make your money last longer?
- What supplies do you need? Who could give them to you?
- What difference will your grant make to other youth and your community? What is it that you're changing for the better? What issue are you tackling?
- How can I (as a youth) support this? How will your idea reach out to and include unengaged youth?
- What if...? Ask questions to explore possible challenges such as: what if someone abuses the instruments?

## REASONS NOT TO FUND AN APPLICATION:

- It does not meet your selection criteria
- The action plan and potential community impact are unclear
- There is not enough support for implementation
- The idea is not new – it duplicates an existing program or service
- The goal of the project is not realistic
- Another funding source is more appropriate e.g. city/school
- You don't have enough resources – choices have to be made!

## Making your application youth-friendly

To ensure that all young people have access to your youth-driven grants, you need to design an application form or process that is simple and easy to understand.

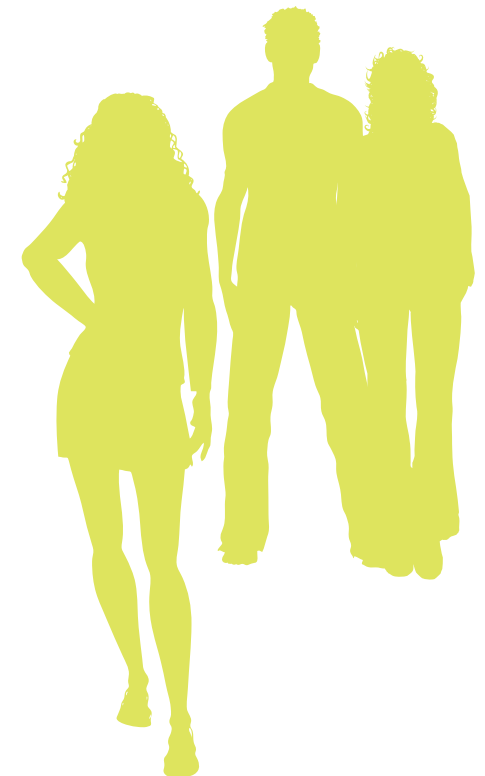
- Keep the application form short – use plain language and ask only the most important questions
- Make it visually inviting – include graphics, visuals, and icons
- Try to be flexible in the kind of application you will consider – applicants may prefer using alternative application formats such as audio or video
- Consider speaking to applicants in person or through phone or online interviews
- Make sure that applicants feel comfortable asking for support – use appreciative language and be available to answer any questions

For sample applications: » [www.youthscape.ca](http://www.youthscape.ca)

## Outreach

Outreach means getting the word out about your granting program: if no one knows about it, you won't receive any applications. You can use conventional methods such as posters and flyers, but you also need to reach out in non-traditional ways to potential grantees, especially if you are targeting unengaged young people:

- Approach young people where they hang out (malls, public transport, coffee shops, local establishments, youth or recreation centers)
- Use Facebook, Twitter, the Internet and other media used by young people
- Host information sessions in schools during lunch and at in-and-out-of-school programs
- Connect with youth-serving organizations who are recruiting young people, and participate in and contribute to existing youth activities
- Encourage former grantees to spread the word – youth-to-youth word of mouth is a great way to get young people involved
- Work with other granting organizations, such as community foundations, to organize forums



Victoria en Nuit and It Takes A Village are examples of responsive, participatory, youth-directed community action projects.

## Youth Development Community Mapping Projects

YouthCore's very first Youth Development Team projects (now called SPARK Projects) are examples of genuinely responsive, participatory, youth-directed community action projects.

### **VICTORIA EN NUIT: LAST BUSES AND CHEAP FOOD . . . OPEN PAST 10PM**

The name says it all really. This Youth Development Team project directly engaged with over 300 local young people who spend time in Victoria's downtown core. The result was a relatively comprehensive compilation of youth-friendly eateries, facilities, transportation resources, and emergency services young people can access after 10PM. The information was compiled into a pocket-sized map and made available to youth across the city.

### **TAV MAP: IT TAKES A VILLAGE**

The 'It Takes a Village Map' was a YouthCore community mapping initiative that aimed to put together an asset map of all the resources, services, and supportive spaces for young parents in Victoria. Led by young parents, TAVMap gathered information during a series of events where young parents exchanged clothing and toys, and shared stories and ideas, and collectively recorded some of the services and spaces available. The finished map is available on YouthCore's website as well as in print. It is not only a useful tool for easily locating specific sites, but also is a visual narrative of young parents' experiences as a community.

» [www.youthcoreprogram.ca](http://www.youthcoreprogram.ca)

# Support

Most young people are not familiar with grants. They will need support to administer the grant and mentors to help them expand their action plans, implement their ideas and make connections to increase the impact of the grant.

## ADMINISTERING YOUTH-DRIVEN GRANTS

Set yourself up for success and minimize risk.

### Create a welcome package for youth grantees

Some things you may want to include are: a written letter of agreement to outline the roles and responsibilities of the grant recipient and the funder. Each party can sign and date the agreement. Ensure that young people understand what they are signing and what it means. You might also include a section for roles and responsibilities of parents or guardians, if you are accepting grant applications from younger recipients.

### Establish a clear system for transferring money

Decide whether to create a bank account in the name of the grant recipient or jointly with the funder, how many signatures are required to debit money, and whether you want a debit card issued to the recipient. Grants could also be funded through cheques made out to individual youths.

### Tie funds to milestones and release them gradually

Work with grantees to break projects down into small steps or goals, and tie payments to the achievement of each of the milestones, or split the grant into two payments – perhaps releasing 75% of the funds when you receive the project budget, and 25% after you get the final report and receipts.

### Be clear about eligible and ineligible expenses

Clearly outline – with examples – which expenses are allowed and which are not (materials, honorariums etc.). This will depend on how the budget framework is established. Also, explain what happens to materials and equipment when the project is finished (e.g. can the grant recipients keep materials for personal use or do they have to remain for community use).

## MENTORSHIP

Mentorship is critical in helping young people make the most of grants. Sometimes, a mentor can help a young person make a ‘big dream’ more realistic. It can be very difficult to translate a big idea into concrete, achievable steps – a mentor can be invaluable in this process. Sometimes, mentorship means helping a young person make connections to go beyond a “one-off” project (a block party or week-end retreat) to create longer-lasting impacts.

## PEER MENTORSHIP

To increase impact and model the values of learning, consider hosting interactive forums where young people can swap skills and ideas. You can also set up interactive online forums to share lessons learned. See YouthCore’s Spark Pages for some examples of learning in action.

» [www.youthcoreprogram.ca/?action=spark\\_projects](http://www.youthcoreprogram.ca/?action=spark_projects)

### 3.0 TAKING EFFECTIVE ACTION

*“We were giving money to a young person to do bike repairs for street involved youth. Our concern was that if somebody took the bike and the brakes did not work, what was the liability for this – not only for the person using the bike, but for the granting organization? I could not risk something like this happening.*

*While this grant was inherently risky, we were not just concerned about the money, but more about what could happen if things went wrong. We did not want to get sued.”*

— YOUTHSCAPE STAFF CALGARY

A welcoming package was created to help young people manage the finances.

## Strengthening Accountability

It can be challenging to manage the finances of youth-driven grants. Tracking the finances of a large number of grantees that do not have project management skills can turn into a logistical nightmare.

One YouthScape Thunder Bay project had particular difficulty because one of the young people tried to take advantage of the access they had to their Community Bank Account, which had been set-up as a joint account with the managing organization. Only one signature had been required to withdraw funds, and one of the youth involved withdrew funds that were not needed for the project. Because of this, and because of improper and missing receipts, we spent several months working with the youth and his mother to resolve the problem. Eventually, however, we had to close the project and conduct a thorough review of our accountability practices and processes.

As a result we created a YouthScape welcoming package to help young people understand:

- What a proper receipt is
- Why they should keep receipts
- How to report on things they purchase
- How to keep a financial spreadsheet

The welcoming package also contains a copy of the grant agreement, contact information for the YouthScape team, a CD with all data files needed to track the project, media consent forms and a waiver of liability.

We also began using a more hands-on approach to support and guide the projects. The full YouthScape team (program manager, coordinator, youth mentor, and finance person) met with each project team and when a project was approved, we sat down with the youth and/or allies involved and reviewed the welcome package so that everyone was aware of expectations.

The welcoming package isn't just about giving out a slick duo-tang; it's about a commitment to the youth that we will not leave them working in isolation, without support, guidance and encouragement.

For more information: > [www.unitedway-tbay.on.ca/YouthScapeProject.htm](http://www.unitedway-tbay.on.ca/YouthScapeProject.htm)



## Youth-driven grants: a risky business?

Giving money directly to young people can seem like a risky business to organizations that want and need to be accountable to parents, board members, funders and youth themselves. Proper procedures (checks and balances) need to be in place, but you also need to be sensible. Strategies to deal with these issues:

### Be realistic and put things into perspective

Think about the benefits to individual youth, peers and community, and balance them against the risks or challenges of the project.

### Use the selection process

Consider how to make projects safer before a grant is approved. For example, a team of young people wanted to do a parkouring project (street acrobatics in public spaces using benches, buildings, etc.). As part of the grant, we paired the team up with a local university where people knew about proper safety procedures and where there was existing insurance.

### Involve partners

Be creative in involving community partners to help mitigate risks. YouthScape Halifax, for example, engaged a local insurance company to help young people complete insurance forms. Or connect youth to training centres as part of their granting project to help reduce risks (e.g. bike mechanics).

### Provide an orientation

During the orientation process, help young people understand their rights and responsibilities.

### Implement an accountability structure

Ensure that your staff team is well equipped to answer questions and support young people in essential accountability processes such as completing budgets and keeping track of receipts.

*“What if a project used funds inappropriately, did not turn in receipts, or was just not going anywhere but the funds were spent? What are the funders’ expectations for ensuring the funds are used appropriately and reported on?”*

—YOUTHSCAPE STAFF





## Youth Driven Granting: A Checklist for Success

- Provide support
- Match appropriate allies with projects
- Understand the value of both large and small grants
- Build on energy points
- Remember: passions = successful projects
- Be strategic
- Take risks
- Remember that the needs and opportunities for each grant is unique
- Embrace learning and celebrate small wins



# Hiring Youth Staff

Hiring young people with first-hand knowledge of and interest in youth issues can provide your organization with unique expertise. Young people's life experiences give them knowledge and skills that aren't available through studying or reading.

Hiring youth staff:

- Establishes credibility in the youth 'community'
- Increases programming effectiveness
- Provides work experience that prepares young people to play an active role in their communities

## YouthScape

## The mistake of lowering expectations

### ROLE OF ORGANIZATIONS

Organizations sometimes make the mistake of lowering their expectations for younger staff members, because they have limited work experience, or are on a healing journey. This often does a disservice to youth, preventing them from taking responsibility for their actions and learning about the realities of the work environment. Setting clear expectations motivates youth to meet them.

### ROLE OF YOUTH

In a summer mapping project in Rivière des Prairies, young people created their own rules for accountability. To deal with late arrivals and lots of swearing, they decided to enforce a monetary measure and to charge \$2 for late arrival and \$1 for swearing. Accountability was the responsibility of all the young people. The money was put into a common fund and used to pay for food in celebratory parties. The monetary fines made young people more responsible for being on time and controlling their language.

*"We should be calling them 'staff that happen to be young'. 'Youth staff' seems to imply lower expectations for accountability. We are not doing our job as a learning organization if we're not preparing youth to be accountable and take responsibility."*

—YOUTHSCAPE STAFF VICTORIA

*"The [Youth staff member] was the best at recruiting (going on the bus and talking to people), but could also fit well into adult and bureaucratic environments and was able to talk to people so that they would listen with respect."*

—YOUTHSCAPE STAFF CALGARY

# What We Learned About Hiring Youth Staff

As staff, young people offer tremendous potential to youth engagement activities because of their unique competencies, skills, and networks.

## THE BENEFITS

As staff, young people offer tremendous potential to youth engagement activities because of their unique competencies, skills, and networks.

### INDIVIDUAL YOUNG PEOPLE

- Develops skills
- Builds confidence and self-esteem
- Provides information about community development careers
- Develops work experience
- Develops relationships with adults, organizations and community

### ORGANIZATIONS

- Provides street credibility
- Infuses youth energy, passion and creativity
- Provides structure for youth network outreach
- Integrates youth reality into programs
- Contributes new networks and tools
- Increases the ability to create more relevant services

### COMMUNITY

- Builds social capital
- Strengthens community networks
- Changes perceptions of youth from 'problems' to 'contributors'

## THE CHALLENGES

There are several challenges to keep in mind when you are considering hiring youth staff. Knowing about them will help you better address them.

### INDIVIDUAL YOUNG PEOPLE

- Requires maturity and a work ethic to understand and meet expectations
- Requires critical thinking skills and an ability to discuss challenges and solutions
- Day-to-day tasks can erode passion and motivation

### ORGANIZATIONS

- Requires an identified person to provide support
- Demands very clear expectations that match the young person's skill set
- Can decrease productivity initially
- Deliverables can be less tangible
- Can increase staff turnover and result in ongoing training and relationship development

### COMMUNITY

- Uncertainty of experience level
- Competency questioned and not taken seriously

# Implementing A Youth Staffing Strategy

## Make young staffers welcome

### Get your team on board

Consider hosting a staff meeting before bringing in a young staffer, to discuss why you are taking this step and how everyone can help welcome them. Once the youth is brought into the team, do some creative introductions.

### Recruit actively

Find a young person that fits well with your organization, and consider using new methods to find young workers. Young people might not see or respond to conventional posting methods. You could advertise for the position through youth-serving organizations, on the Internet, in-person, or through word-of-mouth, particularly if you wish to get a diverse range of applicants.

### Make your interviews friendly and professional

You may be interviewing first-time employees. Take the time to make this a positive experience. Consider the physical space, clothing, and the seating arrangement, and include some of your current younger staff as part of the interview process. Ask questions that relate to: volunteer experiences, community involvement, youth networks, group-work experience, qualities and skills they want to develop, and their ideas about how youth and adults can work together.

## Set young people up for success

### Involve young staffers in meaningful work

The greatest benefit of employing enthusiastic and creative young people comes when you give them meaningful work responsibilities that allow them to truly contribute to your organization. Unrelated, menial administrative tasks can be unsatisfying.

### Create a work plan together

Commitment comes from understanding and engagement. Work with your young employee to create a contract and schedule regular check-ins. Ensure they are able to commit to the outlined tasks and that they see how the tasks will contribute to the goals of the organization.

### Establish short-term timelines and deliverables

Young people may need short-term timelines and deliverables to help them stay on track. Work together to break down big projects into smaller components to avoid overwhelming them.

### Clarify accountability mechanisms

Work with young people to set up monitoring and accountability strategies. Be very clear about your expectations and the consequences, and think outside the box with respect to reporting. Encourage formats that draw on their skills and strengths.

In YouthScape, we found there were three key components that build a healthy work environment for both youth staff and adult staff:

- **Make young staffers welcome**
- **Set young people up for success**
- **Establish appropriate support**

## activity 4

### Self Portrait

This activity will help create a youth-friendly atmosphere by allowing young people working on new projects to introduce themselves in a dynamic and vivid way.

» see Appendix 2



## Establish appropriate support

### Provide the scaffolding for success

Just as scaffolding supports a building under construction, it supports young people as they learn to contribute to the workplace. You will need stronger supports at the beginning, and will be able to adjust and reduce them as the person gains experience and knowledge. It is about finding the right balance, in giving youth enough responsibilities and opportunities to grow but not too many that they are overwhelmed. One way to create 'scaffolding' is to have a youth accompany an experienced adult staff member in activities and slowly pass on responsibilities to the youth.

### Be friendly, but maintain professional boundaries

Young staff members often have issues to overcome. It helps for you to be very clear about their role and about best practices for working with young people who are under 18. This may be challenging, as young people may identify with the youth they are working with, especially if they are close in age. Consider how you will maintain professional guidelines while helping the young person do their best work.

### Allow for personal healing and development

Youth who join your staff may have personal issues that interfere with work responsibilities. You can be supportive by providing days off, within reason, for personal development and healing.

### Give young people a mentor

In addition to having someone checking in on them, young people also need to be inspired and challenged to be the best they can be. This requires mentors who can model the values or guideposts of the initiative.

### Anticipate high staff turnover

Think about hiring several young people at a time, and developing a structured orientation process and ongoing mentorship program.

# Being an Inclusive Organization

Youth and adults in Saskatoon outlined key characteristics of an organization they felt would be inclusive and welcoming for youth staff. They included:

## SHARING OF POWER

- Young people are part of hiring and firing process
- Youth share ideas freely within the organization
- Youth are able to present without being helped by authorities
- There are positive and respectful communication processes
- Roles and responsibilities are identified and young people are aware of them
- Policy and procedures are decided collaboratively with youth

## LEARNING VALUES

- Sharing stories, experiences, knowing each other, our goals, and our pasts
- Learning from failure, willingness to try again
- Reflection, discussion, dialoguing
- Adaptive and flexible

## FRIENDLY-ENVIRONMENT

- Youth are allowed to wear “cool” work clothes
- Youth are respected and adults are supportive
- Youth are accepted, not labelled for, or limited by, their past
- Youth and adults all leave their egos at home

## RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- Youth have skills that are needed to succeed
- Youth know their rights and their responsibilities

## RECOGNIZING DIFFERENT CAPABILITIES AS EQUAL

- Youth are respected for what they bring to the organization
- Adults do not have to pretend that the youth are doing well
- Youth are able to have their own skills recognized
- Management understands that young people are good at many different things – do not stereotype

*“I don’t do anything on time, because I am so in the present. The thing with writing and reporting is that it is difficult... I felt like I was trivializing them and betraying their trust... like gossiping behind someone’s back.”*

—YOUTHSCAPE STAFF  
SASKATOON

*“Finding a container that works is critical. It can be exciting to have open-ended work but it is exhausting and...ineffective... without the right container, people don’t feel safe...they would not be able to express themselves.”*

—YOUTHSCAPE STAFF  
SASKATOON



## Hiring Youth Staff: A Checklist for Success

- Clarify expectations
- Clearly identify roles and responsibilities
- Establish open channels of communication
- Set up 'scaffolding' supports that adapt to the young person's experience and capacity
- Involve youth in work plans
- Budget for human resource support
- Nurture skills, build in challenges, and reward commitment so youth can maintain creativity and enthusiasm
- Build in renewal and transition plans



# Involving Youth in Decision-making

In order for young people to have real influence on issues that affect their lives, you will need to establish formal structures that support their perspectives.

Changing organizational structures to be truly supportive of youth involvement means moving far beyond token acceptance of young people in the workplace. Embedding youth-friendly processes in institutions and organizations will increase the likelihood that:

- Young people's competence and power will influence the outcome of decisions
- Youth involvement becomes a standard part of your operation
- Organizations and communities adopt new practices for working with youth
- Organizations become accountable to youth

*"I realized that the organizations that offer activities or projects believe that the level of young people's civic involvement was greater than the reality perceived by the young people. The discussion was interesting and offered a chance to discuss these diverging perceptions and reach a shared view."*

—YOUTHSCAPE SELECTION COMMITTEE  
RIVIÈRE DES PRAIRIES

## Youth in Decision-making

Read Chelsey's story in her comic book and hear how she engaged young people in decision-making around a drop-in youth centre for street youth in Thunder Bay.

» [www.youthscape.ca](http://www.youthscape.ca)



*"Once upon a time there was a CYW named Chelsey. Chelsey was offered a job that no one could refuse. What was the job you say? Well that day Chelsey became a Youth Engagement Worker."*

—YOUTHSCAPE GRANTEE  
THUNDERBAY

YouthScape

Thunder Bay

# What We Learned About Youth in Decision-making

**Meaningful engagement involves youth having influence.**

*“Simply forming a community committee does not assure its dynamism or a participatory or functional process.”*

—YOUTHSCAPE PARTNER CALGARY

## THE BENEFITS

Involving youth in decision-making builds young people’s capacities but also contributes to the capacity of organization and communities.

### INDIVIDUAL YOUNG PEOPLE

- Practices and enhances skills
- Develops a sense of ownership
- Provides experience in negotiation and compromise
- Increases confidence and pride
- Builds a better relationship with peers, family and school

### ORGANIZATIONS

- Provides diverse perspectives
- Improves retention and recruitment
- Shares ownership
- Increases relevance and credibility of decisions
- Gives programs greater impact

### COMMUNITY

- Strengthens democracy
- Enables youth to take more leadership
- Reduces crime
- Provides for more inclusive and cohesive society
- Creates more resiliency

## THE CHALLENGES

There are several challenges to keep in mind when you consider including youth in decision-making. Knowing about them will help you better address them.

### INDIVIDUAL YOUNG PEOPLE

- Formal processes may be intimidating
- Demands extra support to enable contributions to decision-making in formal environments
- Other commitments may interfere

### ORGANIZATIONS

- Requires a shift to more collaborative leadership styles
- May clash with the formality and structure of decision-making and meeting structures
- Requires systemic change at all levels, so it becomes an organizational reflex

### COMMUNITY

- Often over-dependant on adult champions
- Resistance to give power to youth

The level of decision-making that young people can take part in will vary in each organization and context. In a highly structured workplace, where stakes are high, it may be an important step forward to move from making sure you inform young people, to making sure you consult with young people. Other, less structured organizations may be able to implement a more flexible, shared decision-making process.

While our overall goal is to empower and work in partnership with young people, general involvement and consultation are critical aspects of engagement, and should not be dismissed or underestimated.

Meaningful engagement involves youth having influence. The greater influence the youth have, the greater the chance that young people will contribute to positive social change.

## Implementing a Youth in Decision-making Strategy

To involve youth in decision-making, YouthScape found three elements to be critical:

- Understanding power
- Establishing a decision-making structure and process
- Setting young people up for success

### Understanding power

#### Critically examine power and decision-making

Think of all the places in your organization where decisions are made. Who hires and fires people? Who sets the agenda? Who sends the invitation? Look for ways young people's voices can become more embedded into the system.

#### Create a Safe Space

Pay attention to establishing an environment where there is trust and not judgment. Find ways to make youth feel welcome to participate, and show them that their voice is being listened to.

#### Allow for flexibility

Decision-making can be flexible. Consider who is interested in making a decision and develop roles that are not always static.

#### Consider accessibility

Provide information and make it feasible for youth as well as adults to engage.

### Article 12

### UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

#### Adapted from General Comment 12

Article 12 stresses the right of all children to express their views in matters affecting them, with those views being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. Article 12 is one of the four general principles of the CRC. All processes in which young people are heard and participate, must be:

- Transparent and informative
- Voluntary
- Respectful
- Relevant
- Child/youth-friendly
- Inclusive
- Supported by training (both adults and youth)
- Safe and sensitive to risk
- Accountable (follow-up)

To act on their power, young people must become aware of where their current power comes from, and how to further leverage it.

Think about:

- Formal and informal types of power
- Multiple sources of power such as resources, position, constituency, perception, access, expertise, networks, and personality
- Strategies to increase power...where does your power come from to achieve community change?

*“We give away our power by always asking to have power.”*

—YOUTH INNOVATION FUND STAFF

## Establishing a decision-making structure or process

“Are we asking youth to fit in, or are we able to recreate and reorganize our approaches and ways of doing things to build on their talents?”

Decision-making structures are critical to youth engagement initiatives. They are one of the most effective means of providing a democratic process for youth and adults to work together to make decisions. There are several key factors to consider when choosing a structure or process:

### Find the right fit

Experience suggests that the more strongly young people are connected to an initiative, the more they will contribute. If young people are randomly selected to attend, and do not represent the target groups of the initiative, they cannot be accountable to their peers in the same way, and will not be as engaged or active.

### Provide information and prepare

Providing youth-friendly information before a meeting helps ensure that both young people and adults are aware of the agenda items and prepared to participate.

### Choose a flexible format

There are lots of opportunities for flexibility – look for and take advantage of these to bring some fun and liveliness to committees and meetings.

### Build relationships between adults and youth

Relationship-building activities that help young people and adults get to know each other on a more personal level can help increase understanding and ensure that young people are more comfortable voicing their opinions.

### Establish clear roles and responsibilities for both youth and adults

Knowing who is responsible for what helps create ownership, and accountability.

### Make sure everyone is fully informed

It is critical that anyone making a decision has the information and knowledge to do so. Give new or recently absent members an opportunity to get up to speed before asking them to participate in making a decision.

### Include diverse areas of decision-making

Engage youth in a range of decisions.

## Setting up for success

Finding a structure that will help move your vision forward can take time.

Steering committees can offer an accountable way for multiple partners to make decisions, and can take on a variety of formats (board meetings, consortiums, workshops, cafes, online exchanges or marketplaces). They can include organizational representatives, key stakeholders including young people, a mixture of youth and adults, or just young people.

In YouthScape HRM, the decision-making team was made up of an equal number of adult and youth representatives.

**Steering committees need to be creative in their format to serve a clear purpose and have clear roles and responsibilities.**

## ..... YouthScape

### Making Decisions HRM Style

You can use consensus, majority or compromise decision-making to choose an area of focus.

In using these models you can apply a number of techniques that will help make the choice easier.

- Pick a name out of a hat, or elect a leader to make the final decision, etc.
- Use the Red Light, Yellow Light, Green Light technique to see where everyone stands on a decision: Red = Disagree; Yellow = Proceed with caution; Green = Agree
- Ask everyone whether they have issues with a decision e.g. “Is anyone not okay with \_\_\_\_\_?”

*“If you are working with youth at risk, make sure you have double the number of young people on the committee than you need to make a decision. Expect that things will come up in the young people’s lives that prevent them from being there, and whatever you do **don’t** make them feel bad if they can’t be there – or they will just stop coming.”*

—YOUTHSCAPE COORDINATOR HRM

*“We learned that the steering committee was not working because it was mostly adults talking and not doing productive things...too many decisions being made by the steering committee would take all the time and it was boring...last steering committee, I was barely awake...”*

—YOUTHSCAPE PARTICIPANT  
HALIFAX

HALIFAX

There was an air of excitement for both the adults and the young people.

*“We focused on personal interests, passions and talents, and asked adults to talk about themselves without defining themselves by their leadership position.”*

—YOUTHSCAPE PARTICIPANT  
RIVIÈRE DES PRAIRIES

## The Béluga Consortium

Creating a communal vision and realizing a plan of action to improve the community in Rivière des Prairies has involved several steps.

### FIRST STEPS

We brought the community’s multi-sectored leaders together around the Béluga Rivière des Prairies Project. At first, meetings consisted almost entirely of adults, even though the main topic of discussion was young people and the importance of their involvement in decisions that affect them. The more frequently the group of leaders met, the more they began to understand the basis of Béluga, and the more clearly the need emerged to include the community’s youth in the consortium. Questions arose; What are young peoples’ perceptions of Rivière des Prairies? What are their concerns? How can they be integrated into the consortium without being caught in the trap of ‘tokenism’ (doing ‘as if’, symbolic recognition)?

### FORGING LINKS BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE AND ADULTS

The initial meeting of the consortium, with an additional 10 young people, was crucial. To facilitate this introduction, we prepared a special program. We asked young people and adult participants to introduce themselves through activities touching on their personal interests, their passions, their talents, their understanding of Béluga, and so on. We purposely created an environment that forced the adults to talk about themselves without defining themselves by their leadership position in the community. The games created youth-adult pairings and focused on creativity, a more natural style for young people. There was an air of excitement with both the adults and the young people.

### TOWARDS A HARMONIZED RHYTHM

Although this introductory meeting was magical and helped forge links between the young people and adults, the first meetings of the mixed consortium were a real challenge. Everyone worked hard to create opportunities for the young people to take the floor. We incorporated news of existing youth projects into the agenda and discussed the evolution of the committees’ work. This new responsibility enabled the young people to speak more often and more comfortably in the meeting setting and provided opportunities for them to request the support of the leaders in getting their projects off the ground.

As the number of young people on the committees grew and youth-led projects were integrated in to the initiative, young people were more often at the centre of the program. There were more opportunities to discuss topics of concern to them and to work with the Béluga staff, to ensure that young people were at the heart of the agenda.

### FINALLY...

The consortium has provided a model for the civic involvement of young people that other organizations are now using. Everyone could see what was being done, and had the necessary information to orient the activities. In the beginning, the team of Béluga staff members were the main instigators. Today, the city’s sports and recreation section, the Maison des Jeunes, the RDP Team, elected officials, the police, Jean-Grou secondary school, the Library, and the Maison de la culture are all initiators of concrete activities that relate to young people’s civic involvement. The consortium has become a privileged place for sharing.

# Involving Youth in Decision-making: A Checklist for Success

- ✓ Recognize that young people have the ability to contribute
- ✓ Work with young people to activate this ability and allow them to use it in constructive ways
- ✓ Clarify the decision-making process
- ✓ Embed decision-making structures across all levels, such as youth centers, schools, and municipalities
- ✓ Explore alternative formats (cafés, market places etc.)
- ✓ Focus on the youth at the table, and how much are they actually participating rather than equal representation
- ✓ Stress the significance of participation and the responsibilities that come along with it
- ✓ If you need 6 young people present to make a decision, aim to have 12 on the team, recognizing that very few young people will be able to be there 100% of the time
- ✓ Provide regular updated information to all participants to allow them to make informed decisions



## activity 5

### Apples and Onions

This activity is a quick and effective way to get youth talking about a recent meeting or event and to identify areas for improvement.

» see Appendix 2



## 3.4

In many communities across Canada, there are few places for young people to 'hang out'.

# Creating Youth Friendly Spaces and Places

Youth-friendly spaces and places are physical or virtual spaces for young people to share and be themselves. In many communities across Canada, there are few places for young people to 'hang out'.

In our highly structured society, youth have been relegated to organized programming and pre-defined places. They often feel judged or excluded from the community, yet young people are among the most frequent users of public spaces – sidewalks, city parks, and shopping centers. Creating youth spaces and places provides an opportunity for:

- Young people to appropriate, define and manage a public space or place
- Young people to have a more positive image in organizations and communities
- Communities to become more inclusive





Ready, Set, Renovate

Every young person in Thunder Bay needs a place to go. A place that offers a chance to escape from stresses and challenges they face in their day-to-day lives, even if that escape is only for a short time. This can be a space of safety from the negative influences of the streets or a space of belonging to something meaningful.

That sentiment was expressed by a group of nine high school philanthropy students. The students decided that they wanted to take on a community project that focused on 'giving back to the youth'. A YouthScape grant gave them that opportunity.

The group decided to help create a space for youth at the local Shelter House. They visited the shelter and saw that the need was there. While the Shelter House did provide an area for teens, from the youth's perspective, it wasn't welcoming. The group met with staff and youth who use the shelter and brainstormed ideas for changes to the space. Their vision was to engage these youth in participating in all aspects in the redesign of their space. Unfortunately, the reality of northern Ontario's cold winter weather and the high volume of homeless people in our community put a stop to the project. The need for beds at the shelter was at an all time high and the youth space was turned into an overflow room. There is still a possibility that a space can be achieved one day, but at present, there is no timeline for this. It was time to regroup and rethink of possible alternatives. The group turned to their adult mentor for guidance.

Discussions brought up several ideas. The adult support-person told the young people about youth centres that were operating in the city. How would they feel about approaching one of these establishments with their proposal to reform a space for young people to use?

Some in the group were hesitant, some disagreed, but in the end they came to a consensus and found a space that provided even greater benefits for the youth. The group learned that many youth who attend the centre also accessed the shelter and they could redesign this new space to better meet the needs of the First Nation youth that came there. Many of these youth were from remote northern communities that were coming to the city for school. For some, it was their first time away from home living in a boarding house. With longer hours of operation, more supervision and access to a broader range of youth, the young people are working together to design the space and provided a safer haven.

*"This space will not only benefit the youth who use it, it will also benefit our group. Maybe friendships will be started, and disengaged youth and engaged youth can work together for positive change."*

—YOUTHSCAPE GRANTEE  
THUNDER BAY



# What We Learned About Creating Youth Friendly Spaces and Places

**Youth spaces allow different types of youth to become involved.**

*“Kids want open and accessible space, but adults make kids go through all these programs before they can just hang out there.”*

—YEAH STAFF HAMILTON

## THE BENEFITS

Creating physical and virtual spaces provides young people with a sense of belonging, which is often a prerequisite for them to be able to contribute to their community. Youth spaces allow different types of youth to become involved. Those with creative skills can share them, and those that simply want to be able to go to a place where they feel accepted can find one.

### INDIVIDUAL YOUNG PEOPLE

- Provides meaningful learning opportunities
- Gives a sense of belonging and safety
- Provides opportunities to work with other youth and adults

### ORGANIZATIONS

- Models positive youth-adult partnerships
- Brings life to the organization
- Strengthens ties with community stakeholders

### COMMUNITY

- Creates community ownership for public domains
- Increases confidence in youth
- Channels youth creativity in a positive direction

## THE CHALLENGES

There are several challenges to keep in mind in creating friendly youth spaces and places. Knowing about them will help you address them.

### INDIVIDUAL YOUNG PEOPLE

- Demands ongoing commitment
- Requires a feeling of ownership and respect for the space
- Requires understanding the protocol of respect for others/ property etc.

### ORGANIZATIONS

- Requires time and commitment
- Calls for long-term connections with young people
- May involve a range of financial and human resources
- May require political and legal support

### COMMUNITY

- Groups of young people can create fear or tension
- Unwillingness to allocate space to young people
- Potential lack of openness to youth's creativity

# Implementing a Youth Friendly Spaces and Places Strategy

There are three key steps in creating youth-friendly spaces and places:

- Identifying the type of space needed
- Creating the ideal place
- Providing for maintenance and commitment

## Identifying the type of space needed

Based on the needs or gaps identified by young people, determine the need for safe spaces or actual places for youth, and what form they could take. Consider if there is a need for the following:

- A physical space where young people can hang out
- A virtual space where youth can interact
- A safe space where young people can be themselves
- A combination of the above

## Creating the ideal place

Once the need is clear, work with the young people that are invested in the idea to identify:

- Key community and individual strengths they can build on
- The availability of unused spaces or places
- Key people that they need to work with or have on side to make their dream happen
- A detailed action plan

With the action plan in place, support the young people in connecting with adult allies in the community and in decision-making positions to secure and create a place, if this is what is needed.

Next, work with the young people to create a nurturing space that is emotionally and physically safe and supportive. Challenge them to create a space/place that will be welcoming for different groups of youth in the community.

*“Young people who come here need someone who sees them as successful. When we focus on ‘marginalized’ kids we need to realize they have many skills learned through survival, which a cushioned kid will not have. Kids who have been on the streets know how to communicate and negotiate, how to find food and clothes and how to get people to listen.*

*Somehow they take care of themselves. They are very smart. They have an unbelievable knowledge of life. It is not about telling them how they fit in. You need to just say we are trying to help.”*

—YOUTHSCAPE STAFF SASKATOON

## YouthScape

Young people feel that an event organized by them and for them makes them feel more a part of the community.

Physically, this will involve decisions on what the space looks like, the colour of the paint, the furniture that is needed etc.

Emotionally, this will involve setting up rules and expectations that people treat each other with respect and that negative attitudes and gang colours are left at the door, etc.

The provision of nutritious, free or inexpensive food can be helpful. Consider approaching local grocery stores to donate food items. It is important to note that safe spaces can be created anywhere and are not dependant on places, but that any place must be safe, in order to be supportive.

## Providing for maintenance and commitment

Engaging young people in decisions about the design of youth-friendly places and spaces is a good start, but to maintain their benefit, young people also need to be involved in setting protocols for their use, determining how funds are spent, developing consequences for when protocols are not followed, establishing clear roles and responsibilities, and preparing transition plans in case someone cannot meet their responsibility.

## Community Events by Youth

For the past few summers, a youth-driven events committee in Rivière des Prairies has organized an annual event where young people can share their musical talents with the community. Held in a centrally located park, this popular event has been very successful with community members of all ages. It is notable for the absence of fights at the event, given that in the past, gang fights have erupted under similar circumstances. The police appreciate working with youth to keep the event safe, and feel the event has improved the relationship between police and youth, which at times have been very tense.

Young people feel that an event organized by them and for them makes them feel more a part of the community; “the fact that the event is organized by youth makes it different, youth want to come; the show is more oriented to youth.”

As part of the event organizing committee, youth were involved in auditing youth talents, seeking out new talents and finding community support for sponsorship.

## The Mural Project

YouthScape Calgary's first project emerged in the form of a stunning mural to beautify the light rail transit vent (a.k.a. "the mushroom") outside the Alberta Trade Centre. The location is fitting because the Trade Centre houses Children and Youth Services and its Youth Employment Centre, Community and Neighbourhood Services, senior management, numerous agencies serving youth and immigrants, as well as Discovering Choices, the Calgary Board of Education's high school outreach program.

Young people who use services in the Alberta Trade Centre worked closely with partnering agencies to develop the overall theme of the mural. During creative brainstorming, they kept in mind that the offices host a range of visitors each day, from young mothers continuing their education, to the director of Community & Neighbourhood Services welcoming officials to meetings; from kids with nowhere else to go, to new immigrants, and the professionals who keep the Centre's services going.

The end result reflects how all services, for both professionals and youth, are interconnected – in part literally, through the mural's bright, puzzle-like design. "We hung out with the kids...in a whole new way," said the manager for Children & Youth Services. "Standing side-by-side in your paint clothes creates a new conversation and builds a different relationship and that's the kind of change we were hoping to see."

"Not only did Calgary Transit give us permission to paint their building, they organized and resourced the installation – a three-day project that included contracting a crew with skyjacks. It wouldn't have happened without their contribution," said a city manager. YouthScape projects like Calgary's newest mural go a long way toward bridging the gap between youth and adults by reinforcing that the distance is usually more perception than reality.

*"We hung out with the kids... in a whole new way. Standing side-by-side in your paint clothes creates a new conversation and builds a different relationship and that's the kind of change we were hoping to see."*

—YOUTHSCAPE STAFF CALGARY

*“I didn’t know I could change my community or that my opinion mattered. But today, with the support of the Youth Challenge Fund and the City, our voices are heard, and I see that young people can do a lot to address the challenges facing their communities, like the cultural segregation that exists here.”*

— YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL  
YOUTH TORONTO

## Setting Up Structures, Shaping Communities

In a recent movement towards a more neighbourhood-oriented approach, Dorset Park, Scarborough was one of the 13 neighbourhoods identified by the City of Toronto as Priority Neighbourhoods for Investment.

This program was developed to support marginalized and racialized young people living in communities without the wealth of opportunities and services enjoyed by other Toronto neighbourhoods. Thanks to a partnership involving the United Way of Toronto, the Youth Challenge Fund, the City of Toronto, the Dorset Park Youth Advisory Council, and other front-line workers, the voices of youth in this community have been heard loud and clear ever since.

After a youth symposium held in Dorset Park by members of the City of Toronto, it was apparent that the biggest concern for many youth in the area was the lack of culturally diverse, youth-friendly spaces. From day one, efforts were made to ensure that the Youth Advisory Council would lead the planning and design of the space. This came with both successes and challenges for the youth and adults involved. Early on, for example, excited staff with good intentions may have created the idea that youth would get exactly what they asked for, leading youth to sometimes hold an over-simplified view of the capital process.

At first, this caused major frustration for the young people, when their ideas did not progress as planned. The complexity of the “adult world” process was at times difficult for young people to fully understand. Adults also found this challenging, because while the satisfaction and involvement of youth was crucial, it was necessary for both parties to work together and to understand one another. Together, young people and adults created a structure to support youth through a separate process so they could participate fully in the capital process. This structure included workshops, public speaking, coaching, and community consultations. Members of the City of Toronto felt that they were able to grow as an institution by learning how to teach youth about their procedures, and by working to find ways for the capital staff to understand young people’s perspective on the project. It has been valuable for everyone to learn how to effectively facilitate productive cooperation between all the parties involved.

During the two years it took to plan and design the sports pad at McGregor Park Recreation Centre, youth led the way, and were key players with their partners from start to finish. When Michael Kerr, a member of the Dorset Park Youth Advisory Council opened the park, he recalled that: “I didn’t know I could change my community or that my opinion mattered. But today, with the support of the Youth Challenge Fund and the City, our voices are heard, and I see that young people can do a lot to address the challenges facing their communities, like the cultural segregation that exists here.”

This Dorset Park initiative is a funding partnership between the Youth Challenge Fund, United Way Toronto, the City of Toronto and the provincial and federal governments. A total of \$1,350,000 has been invested to support the Dorset Park Youth Challenge through on-going capacity building and leadership development, and the development and construction of two community spaces for youth.

## Café Le Spot – Causing a Stir!

Café Le Spot, which is organized and run by young people, is open four days a week. To mobilize and engage young people, Café Le Spot has incorporated elements from a “Recipe for Success” for involving young people in decision-making, developed by the Boscoville YouthScape team (Rivière des Prairies YouthScape partner). The winning mix includes:

- Clearly defining roles and areas of action so that more young people will be able to shoulder responsibility and get involved
- Putting young people in positions where they can make use of their strengths so they feel more capable and more able to participate
- Providing opportunities for young people to genuinely influence decisions, so more young people will be willing to participate in decision-making
- Empowering young people to believe in what they are doing and helping them feel they are contributing, so more young people turn out and get involved
- Providing supportive leaders that can help young people understand and work with existing community structures

Café Le Spot was organized and implemented by the young people themselves. “Nathalie guided us at our meetings and always presented both sides of the question so that our decisions would be as informed and fair as possible,” said Tatiana, a Café Le Spot participant. “But we always had the last word, we made the decisions and we took responsibility for them.” “I was always struck by the harmony in the group,” says Nathalie. “Everyone felt able to present their ideas without fear of being judged by others.

They had very different life experiences and came from different backgrounds, but they figured out how to make use of their differences to develop their community project with respect... they saw a need in their community and they threw themselves into filling it!”

Café Le Spot allowed the participants to work as a team, make decisions as a group, carry out a project from start to finish, and brainstorm unique ideas. They discovered and worked with individual and group strengths and limitations.

On opening day, Café Le Spot participant, Ernest said: “I felt I really mattered. I finally realized the project was for real and I could apply in practice things I had learned at school. I felt I was growing up, was finally doing something constructive, and had become a responsible adult.”

Café Le Spot was a 32-week component of an employment-creation program for dropout youth removed from the work force. Originally, Café Le Spot was envisioned as developing into a cooperative; however, due to administrative issues and a drop in the motivation of the youth originally involved, this has not happened.

The three key ingredients in building Café Le Spot have been:

- Creating a space where young adults can feel accepted for who they are
- Developing a place where people can take part in a variety of activities
- Providing a space where youth can express themselves in a positive way



## Creating Youth Friendly Spaces and Places: A Checklist for Success

- Think creatively about which spaces and places might work
- Involve youth in all stages of planning, implementation and maintenance
- Involve adult allies who have appropriate connections and experience from the start
- Adapt the space to accommodate different youth
- Pay attention to both the physical and emotional environment
- Focus on making everyone feel welcome and safe

### activity 6

#### Community-Youth Friendly Open Space

Open Space activities are ideal for youth who may not be comfortable talking about certain topics, because in an open space setting, participants choose the topic or theme that best suits their interest and comfort level.

» see Appendix 2





# Working in Partnership

Working in partnership provides an opportunity to link, network and communicate across sectors to better serve the needs of youth in the community.

Communities and key stakeholders across all sectors that affect young people’s lives need to work together, especially in these tough economic times when our already fragmented service delivery system is strained.

*“We all have a blueprint for life... and if we were just to show each other our plans, then maybe the bigger plan can start to change, to adapt to all our needs, but we must first come together. This is the first step.”*

— YOUTHSCAPE YOUTH COORDINATOR SASKATOON

..... YouthScape

## HRM’s Youth Engagement Strategy

In 2002, the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM), led by Community Recreation, initiated a Youth Engagement Strategy with the goal to “increase capacity to directly engage youth and communities in the development and delivery of programs and services to make HRM a more youth friendly municipality.”

The Halifax Regional Municipality is a complex organization governing a region larger than Prince Edward Island. Following are some of the lessons we learned as we transformed it into a youth-friendly place.

### Plan services WITH youth, not FOR youth

We learned it was important to shift our perspectives and roles, to see young people as partners in community development. This shift helps frontline workers become coaches and supportive adults, as young people lead a program or service initiative.

### Create a support network for staff

It can be challenging to create a change like this. We learned it was important to create a network where staff could share stories of successes, confusion and frustrations, and exchange experiences about things that work well. This network also helps staff feel supported in exploring new ideas.

### Build good relationships

We discovered how important it is to understand the interests and passions of young people, to involve and support them, and to listen without judging. Council members, senior staff and front-line workers all need to understand and support the principles of youth engagement.

A Youth Engagement Strategy can help communities increase their capacity to directly engage youth in the development and delivery of programs.

Halifax



**A municipality may need to rely on outside resources and knowledge to implement a Youth Engagement Strategy.**

**A knowledgeable and credible community partner is key to implementing these strategies.**

*continued...*

#### Embrace flexibility

Any large organizational structure requires procedures and processes, but working successfully with youth requires a lot of flexibility. To accomplish this:

- Make sure youth engagement is a priority for staff
- Create flexible staff schedules to allow for meetings in the evening and on weekends
- Allow staff to use current communication technology such as text messaging and Facebook
- Be prepared to operate on 'youth time'. This may mean shifting from lengthy consultations to more immediate action
- Try multiple tools and strategies: different approaches work for different people

#### Help young people govern

We learned it is important to have several ways for youth to have a place at decision-making tables. Some techniques to try:

- Establish a youth council
- Create community-friendly consultation sessions (World Cafés) with a relaxed and supportive atmosphere and clearly worded questions
- Set up Youth Action Teams – action-oriented groups including youth and adults that take on tangible tasks
- Find ways for youth to attend and participate in meetings and gatherings around the municipality so they can hear first-hand about successes and challenges

#### Create Community Partnerships

A municipality may need to rely on outside resources and knowledge to implement a Youth Engagement Strategy.

We learned how important it is to have a knowledgeable community partner. HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development has almost twenty years of experience in community youth development. They supported our management and staff as we worked toward youth engagement.

» [www.heartwood.ns.ca](http://www.heartwood.ns.ca)

Our partnership with YouthScape has brought us additional resources, a connection to a national learning community, and an innovative youth granting program. YouthScape showed us how youth and adults can work successfully together.

» [www.youthscapehrm.ca](http://www.youthscapehrm.ca)

For more detailed documentation and lessons from the HRM Youth Engagement Strategy, please check out the website:

» [www.halifax.ca](http://www.halifax.ca)

# What We Learned About Working in Partnership

## THE BENEFITS

There are numerous advantages of working in partnership that are important to recognize in order to leverage the opportunities.

### INDIVIDUAL YOUNG PEOPLE

- Teaches the value of working with community partners
- Develops an appreciation of how different community sectors affect everyone's lives

### ORGANIZATIONS

- Shares best practices of meaningful engagement
- Identifies and minimizes duplication and gaps in service
- Establishes a collaborative learning community

### COMMUNITY

- Breaks down silos
- Pools resources
- Establishes coordinated efforts to address an issue

**Working in partnership provides an opportunity to link, network and communicate across sectors to better serve the needs of youth in the community.**

## THE CHALLENGES

Working across sectors and building partnerships with people/organizations who do not generally work together is challenging. Being aware of these challenges can be helpful in overcoming them.

### INDIVIDUAL YOUNG PEOPLE

- Youth inclusion and engagement efforts are often sidelined
- Time and format of meetings are often not welcoming to young people

### ORGANIZATIONS

- Demands a new way of thinking and working
- Requires time and collaborative leadership
- Demands building of trust and a sense of community
- Requires high levels of commitment
- May require significant financial, human, political and legal resources
- Challenges organizations to see the ongoing need and value of collaboration

### COMMUNITY

- Demands a new way of doing things
- Difficult to see the long-term impact
- Requires tangible and concrete actions to stay motivated

*“Sometimes they don’t understand why we want to work together. They think we might have a hidden agenda.”*

*“Leadership of the Consortium is a collective responsibility. It does not belong to a single organization. It is the youth within the organizations that need to contribute; youth involvement cannot be limited to those who have been part of our Boscoville and Béluga projects.”*

—YOUTHSCAPE PARTICIPANT  
RIVIÈRE DES PRAIRIES

# Implementing a Partnership Strategy

There are three essential steps to implementing a partnership strategy:

- Identifying partners
- Nurturing partnerships
- Gaining influence

## Identifying partners

### FIND THE RIGHT FIT

Collaborate with young people to critically examine the issue you want to address, and consider all the sectors that may be involved. Consider which community organizations or people you need to work with to accomplish your goals. Then target the people and organizations that fit best with what you want to do. You will be surprised at how many different sectors are involved in shaping young people’s lives!

### BE STRATEGIC

Build on existing networks and relationships when inviting partners and take the time to build trust before the real work begins.

## Nurturing partnerships

### BUILD A LEARNING COMMUNITY

Create a safe space where partners are comfortable sharing their successful and unsuccessful stories, and offer learning events and training programs.

### VALUE COLLECTIVE OWNERSHIP

Find ways for everyone to see the value of the partnership, and the responsibility to move the agenda forward. It helps to rotate hosting and agenda setting among partners.

### VARY MEETING FORMATS

Meet in different places and at different times, and vary the way you facilitate the meeting. Consider offering food to make it a welcoming environment.

## The Youth Service Provider Network

The Victoria Youth Service Provider Network is a collective that is open to all members in the youth-serving community. Its aim is to provide the best possible service for youth through active collaboration, communication, and relationship building. One of the network’s key contributions is an online resource – a youth portal for Victoria and surrounding areas: [» www.YouthCore.ca](http://www.YouthCore.ca)

### OUR OBJECTIVES

- To improve working relationships and referral systems among youth service-providers in Greater Victoria by sharing information and meeting quarterly to network and strategize
- To collaborate on an annual event that celebrates diverse youth and their achievements and works to improve the lives of all youth
- To collaboratively facilitate a website and online community calendar with an inclusive roster of youth-related programs, events, and organizations
- To work together to improve the profile of “youth” in Victoria and raise community and media awareness of youth related-issues, services, events and opportunities

While we have no formal requirements, we try to work together every year, and we cooperate on online developments for the portal and supporting the online listserv.

### REFLECTIONS

At first, key community leaders were not convinced about the value of this network. We set it up without the support of most managers and directors of youth-service organizations. Three years later, we are still going strong, and now have the support of those who used to doubt the value of our work.

### WHAT WE LEARNED

- Involve local, front-line workers in relationship-building meetings
- Create a central administrative hub with equal and distributed leadership roles
- Commit to tasks that are doable and not overwhelming
- Be flexible, use technology and spread the word to youth across community sectors
- Don’t seek support from people who do not believe in what you’re doing – you need champions who are fully behind you
- Don’t force technology – allow people time to gain skills and confidence
- Be patient. Building relationships slowly and steadily is key

The Victoria Youth Service Provider Network is a collective that is open to all members in the youth-serving community.

Its aim is to provide the best possible service for youth through active collaboration, communication, and relationship building.

## Gaining influence

As you begin to work together with your partners and with young people, you will begin to see ways to exert your collective influence to create change. Ask yourselves:

- Can we change policies so they better support the engagement of young people in vulnerable situations?
- Is there funding available to support our work? Are the guidelines and application processes accessible and reporting requirements realistic? Can we change anything to make funding more accessible?
- Do our evaluation processes and performance reviews incorporate questions about how youth were involved?

## YouthScape

calgary

*“When we spent \$3,000 marketing a health promotion contest, we got 50 entries. For our YouthScape bus pass contest, we spent nothing, and got 260 submissions. The difference? Our partnership with the City got us buy-in with the School Boards. Now everyone believes that we’re onto something big.”*

— YOUTHSCAPE STAFF CALGARY

## Why partner buy-in is important

YouthScape Calgary’s bus pass design project involved two school boards, Calgary Transit, The City of Calgary, and the Chinook Centre shopping mall.

This broad partnership helped us reach young people with information about the contest, without racking up expenses. In the past, when we’ve run contests, we’ve spent thousands of dollars on promotion. Connecting with key partners showed us much more efficient and cost-effective ways to get our message across.

# Working in Partnership: A Checklist for Success

- Focus on adding value
- Foster a sense of shared ownership and collective responsibility
- Model good youth engagement principles and provide partners with tangible experiences
- Celebrate 'small wins' on the way to a long term goal
- Provide ongoing opportunities for partners to engage with youth
- Provide feedback to help partners reflect on their practice and embed youth engagement principles in their organization
- Establish working principles and values, and address any conflict, disruptive or negative behaviour immediately



## activity 7

### Skill Swapping

This activity shows participants visually how relationships can be created to achieve project goals.

» see Appendix 2





# 4.0





## 4.0 Nurturing Relationships

Supporting the meaningful collaboration between youth and adults is as much about process as it is about results, especially when working with vulnerable populations. Infusing young people's perspectives into social change initiatives involves more than creating an opportunity. It is about practices that allow youth and adults to discover new ways of working together.

In YouthScape, we found two practices were key to creating a supportive environment that nurtures relationships and enables youth engagement:

- 4.1 Building trust
- 4.2 Establishing allies



## Building Trust

Trust is one of the most critical components of success for individual young people, between adults and youth, and between community organizations working together. You can build trust and more inclusive relationships through effective:

- Facilitation
- Agenda design
- Use of common language

### YouthScape

HRM  
LITIX

*“Youth will mirror whatever they get. If adults are sincere, youth will be sincere too. If you’re there for youth, youth will be there for you.”*

— YOUTHSCAPE STAFF HRM

### Relationship-building

Young people say that in order to build healthy youth-adult partnerships, trust is essential. Trust helps young people to feel secure in their development and increases their sense of belonging. This is a story about a group of young men who are trying to find and build trust with adults in their community.

#### IDENTIFYING AN ISSUE

In a rural community of HRM, youth were seeing a lack of cohesiveness in their community, and so were feeling that they were losing their support networks. The youth were being lost in the shuffle and young people were raising themselves. As part of the solution a group of young men applied for a grant to seek access to a recreation centre as a safe place for youth in the community.

#### ADULT AND GOVERNMENT PROCESS VS. YOUTH COMMON SENSE

Approaching the adults who controlled the recreation center was met with challenges. There were many systematic processes and rules which created additional barriers and the adults didn’t take the time to explain why these rules existed or where they came from.

With financial support and coaching from YouthScape HRM these young men were able to formalize their project and learn new communication skills which enabled them to overcome these barriers.

Here are a few suggestions from these young people on how to increase the level of trust between youth and adults:

#### Increase Positive Interactions and Relationships with Youth

Positive relationships between youth and adults can be transformative for both parties. Many young people desperately need positive adults in their life, and the rewards for adults can be extremely rich.

#### Positive Role Modeling

Youth see the importance of positive role modeling. They learn this message through both their negative and positive experiences with adults.

#### Work with Youth to Remove Barriers

Give youth complete information so that they understand the situation and structures that may not make sense to them, rather than simply denying an activity. Work with them to change the structures and systems that prevent their involvement.



## Facilitation

When engaging with youth, the way an initiative or an event is facilitated has a major impact on its outcome.

The facilitator sets the tone, works with participants to establish the working parameters, creates a sense of group ownership, helps focus and structure the discussions and supports participants in reaching their goals. Establishing trust is essential for this process to occur. To build trust as a facilitator, you can:

### CREATE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT THAT EMBODIES THE INITIATIVE'S VALUES

#### Use a positive approach

Stay positive and energetic and focus on strengths.

#### Be a role model

Support and guide young people, but do not direct them or take over their process.

#### Build relationships

Help young people feel valued and respected. Be sensitive and sincere.

#### Be patient and flexible

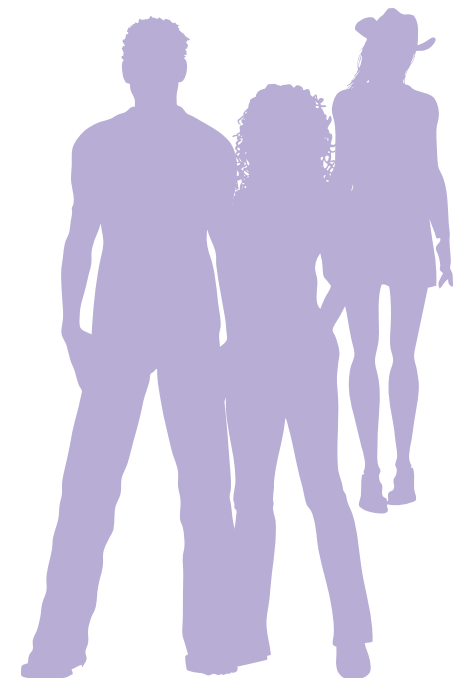
If an activity/discussion goes off track, gently try to bring it back – and don't forget your sense of humour!

#### Help youth feel comfortable

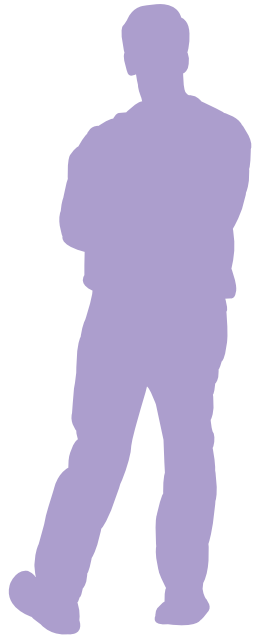
Encourage young people to express opinions and feelings freely without judgement. Emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers.

*“Speaking at me for hours and showing me PowerPoint presentations isn't the best way to inspire me or hold my interest. I have ideas to share, if someone allows me to share them. I wish more workshops were like YouthScape, where I get to talk with everyone as equals, have my opinions heard and have fun doing it.”*

—YOUTHSCAPE YOUTH PARTICIPANT HALIFAX



The facilitator sets the tone, works with participants to establish the working parameters, creates a sense of group ownership, helps focus and structure the discussions and supports participants in reaching their goals.



#### Listen carefully

Take time and listen carefully to young people and their stories.

#### Pay attention to body language.

Watch young people's body language (fidgeting, being noisy or aggressive, or being very shy and quiet). Look for written and spoken clues about how they are feeling during activities; issues may come up for them.

#### Talk to young people on their level

Sit with young people while they are doing activities, don't hover over them. Ask questions and try to understand how they see their lives and their community. Dress comfortably and casually.

#### Make sure everyone understands

If your group is made up of different age groups, it may be helpful to divide them and provide instructions that are suited to each age group. Make sure that everyone knows what to do.

#### Be inclusive

Encourage all young people to participate, including those with physical or mental challenges, those who are isolated or those who have emotional considerations. Never force someone to participate if they are not ready.

#### Hold people accountable

Don't be afraid to hold people accountable for their behaviour. Be firm but respectful and create an opportunity outside of the group to talk through any issues.

### ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

#### Privacy is important

Make it clear that you believe young people's privacy is extremely important, but that although the group may agree not to share views with outside people, you cannot guarantee that this will happen.

#### Identify external support

Be sure to identify external support for young people who may need to discuss issues raised in more depth.

#### Be prepared to follow up

Watch for young people who may need extra support, and follow up about anyone who discloses issues of vulnerability (e.g. abuse) that require further attention.

#### Be an "advocate"

You may need to intervene, speak for, or support vulnerable young people who share their experiences.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Adapted from Javeg, E., "Guidelines on Listening to and Talking With Children Who are Psychologically Distressed," Redd Barne, Oslo, 1988.

# Agenda Design

Meetings, events or gatherings help build trust with a larger group if they are done well. An agenda determines the tone, the relative importance of different items, and the ultimate outcome of a meeting. It also establishes the order, time spent on each piece, how presentations occur, how resources are used and what role each participant plays.

## DESIGNING AN AGENDA

### One or Two People

One or two people can take the lead in designing and delivering an agenda. This may be less difficult and time consuming, but may not build community ownership of the agenda.

### Collaborative

Several stakeholders can collaborate in building an agenda. This is usually an iterative process which both sets the agenda and creates buy-in. You must be clear about how decisions will be made and ensure that everyone feels their voice has been heard. This model while effective is quite time consuming.

### Open space

When you have a small group with common interests that work effectively together, you may want to consider using open space and small group conversations to create an agenda at the event. In an open space design, group participants generate the agenda, proposing the topic or theme they want to focus on. This can support a youth-driven process, but may create discomfort with some as it is less structured and topics and materials are often not prepared in advance.

## EFFECTIVE AGENDAS

Effective agendas for meetings and gatherings nurture diverse relationships, both between and among youth and adults. Here are a few points to consider:

### Recognize different learning and presentation styles

Include a combination of agenda formats to allow participants – both young people and adults – to process and contribute ideas in different ways. Create opportunities to learn by:

- Seeing – graffiti walls, timelines, impact drawings
- Listening – music, presentations, discussions
- Moving/doing – games, making crafts, taking photos

YouthScape's national gatherings have been designed progressively with increasing community and youth involvement.

### MAY 2007: LAUNCH

Core team organized and facilitated the agenda with advisory and funder input

### NOV 2008: INITIATION OF COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Larger team of adult facilitators organized the agenda with two youth host facilitators

### JAN 2009: YOUTH PROJECTS IN PROCESS

A diverse team co-hosted, organized and facilitated the agenda with significant input from youth and community partners

### NOV 2009: SHARING LESSONS: CELEBRATING SUCCESSES

Young people and community partners co-designed, hosted, organized and facilitated the agenda

**Providing youth an opportunity to share their stories, talents and visions with their community in creative ways is another way to build an inspiring agenda.**

**Take the time to discuss ‘loaded’ and uncommon words like ‘marginalized’, ‘diversity’ and ‘systems change’.**

#### Provide parallel sessions

Depending on the size of your group, you may want to organize different activities that occur simultaneously. This will allow participants to contribute to topics that interest them. Allow for space and time to reconnect with one another to share key points from each session or to provide opportunities to repeat activities such as workshops.

#### Integrate fun activities

Young people and adults all need ‘downtime’ to energize and ‘absorb’ what they have learned. Fun activities that can target specific groups or focus on a specific purpose or message are a great way to do this.

#### Encourage creative presentations

Providing youth an opportunity to share their stories, talents and visions with their community in creative ways is another way to build an inspiring agenda. It can engage participants, challenge negative perceptions and provide a platform to showcase abilities, skills and talents.

## Use of common language

Language can be a source of miscommunication and exclusion – or a way to bring people together.

Building trust with and working effectively with youth requires finding and using a common language: one that everyone understands. You may need to discuss the meaning of ‘loaded’ words like: youth engagement, marginalized, or diversity; or terms that are familiar to you, but may carry little or no meaning for young people like: systems change or comprehensive.

### KEY TIPS

#### Use plain and simple words

Avoid technical terms, acronyms, and buzzwords. That doesn’t mean you should underestimate young people’s ability to understand complex topics if you explain them properly. Plain language does not compromise learning or critical thinking, but allows everyone to participate on an equal footing.

#### Create appealing visuals

Consider using imagery or metaphors in documents and during meetings or events. They can help to explain or support detailed or complex ideas. You may ask yourself: Is the document organized in a way that is easy to follow? Are there photos or images that help support the message visually and break up the text?

Simplifying the language you use may take some thought to begin with, but in the long run, you will find it easier to connect with and include both young people and community members.

## How to Break Down Language Barriers

### Slow down and explain new terms

Help participants feel comfortable about pausing a conversation to understand a new term or acronym.

### Develop your own definitions

You can do this during an event or on-line (e.g. creating a 'wiki', or a blog using a social networking site, etc).

For instance, you could use flip-chart paper and markers and allow the participants of all ages to discuss the meaning of a new term and build a definition together. Posting the new definitions on the wall lets people refer back to it if they need to.

### Prepare a Glossary

Circulate a list of important terms and definitions to help everyone get on the same page and include it in orientation packages.

### Provide graphic illustrations

Use images and diagrams to illustrate written stories and documents. Draw an agenda instead of writing it, or have participants illustrate key points from a discussion.

Youth-organized forums can include:

#### ART SHOWS AND EVENTS

Community events that showcase young people's skills and talents (e.g. summer shows in parks)

#### FILM & VIDEO BROADCASTING

Videos to share young people's life stories and create greater understanding (e.g. around homelessness)

#### JOURNAL MAGAZINES OR NEWSLETTERS

Writing and designing print material (e.g. comic book, poster, photos)

#### COMMUNITY DIALOGUES ON SPECIFIC THEMES

Community dialogues on issues of importance to young people and their community (e.g. gang violence, public perceptions of youth)

#### PRESENTATIONS

Individually, as a group, or with key adult allies on specific issues and to specific audiences



## 4.2

*“If we want to continue with Youth Engagement and for there to be more ripples [in our community], we need to have those adult support people building their skills and becoming better in Youth Engagement.”*

—CITY OFFICIAL, HRM

*“Becoming an adult ally requires the skill and attitude to be an equal partner with youth. It means letting youth make their own decisions even if you don’t agree with them and being willing to share power with youth and relinquish control over how things get done as hard as that may be. An adult ally is someone who stands up for and reaches out to youth.”*

—YOUTHSCAPE ADULT ALLY  
THUNDER BAY

# Establishing Allies

Allies play a critical role in implementing youth engagement strategies. An ally can be another young person (or pair of young people), an individual adult, or an adult connected to a relevant sector or organization. Allies can provide valuable new outlooks and attitudes.

The role of an ally is to:

- Support the development of a young person’s idea or work (e.g. encouraging a young person to ‘dream big’)
- Walk alongside a young person as they implement their project
- Help ‘trouble shoot’ and work through problems or challenges
- Connect the young person to organizations or resources that can increase the impact of their idea (e.g. introducing them to a City Councillor responsible for a sports and recreation program)

## Matching young people with an ally

You can use several strategies to match young people with allies:

- Organizations can put out a call for volunteers and actively recruit allies
- Young people can choose their own allies (e.g. a teacher, parent, older youth mentor)
- An ally may volunteer to become involved in supporting young people

The important thing is to let young people decide if they want or need an ally, and to consider how an ally’s skills and experience will fit with needs and interests of the youth team or project.

## Getting started as a youth ally

Here’s how to become an effective youth ally:

- Listen to the young person’s ideas and plans without making judgments
- Maintain some distance from the project so the young person can ‘own’ it



- Help the young person find valid and constructive resources, and prompt them to look for new ways to tackle issues and challenges
- After a young person identifies a project focus or idea they want to pursue, encourage them to get feedback and ideas from their community
- Help the young person identify other allies in their community – there may be other community members who could offer support, provide sponsorship, or help in other ways to ensure the young person’s idea is a success

Experience working with young people does not always translate into being a successful ally...

How would you assess your own ways of working with young people?

## Self assessment: Are you a good ally?

Experience working with young people does not always translate into being a successful ally, particularly for adults or peer mentors use to being in supervisory roles (e.g. teacher, sports coach, or parent). How would you assess your own ways of working with young people?

### 1. CIRCLE ONE NUMBER FOR EACH QUESTION

1=VERY ADEQUATE   2=SOMEWHAT ADEQUATE   3=SOMEWHAT INADEQUATE   4=VERY INADEQUATE

Truly respecting their ideas	1	2	3	4
Giving encouragement	1	2	3	4
Providing resources for activities	1	2	3	4
Listening carefully	1	2	3	4
Promoting active participation	1	2	3	4
Dealing with bureaucracies	1	2	3	4
Building community support	1	2	3	4
Helping them get organized	1	2	3	4
Encouraging critical thinking	1	2	3	4

2. ADD THE CIRCLED NUMBERS AND PUT THE TOTAL HERE \_\_\_\_\_

3. UNDERLINE THE ITEMS THAT YOU FEEL YOU NEED TO IMPROVE.

4. CIRCLE AN ITEM YOU COULD START CHANGING TODAY.

5. THINK ABOUT HOW YOU CAN PUT THAT IN PRACTICE.



One of the biggest challenges I found was keeping the youth involved without making too many suggestions of my own.

## Learning from a Youth Ally and Mentor

My name is Sadie. I am a twenty year old university student working with YouthScape. A group of students and a teacher from Hammarskjold high school approached YouthScape through a proposal application which asked for an estimated \$25,000 to build a bike garage on the school grounds. They wanted a bike shelter so they could have a safe place to store their bikes so that more students would ride their bikes to school.

Working with this group as a youth mentor I have faced a few challenges. I have tried to:

### SUPPORT WITHOUT LEADING

One of the biggest challenges I found was keeping the youth involved without making too many suggestions of my own. I overcame this problem by stepping back and appointing a student to chair the meeting. The students decide what was most important to discuss during the meetings. This helped them to take ownership of the project and determine where they would like to see the project go ahead. They decided that they would focus on fundraising for the building first, and apply for “green” grants.

### NURTURE GOOD IDEAS

The young people had a lot of great ideas for the bike garage initiative, including what they wanted it to look like, how it could enhance the school community and how they could raise money for it. During my last meeting with the group I asked them what they felt they have accomplished and how they have changed. Even though they have yet to initiate any fundraising initiatives, the group felt they had solid ideas and were confident they could move forward with them.

### BUILD ON STRENGTHS

It can be hard for groups to focus on strengths instead of the barriers and struggles they face. I believe that once the group has a formal proposal for YouthScape they will feel even more confident in moving forward with fundraising initiatives. They want to have a more solid financial base before they approach the school board with a proposal.

### PROVIDE USEFUL SUPPORT

I realized I needed to make myself available to the young people I was working with. To be supportive of their views and ideas, and create a safe place for them to engage in brainstorming, we met in person at a coffee shop, by phone or text message or over the Internet depending on what worked best for both of us.

# Tips to Consider

## CHECK IN OFTEN

It's important to stay in contact and discuss successes and challenges young people may be facing – and remember to ask them how you can help.

## BE WILLING TO ASK FOR HELP FROM STAFF OR OTHER ALLIES IF YOU NEED IT

## FOCUS ON SKILLS AND STRENGTHS

Move the focus from what youth don't have to acknowledging the competence and knowledge they do have.

## PROVIDE GENTLE REMINDERS

You can help the young person stay on top of logistics, reporting, goals and deadlines, as well as providing encouragement and help.

## CREATE CONNECTIONS

Put youth in touch with other young people that have successfully completed grant projects.

## LINK PROJECTS AND PARTNERS

When you see a possible connection between a young person's project and a community organization, create a link between the two.

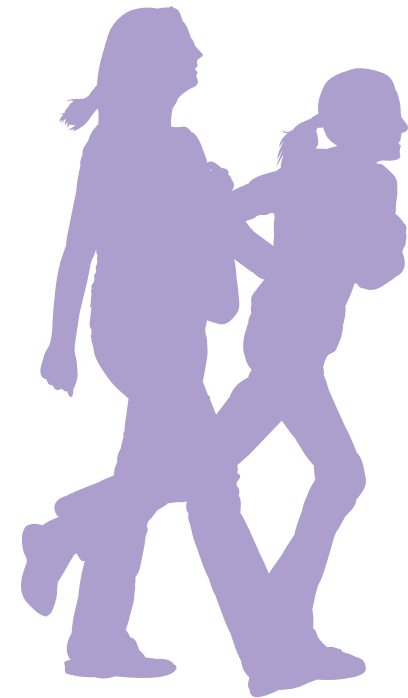
Being an effective ally also requires follow-up support.

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## Providing follow-up support

Being an effective ally also requires follow-up support. Be sure to:

- Encourage participants to discuss their project after it is finished – discussing strengths and challenges and how they can be resolved can help build a better project next time, and can also inspire other young people to take on their own projects
- Encourage other young people to continue the community work that has already been started
- Offer opportunities for young people to identify new issues to tackle in their school, neighbourhood or community



*“If we continue to persist we will persevere – always looking forward and never looking back.”*

—YOUTHCAPE GRANTEE  
THUNDER BAY

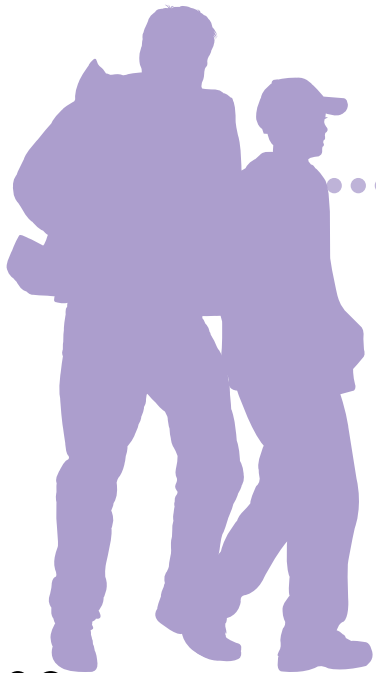
## Overcoming Challenges

In Thunder Bay, a team of young people wanted to start a hockey skating night each week, but there were many challenges to overcome.

- The city union was reluctant to put up the hockey rink boards and open the existing building
- The young people needed an indoor area for tying skates and warming hands
- There was an underutilized skating pond and some boards available, but the city felt there were already enough boarded rinks and that the available boards were needed elsewhere
- The city also said it was too late in the season to put the request for a rink through the review and approval process

The young people didn't give up. They took in all the information they had gathered, and decided to put their request in earlier for the following year. Beginning in the summer, they contacted the city parks and recreation department, inquiring about the possibility of having a boarded rink for the upcoming season. Then another setback: this time, they were too early, and the decision-makers were on vacation! By the time they adjusted to school again in the fall, and took up the project again, it was too late again.

Despite these frustrations, they have been able to continue the skating nights on the un-boarded pond, and through a partnership with the neighbourhood organization, they were successful in convincing the city to let them use a nearby building for skate-tying and warm-ups. As they continue to encounter these challenges, the young people say, “If we continue to persist we will persevere – always looking forward and never looking back.”



# Establishing Relationships: A Checklist for Success

- Build trust among participants and between groups
- Create inclusive meetings and events
- Establish a common language
- Agree upon meanings of important concepts and use visual representation where possible
- Engage adult and youth allies from different sectors
- Identify allies that fit the situation
- Build skills to be an effective ally
- Commit to following up and providing support throughout



## activity 8

### Family Portrait Game

This activity is perfect for youth to use their creativity and team building skills in creating and nurturing relationships with each other and with their adult allies.

» see Appendix 2



# 5.0



# 5.0

## 5.0 Measuring Impact

It is important to reflect on the action strategies you have undertaken and to document their impacts so you can track progress and make the changes required.

Here you will find some tools and strategies to help your organization track and leverage its efforts to meaningfully involve young people in social change.

- 5.1 Tracking Change
- 5.2 Sustaining Impact



# 5.1

## Tracking Change

In social change initiatives, meaningful, and lasting impacts may take years (if not decades) to see. Measuring change can be challenging if results aren't seen until long after individual programs and projects have ended.

It can also be difficult to pinpoint precisely how initiatives are linked to changes in behaviour or relationships when there are many other factors at play.

It is therefore critical to:

- Collect the information – research
- Understand the information – reflection
- Share the learning – reporting





## Different Definitions of Success: A Practitioner's Reflection

Being part of a national learning group, means that you start to share stories, experiences and sometimes, big challenges. I had an informal conversation with a colleague about two similar youth conference projects that our two respective communities were supporting through the YouthScape initiative. When speaking with my colleague I discovered the other community's youth had faced huge challenges in organizing and executing their youth conference, while our youth conference was a huge success, accessing over 150 young middle-school-aged youth, and sparking new youth-led projects to boot.

It got me thinking – was it luck of the draw? What made one initiative more effective than the other? In our case some key people in power positions were engaged. In this case it was teachers. Our youth felt that teacher involvement was essential in enabling and ensuring that the young people attended the conference. They actually mirrored many of the administrative processes that a school itself would put in place to produce a conference or youth event. This was unlike the other community, which did not use an administrative approach with the teachers and school.

The youth team in Victoria was also very formal in their organization, with weekly meetings, formal roles and clear responsibilities (everything from food liaisons, to venue administration, to registration etc.). They identified a leader who was very prompt and who implemented consequences with those not pulling their weight. In all honesty, I was flabbergasted that the youth were okay with the strict container, but the group thrived.

Not everything went perfectly, but the problems were basically the same thing that happens with adults at conferences all the time. Unlike the other community's conference, it was highly institutionalized, administratively assertive and embodied many of the organizational mechanisms that the target audience and system itself practices. Our youth team essentially became the system they were trying to impact, gaining a unique station of legitimacy!

My understanding of the other community's approach was that it was much more organic and infused with a more flexible container for youth involvement, registration and planning administration. So why didn't it work?

I've come to the conclusion that both conferences accomplished different things and were successful in different ways. Our group was essentially able to mirror and manipulate the system's administrative red tape to function more effectively within the system itself. On the flip side, the other youth group enabled young people to define the ways which worked best for them; the challenges they encountered revealed how unfriendly and static the system really was.

It begs a bigger question: How can systems be supportive of creative containers for youth engagement when young people are never seen as legitimate organizers unless they structure their work within specialized, systemic administrative processes? This reflection has made me think twice about how I see a youth-led initiative as "successful" and understand that success isn't necessarily the perception of a great turn out; in many ways the other community's experience demonstrates more innovation and ingenuity, or perhaps ours was more innovative because it manipulated a decidedly un-youth friendly system. Either way, how one defines success is definitely something to think about.

*"This reflection has made me think twice about how I see a youth-led initiative as "successful" and understand that success isn't necessarily the perception of a great turn out."*

—YOUTHCAPE MANAGER  
VICTORIA



# Collecting Information

There are a number of conventional tools such as questionnaires, interviews and focus groups that can help you collect information. Remember to adapt them to the purpose and the audience(s) you want to engage.

## RESEARCH TOOL

### Questionnaires

#### PURPOSE

Questionnaires can gather data from individual participants, and can help track changes across time and locations. They can be completed in person or online.

#### YOUTHSCAPE APPLICATION

We created a questionnaire to find out how much young people contributed in the application and implementation of youth-driven grants, and the perceived learning from the project. We used the questionnaire in two communities during learning forums, where it led to a conversation on the nature of youth-led grants and created the basis for an educational tool. For a sample see:

» [www.youthscape.ca](http://www.youthscape.ca)

## RESEARCH TOOL

### Focus Groups

#### PURPOSE

Focus groups are carefully planned discussions designed to find out people's perceptions about a defined topic, in a permissive and non-threatening environment.

#### YOUTHSCAPE APPLICATION

YouthScape conducted focus groups with a range of stakeholders, such as municipal staff, to discuss impacts and learning from YouthScape. These facilitated conversations have helped document learning, and also helped participants to collectively process, reflect and strategize about next steps.

## RESEARCH TOOL

### Interviews

#### PURPOSE

Interviews are one-on-one facilitated conversations where the interviewer asks questions (open or closed) to the interviewee on a defined topic.

#### YOUTHSCAPE APPLICATION

We conducted interviews with a range of YouthScape stakeholders (youth, staff, and partner organizations) to explore learning and assess the impact of YouthScape. Interviewees have found the experience a useful way to process their experience.

# Understanding the Information

Once you have collected the information, it is important to make sense of it and to figure out how the lessons you have learned can help projects to move forward. In addition to self-reflection activities such as journaling, you may want to use one or more of the following tools or activities to reflect with your group.

## REFLECTION TOOL

### Metaphors

## PURPOSE

Metaphors are comparisons that show how two things that are not alike in most ways are similar in one important way.

## YOUTHSCAPE APPLICATION

In Rivière des Prairies, youth were encouraged to think about a metaphor to convey that sports are important to their mental and physical health.

## REFLECTION TOOL

### Participatory Physical Tool

## PURPOSE

Participants physically move to locate their perspective on a given issue, with the help of a visual tool.

## YOUTHSCAPE APPLICATION

We used this tool to measure projects on the youth engagement spectrum.

## REFLECTION TOOL

### Most Significant Change

## PURPOSE

This tool helps participants to highlight key moments or transformations. It helps capture key threads in an experience that may span a long time or involve multiple players.

## YOUTHSCAPE APPLICATION

In Rivière des Prairies, this tool helped youth realize that their greatest moments were when they felt “they were the boss”, and how they needed to be self-critical about their own leadership and responsibility.

#### REFLECTION TOOL

### Reflection Wheel

#### PURPOSE

Used to evaluate progress, this tool can be used individually or collectively. It maps out where the project is currently, and where it is expected to go. First, the criteria (or indicators) to evaluate the project are agreed on. These provide the spokes of the wheel (generally no more than 6) that helps participants evaluate the project.

#### YOUTHSCAPE APPLICATION

**BIGGER SCALE:** Early on in YouthScape, we used the wheel to provide a scan of the initiatives across five YouthScape sites. In one community, for instance, adults rated organizational change high but youth questioned the rating, pointing out that this was not clear from their actions.

**SMALLER SCALE:** Youth used this activity to explore indicators of success for their granting projects.

#### REFLECTION TOOL

### Solution Tree

#### PURPOSE

This activity helps you examine a problem in terms of its root causes and possible solutions.

#### YOUTHSCAPE APPLICATION

In a mapping project where young people had gained a lot of data on the issue, the solution tree helped go deeper with the data and provided a road map for them to identify ways of moving forward.

#### REFLECTION TOOL

### Apples and Onions

#### PURPOSE

This activity can help a group to evaluate a meeting, event or their success at being a team. The goal is to hear feedback in an appreciative way to focus on improvements for next time.

#### YOUTHSCAPE APPLICATION

In Halifax, each participant stands in a circle to share something they liked (represented by an apple) and something they would like to improve for the next meeting or event (represented by an onion).

“My apple was being able to share my ideas on the project and feeling like my feedback was valuable. My onion was that next time I hope we have more youth attend.”

## Our YouthScape River

YouthScape is like a river. Sometimes the water moves quickly and sometimes it moves slowly, but it is always going somewhere. Each river is full of life, with twists, turns, and undercurrents – creating a unique flow.

We asked each YouthScape community to create their own river representing their journey. The river analogy included fishes (movement), obstacles (things that prevented movement), and splashes (the impacts).

HMR’s river began with the concept of bringing youth and youth-providers together. Their fish were the youth grants, and the splashes the new partnerships created. They added worms, which helped to motivate to continue. This included friendships, flexibility in policies, and opportunities to speak out. Parents were identified in all three categories – at times creating obstacles, and at other times, working in partnership and providing motivation.

We asked each YouthScape community to create their own river representing their journey.

## Collecting the Information

During a focus group with Rivière des Prairies municipal staff, we discussed how the YouthScape Boscoville project influenced them and their work.

*“In the beginning, [YouthScape] stressed me out. The idea of having to work with 14 youth! There are lots of assumptions. It requires putting yourself in a position of vulnerability, but I discovered that youth feed you, and vice-versa.”*

—YOUTHSCAPE PARTNER RIVIÈRE DES PRAIRIES

In YouthScape, we have regularly conducted interviews with exiting youth staff to capture their stories and reflections. In one community, a youth staff member shares the meaning of YouthScape for them:

*“I always failed every class. I was always couch surfing. It seemed that I was not worth anyone’s time. Doing [YouthScape] was an educational experience—it was my high school graduation. I was respected for my views and everything I had to say was important.”*

—YOUTHSCAPE STAFF VICTORIA



**Sharing successes and lessons with partners and funders is important to demonstrate how actions are contributing to social change.**

## Understanding the Information

Using participatory activities to gather and analyze information can support young people and adults:

### Make sense of what happened

Social change initiatives are complex and multi-dimensional. Participatory learning activities can help participants make sense of the experience and discover ways to enhance future initiatives.

### Adapt plans

Discussing and examining activities can help you revisit prior plans and identify next steps.

The process also:

### Encourages critical thinking

Participatory learning tools provide opportunities for young people to think critically about issues, to raise questions and to explore possibilities in non-threatening ways.

### Builds bridges of communication

Intentionally bringing youth and adults together and establishing a process to share and discuss different points of view can build stronger relationships, improve communication, and shed light on gaps that need to be addressed.

### Enhances an understanding of abstract concepts

Social change and youth engagement can be abstract concepts. It helps to conduct activities that allow participants to connect these concepts to concrete personal experiences. Using visuals or metaphors can deepen the learning.

### Develops skills

Helping young people reflect on and learn from their experience gives them important tools to analyze their own experience and share their lessons with others.

## Sharing the Learning

It is useful to document and share lessons and successes with others. You can complete reports at the end of the project or use them as a tool to track reflections along the way. Encourage the sharing of lessons learned and growing from one's mistakes.

Reports can:

- Create awareness of a program, define challenges, clarify solutions, demonstrate results or impacts, and support advocacy
- Target diverse audiences such as funders, partners, program participants, and colleagues
- Take a variety of formats such as narrative reports, videos, presentations, comic books, photo essays, etc.

## REPORT QUESTIONS THAT FOSTER REFLECTION AND SHARED LEARNING

- What inspired you to take on this challenge and get involved?
- Did your activity/project work out? Did everything go as planned?
- What were the biggest challenges you faced and how did you overcome them?
- What were the greatest moments? Did you have fun? Did others?
- What have you learned about yourself, your team and your community?
- How will you use and share your learning?

YouthScape

## YouthScape Grantee Reporting: Two Approaches

YouthScape sites have taken different approaches to engage young people in reporting on their grant experiences and milestones, and account for their expenses.

### PROJECT COMPLETION: PHOTO REPORTS

In Halifax Regional Municipality, for example, young people were asked to prepare reports in a creative form.

### ONGOING REPORTING: LEARNING BLOGS

In Victoria, YouthScape staff identified a need to create a space where grantees could document ongoing learning easily. Grantees were expected to create and update their project pages regularly with details about the progress that they were making (people they connected with, successes they had, challenges they faced etc.). Staff also regularly sent grantees reflection questions to respond to, with all of the questions being linked directly to the final reflection that they completed online when their project was finished.

Here is an excerpt from a project blog:

*“The zero waste campaign has gone to the full school. There are no garbage cans in the pilot hallway, and few garbage cans in the rest of the school. We have over 12 stations throughout the school...The fastest growing issue is the hard plastic drawer becoming full within hours because of multiple slushy cups. The [students] often ask us, ‘When are you going to take away all the garbage cans?’ and ‘Why do we even have garbage cans anymore?’”*



Halifax & Victoria



## Putting Some Fun into Funder Reports

YouthScape National experimented with creative approaches to funding reports. In addition to sharing key activities and lessons, we wanted to encourage community partners to:

- Engage diverse stakeholders in the reporting process (e.g. youth, colleagues, etc.)
- Use the content for different purposes and audiences (e.g. stories for newsletters, websites)

Here is an excerpt from the 2009-2010 annual reporting guidelines:

### TOP YOUTHSCAPE “LEARNING” TRAILERS

The purpose of a movie trailer is to attract an audience to a film. Excerpts are usually drawn from the most interesting and noteworthy parts of the film, but in a short format.

Share your site’s top 3 YouthScape “learning” trailers from your entire YouthScape journey. Learning could include engaging diverse young people, participating in a learning community (local/national), or youth decision-making.

Pick lessons that highlight your successes and challenges.

Each YouthScape trailer should include:

Beginning (Act 1): Key message and the premise of the lesson

Middle (Act 2): Analysis of the lesson. You may want to include photos/quotes to bring these scenes to life

End (Act 3): Summary of the lesson and clues to the richness of the story

Note: Great to include some ideas for a sequel! (recommendations for a future project)

Present your trailers in creative formats such as video, written story, poem, comic book or photo journal



# Sustaining Impact

With data and some analysis, your organization may be starting to see some ripples from its efforts. Old behaviours are changing. New relationships and connections are being made. Ripples can happen at different levels: individual youth, peers and families, partners and even your own organization.

For example, a youth granting project to transform a school recycling program may be changing the way that students buy food at the cafeteria or the way that the principal liaises with municipal waste services. Refer to Figure 1 presented in section 1.5 and *Take the Leap* poster in section 2.1, and consider:

- How are youth being agents of social change?
- Are there opportunities to further impact the different spheres that shape young people's everyday lives?
- How can the ripples be increased?
- Can partnerships be created or strengthened to increase young people's impact?

## Strategies for Sustaining Impact

### Identify common threads

Look for patterns and connections in your organization's youth engagement strategies. For example, are you seeing trends in youth-driven granting applications (e.g. focusing on changing culture in schools, importance of youth spaces)? Are other service providers such as police or homeless shelters experiencing the same challenges in a certain neighbourhood?


### Tackle root causes

To break down silos and multiply the ripples from your efforts, look at the underlying challenges across strategies. Root causes, may include lack of voice, miscommunication, safety, racism or other barriers like policies or legislation.

### Engage in systemic action

Identify some concrete strategies to tackle root causes. For instance, if young people want to be heard and have access to decisions affecting them, your organization may support young people to start a youth council for a school board or city service (e.g. transportation, recreation).

5.1



Old behaviours  
are changing.  
New relationships  
and connections are  
being made.

## YouthScape

### Thunder Bay

**She came to the conference as a shy reserved student and left as an inspired leader.**

## Individual impact in Thunder Bay

Ashley, a youth participant who was in detention for cutting class the day we had the Learning Forum at Dennis Franklin Cromarty School, decided to check out the forum after she got out of her detention. We naturally assumed she was part of the leadership group and invited her in. She stayed after the forum and helped us clean up and asked many question about the work of YouthScape. From this conversation we invited her to come to the National YouthScape Conference in Banff.

She came to the conference as a shy reserved student and left as an inspired leader ready to make change in her community. She sees getting involved in organized activities as a way to “keep on track”. She is now a member of several groups, and projects at her school and in the community, attends school regularly, and has stepped up as the leader of the Green Space Warriors.

## YouthScape

### Victoria

**YouthScape has helped us build a new, more trusting relationship with many of our community partners.**

## Transforming granting mechanisms in Victoria

YouthScape has helped us offer new youth-granting mechanisms and build a new, more trusting relationship with many of our community partners. One of our main areas of focus has been supporting young people to be accountable for their commitments. With one indigenous group we have worked with, the granting mechanism provided the first meeting point. It allowed us to re-examine ways in which accountability and evaluation could be more appropriate with respect to age and culture, and how we could work together to make that happen. It was the first time we had achieved this level and depth of collaboration.

For YouthCore, having the ability to provide grants provided a new level of legitimacy in the eyes of our partners, and helped establish youth-engagement as a process and practice, not just a theory. Now we are looking at how our granting mechanisms are working for organizations and communities, and how we can build on successes for the future.

## Organizational Ripples

Volunteer Victoria’s Youth Volunteer Connections Program began in 2006. It is an individualized program that assists youth interested in developing skills, self-esteem, and community connections through volunteering.

Supporting community organizations to include young people in their volunteer programs is very valuable. Networking with other youth service providers in the area to learn and understand how best to support and engage young people is also significant.

After YouthScape launched the call for granting proposals, Volunteer Victoria started to think about how young people actually play a vital role in running and developing our program. For example:

### Peer Mentorship Initiative

The Peer Mentorship Initiative was revised into an Advisor program to provide youth with an opportunity to gain a genuine peer perspective on volunteering in their community.

### New volunteer opportunities

New volunteer opportunities were created that built on the strengths of young people’s interests, connected with local agencies and developed skills such as writing about local youth volunteers, co-facilitating presentations, and editing local films.

### Young people were engaged in all stages

In developing its social media project, Volunteer Victoria involved young people in research, assessment, implementation, outreach and contribution of content. The young people are now providing direction and taking on leadership roles within the organization.

### Connections were made with other agencies

Through YouthScape and other programming, Volunteer Victoria was able to connect to practitioners in the Youth Service Provider Network, which provided additional opportunities for learning and collaboration.

*“It is safe to say that my decision to shadow and learn from what YouthScape is doing, in terms of giving young people an honest, genuine opportunity to take on new roles and responsibilities in their communities, has benefited my organization and program immensely.”*

—VOLUNTEER VICTORIA  
COORDINATOR VICTORIA



Remember that change takes time!

# Creating the Conditions for Long Term Social Change

## Build a foundation

It is important for young people to understand the root causes of local issues. Once they have that understanding, they can start tackling the tough issues — not just by doing more activities, but by looking at existing policies and conditions and how they can work towards change.

## Use multiple approaches

Think about multiple strategies to contribute to social change. Expose young people and partners to different approaches: media, social entrepreneurship, advocacy, etc.

## Sustain change

It is important to build a supportive structure for youth engagement in your organization or on a specific issue. This may mean making policy changes such as including experiences with youth as a requirement in job descriptions, allocations for mentorship programs, or funds for on-going grants.

You will also want to:

### Be comfortable with being uncomfortable

Change can often include feelings of discomfort and confusion. Recognize and pause during these moments. Resist returning to old behaviours.

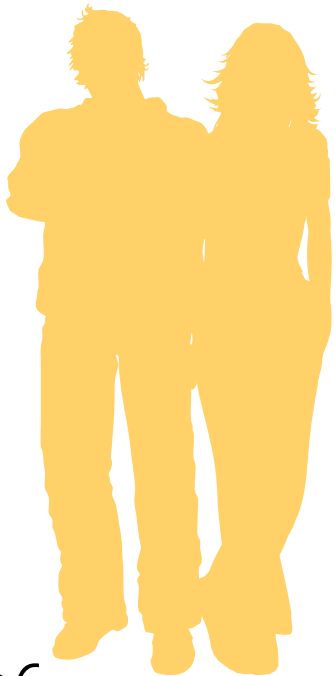
### Focus on partnerships and relationships

Encourage diversity and honesty in building relationships with community stakeholders.

### Find opportunities to celebrate and document small successes

This will help demonstrate how efforts are contributing to longer-term change.

Remember that change takes time!



## Creating a Resilient School

Students at Ernest Morrow School were frustrated by the lack of pride inside and outside their school. They wanted to create a change inside of their school, which might lead to change in their community! After YouthScape staff met with students it was clear that their project was a fit with YouthScape. The students wanted to create a resilient school, and YouthScape aims to build resilient communities.

In answer to “What’s your beef?” the students wanted to create a place where students and teachers worked together. Their long list of ideas might have been overwhelming for another school or group, but these youth were driven to create the change. With a grant from YouthScape Calgary, students and teachers worked together on projects including a cafeteria mural, teacher and student bulletin boards, and a recycling program.

As a result, the school environment at Ernest Morrow has completely changed. Students now hold their heads up high and the relationship between the teachers and students has grown into a unique and supportive partnership. Ernest Morrow has developed a caring spirit where everyone feels involved. The students want to continue creating change within their school. Current projects include fundraising for organizations and causes affecting their neighbourhood and nurturing relationships with another high school by collaboratively working on a community garden and picnic area.

The students want to continue creating change within their school.

### activity 9

#### Magic Carpet

This activity will reveal how we all need to work together as a team to accomplish our objectives, even if this means finding new and innovative ways to approach our goals.

» see Appendix 2





6.0



# 6.0

## Conclusion

The YouthScape community hopes that the insights and tools offered in the Changing the Landscape Guidebook will inform and inspire practitioners, organizations and funders to involve youth in social change. It is important to understand the value of youth engagement; prepare a strong foundation; take effective action; nurture important relationships; and measure impact. Through this, young people can become active agents of change and help to build resilient and vibrant communities.

The YouthScape experiences and research that have informed this Guidebook show that young people can make important contributions to their communities. Meaningful engagement can result in more inclusive, diverse, collaborative spaces and places for all members of society. However, involving young people as citizens in local community is not only about creating opportunities. It is also about taking up the challenge to rethink values, structures and policies.

Working in partnership and supporting a learning culture that includes young people allows us to meet the challenge of involving youth in social change. By applying the tools and learnings discussed in the Guidebook, we can build a Canadian landscape that is a community based, youth paced movement.





**YouthScape**  
community based. youth paced.

commitment



With commitment, knowledge, skills and self-awareness, we will be able to navigate the many challenges of the youth-engagement and the social change journey.

# Creating Change through Youth Engagement: A Checklist for Success




## WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

-  Share information with young people, about issues that affect them – remember that learning in a partnership is reciprocal
-  Involve the different players that affect young people's lives

## TRANSLATING PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE

-  Listen to young people, learn about their thoughts and opinions and try to guide them as they grow and develop, as they will guide us in our work and organizations
-  Recognize that youth have tangible ideas and that these ideas need to be shared, nurtured and implemented

## ADAPTING STRUCTURES

-  Create spaces that encourage participation, co-create activities that encourage meaningful engagement and that the young people feel connected to
-  Ensure inclusion so all young people irrespective of ethnicity, gender, colour or ability, have an equal opportunity to actively contribute
-  Provide additional opportunities for young people who, because of different abilities or opportunities, find it more difficult to participate

## CONCLUSION



- ✔ Offer different ways for young people to participate, for example: listening, speaking, writing, drawing, theatre. This will allow different types of learners to participate in activities and decisions
- ✔ Give children and youth the space to plan and organize activities on their own, providing support when requested

#### CHANGING PERCEPTIONS

- ✔ Showcasing the contributions of young people and positive role-modelling helps community members understand the benefit of involving children and youth, and encourages them to become advocates of youth engagement

## Together we can create a community based, youth paced movement

With commitment, knowledge, skills and self-awareness, we will be able to navigate the many challenges of youth engagement and social change. Each of us will begin this journey into youth engagement from a different place, and will progress at our own speed. While each experience will be unique, the practical tips and lessons contained in this Guidebook, and the tools and experience you acquire along the way, will collectively continue to create more resilient and inclusive communities by engaging young people.

Changing the landscape of Canadian societies IS possible when we involve youth in all aspects of social change!



*“If we can put youth at the centre of our society, it lights a spark, and the flame creates a fire in the rest of the community.”*

—EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR IICRD

*“Food makes it more casual, makes the meeting more informal and conversational... as a shy person, I find eating helps breakdown the barrier.”*

—YOUTHSCAPE YOUTH

*“Pizza has almost become a cliché – just order pizza and the youth will come. Youth hate being labeled, especially when it becomes a pattern where youth are always served ‘youth’ food – it gets stereotypical.”*

—YOUTHSCAPE YOUTH VICTORIA

## Appendix 1: Compensation

There are different ways to compensate young people for their participation and contributions, including:

### FOOD

The provision of food is part of the “101 toolbox” for every event organizer – an important item on every budget! Sharing food makes conversation easier, creates a welcoming environment, and helps participants focus on the task at hand. Be careful that food does not become bait for youth, but a medium to support young people’s involvement.

### EXCHANGES

Setting up an exchange of services or opportunity to learn, have fun and build new relationships, honours the young people’s participation and offers something of value in return.

### HONORARIUMS

Paying youth a sum of money to compensate them for their time, ideas and contributions is another way of valuing and encouraging youth participation. After all, most adults who give time to projects receive a salary or are more financially secure! It is important to ensure that the monetary incentive does not override or diminish the commitment to the project, however.

Some methods of determining honorarium amounts include:

#### Token of participation

Youth receive a standard amount regardless of the time and effort for each meeting/work time.

#### Fixed sum

Youth receive a lump sum (e.g. \$100 to 500) after completing the project.

#### Full, half, or no sum

As a group, youth decide who should receive the full, half or no sum based on their attendance and active involvement.

Consider working with young people to establish honorarium amounts and systems of accountability. While this process can be time consuming and needs to be accounted for in your planning, it empowers young people to take ownership, and provides learning opportunities around money management.

It is also important to note that, while compensation can demonstrate value and allow young people to participate who otherwise would not have the means to do so, it is equally important to avoid setting up an unhealthy dependency on external motivators or rewards. You want young people and adults at the table who are engaged and passionate about the issue rather than the free lunch.

# Appendix 2: Activities

## Young People's Level of Civic Involvement

### OBJECTIVE

To help a group understand the various levels of young people's civic involvement, this activity makes each level very concrete.

### WHAT YOU NEED

- Five large poster-boards describing the five levels of civic involvement by young people (as shown below)
- A dozen 20 cm x 40 cm white poster-board sheets
- A dozen large-tipped felt pens
- Blu-Tack

### HOW IT WORKS

Stand the poster-boards showing the young people's level of civic involvement along one of the walls in the room, or on the floor if you are sitting in a circle, so that they are visible to everyone present.

1. Form teams of three or four people and distribute three or four 20 cm by 40 cm white poster boards and some felt pens. Allow 15 minutes. Ask the groups to:
  - Identify two or three activities, programs or projects for young people and print them on the poster boards
  - Decide which level of civic involvement these projects represent. Use the specifications under the levels as a guide
2. Ask each team to present the activities, programs or projects they have identified, and attach them (with Blu-Tack) under the level of involvement chosen. Ask each team to explain the reasons for their choice and invite the large group to express their reactions to the choice. Continue until all the teams have had an opportunity to present their choices. Allow 3 to 5 minutes per group.
3. When all the teams have presented their choices, here are some suggestions for questions to the large group that will move the ideas along. Allow 10 minutes for discussion in the large group.
  - Are there concentrations at some levels?
  - Are there levels that are empty with no activities?
  - Are there projects that should be moved to another level?
  - What could be done to improve the picture?

## activity 1

This activity will get you thinking about the different levels of civic engagement and where youth engagement can fit in.

—YOUTHSCAPE

RIVIÈRE DES PRAIRIES

### 1 INFORMATION

Young people are given information and take part in activities planned by adults.

### 2 CONSULTATION

Young people are consulted and express their points of view about decisions made by adults.

### 3 INTEGRATION

Young people contribute to decision-making, an agenda is set by adults, and the role of the young person is roughly defined.

### 4 INFLUENCE

Shared decision-making and responsibilities by adults and young people in planning and action. Young people influence adults and governance.

### 5 IMPACT

Young people and adults become agents of change in their spheres of influence; new reflexes are established. Genuine civic involvement by young people.

## activity 2

### Take a Problem, Take a Talent & What Do You Get?

This activity encourages youth to look at how their strengths can be used to improve aspects of their community that need change. It allows young people to help identify projects that have the potential for positive impact on their lives.

—YOUTHCAPE CALGARY



## Take a Problem, Take a Talent & What Do You Get?

### OBJECTIVE:

To get youth thinking about their community and how they would like to change aspects of it.

### WHAT YOU NEED

- A group of about 1-60 people
- 2 Post-It note pads (2 different colors)
- Something to write with (one for each person)

### HOW IT WORKS

1. Pass out two different coloured Post-It note pads to everyone and make sure everyone has something to write with.
2. On one colour of Post-It note, ask everyone to write down something that they dislike in their community and want changed.  
Example: litter, violence, drugs, pollution, etc. The community can be defined as their school, local neighbourhood, the city they live, etc.
3. On the second Post-It note pad, ask everyone to write down something they are passionate about, an interest of theirs, or something they enjoy doing.  
Example: drama, baking, music, sports, etc.
4. Have everyone put up their Post-It notes onto a wall, or other surface so everyone can see all the notes  
Example: in a classroom a whiteboard works well.
5. Get people to come up and look over the notes. Encourage them to connect one of the problems with someone's talent or passion. Have people present their idea to the rest of the group.  
Example: a guy loves to play soccer, so he begins to organize regular soccer games after school. to keep others away from gangs, preventing violence from occurring.

# Slippery Snakes and Ladders to Success

## OBJECTIVE

This activity is intended to begin conversations about running a project, the challenges and solutions to overcome obstacles and how to move the project forward.

## WHAT YOU NEED

- Giant chart paper
- Markers
- Stickers for board game decoration

## HOW IT WORKS

**SNAKES** represent challenges, barriers or obstacles in implementing the project.

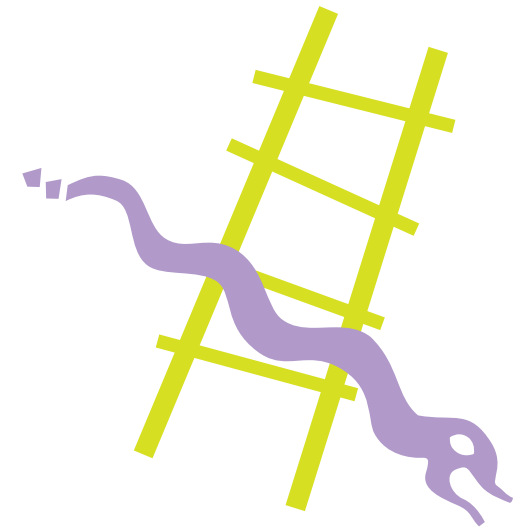
**LADDERS** represent achievements, positive experiences, partnerships or allies that helped advance the project and take it to the next level

1. Divide the group up into their project groups.
2. Give each group a giant piece of chart paper, markers and stickers. Ask them to divide the paper into two columns and label them Snakes (challenges) and Ladders (opportunities).
3. Ask participants to work together with their group members to identify what the snakes and ladders were throughout their project. Allow 10 minutes.
4. Ask small groups to report back to the larger group and discuss similarities and differences. This is a great opportunity to collectively brainstorm around challenges groups are having and resources within the network to help combat these challenges and create more ladders. Allow 20 minutes.
5. Break off into the same groups again. Ask participants to take a look at their original chart. Looking at both the snakes and ladders, ask the participants to put them in order, the best they can, starting at the beginning of the project until the end (or the present). Label them #1, #2, #3, etc.
6. On a fresh sheet of paper ask participants to draw out a snakes and ladders board (1-100 squares).
7. Next ask participants to use the information from their chart to design the snakes and ladders board of their project experience by drawing either snakes or ladders on their board in the order in which they encountered them. Allow 20 minutes.
8. Post the board games on the wall. Keep them up as projects evolve. It's a nice reminder of where we are at, where we've been and where we are going.

## activity 3

The ability to identify challenges and opportunities about a project is central to this game from Thunder Bay. Youth are able to brainstorm about their projects and visually display its evolution.

—YOUTHSCAPE THUNDER BAY



## activity 4

This activity will help create a youth-friendly atmosphere by allowing young people working on new projects to introduce themselves in a dynamic and vivid way.

—YOUTHSCAPE  
RIVIÈRE DES PRAIRIES



## Self Portrait

### OBJECTIVE

To allow young people working on new projects to introduce themselves in a dynamic and vivid way.

### WHAT YOU NEED

- Scissors and glue sticks – one for each participant
- A variety of magazines that can be cut up
- Packages of coloured felt pens and Blu-Tack
- Large white poster-boards, enough sheets for the number of young people present
- Small coloured cardboard sheets (4 to 5 sheets per person)

### HOW IT WORKS

1. Distribute a large sheet of poster-board to each young person and tell them:
  - Using the materials given to you, make a portrait of yourself in pictures, words, quotations, designs and clippings.
  - You should show what you like, what you can't stand, what makes you laugh, what you get really excited about, what other people say about you, what you would like other people to know about you, etc.
  - Show yourself as you want to be. Let your imagination run free!  
Allow approximately 20 minutes.
2. Ask each young person to present what he/she has produced and let the others ask questions if they want. Each person presents his/her own portrait. Allow 2 minutes per person.
3. When the young people have finished their presentations, ask them to stick their poster-boards on a wall in the room that you will be spending the most time in. Their work should be part of your meetings.
4. Identify two to three activities, programs or projects for young people based on their self-portrait and write these on the poster-boards.
5. In small groups, think about the level of civic involvement that these projects would require. Use the Youth Engagement Spectrum in section 2.1.
6. To ensure that the poster-board sheets continue to be lively and change, let the young people annotate them when they want to. In this way, they will become the witnesses of the story.

# Apples And Onions

## OBJECTIVE

This is an evaluation activity to help a group evaluate their success at being a team at the close of a meeting or event.

## HOW IT WORKS

In a circle, each participant shares something they liked – an apple – and something they would like to improve for the next meeting or event – an onion. Though not most people's favourite veggie, consider that an onion could be improved if deep-fried...onion rings!

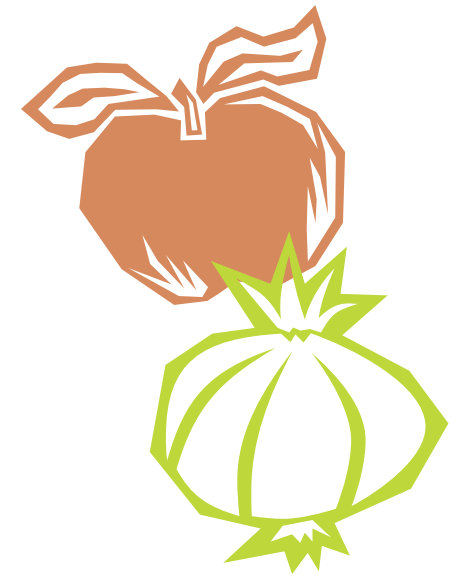
The goal of this is to hear their feedback in a positive and appreciative way that focuses on the strengths of the event and the improvements that could be made.

Example: "My apple was being able to share my ideas on the project and feeling like my feedback was valuable. My onion was that next time I hope we have more youth attend."

## activity 5

This activity is a quick and effective way to get youth talking about a recent meeting or event and to identify areas for improvement.

—THE HEARTWOOD CENTRE FOR COMMUNITY YOUTH DEVELOPMENT, ADAPTED FOR YOUTHSCAPE HRM



## activity 6

Open Space activities are ideal for youth who may not be comfortable talking about certain topics, because in an open space setting, participants choose the topic or theme that best suits their interest and comfort level.

—OPEN SPACE TECHNOLOGY  
ADAPTED BY HALIFAX REGIONAL  
MUNICIPALITY

» [www.co-intelligence.org/P-Openspace.htm](http://www.co-intelligence.org/P-Openspace.htm)



## Community-Friendly Open Space

### OBJECTIVE

This is an activity to encourage meaningful discussions. An Open Space is a really easy way to have small group conversations on what people want to talk most about. It allows flexibility and an easy flow of ideas and conversation.

### HOW IT WORKS

1. First, invite people to brainstorm topics they want to discuss. Keep it short, and topics should be general. This will allow for everyone to participate and feel included in the discussions.  
Example: “Transportation”, instead of “Bus Issues in Timberlea”.
2. Help the group decide on the top 5-6 themes that seem to be coming out of the brainstorm. Choose themes or topics with the most energy and interest.
3. Get them to write down the topic or question on tent cards (or letter size paper folded over), assign a table for the conversation and place the tent card on the table.
4. Assign a suggested time frame for discussions. Allow a minimum of 30 minutes.
5. You can suggest a few basic questions to get the groups thinking, but remember they are only suggestions. Open spaces need to be environments where conversations can happen based on the people at the table, and not the facilitators’ needs.  
Example: one of our questions for a workshop’s open space is “What’s left to learn?”
6. During the conversations, have someone take notes to capture all the great information and stories being shared.
7. Report back to the larger group.



# Skill Swapping Activity

## OBJECTIVE

This activity will help to foster professional relationships between grantees or between youth and adults.

## WHAT YOU NEED

- A ball of string, such as kitchen cord
- Paper or index cards
- Writing implements

## HOW IT WORKS

1. Introduce the activity. Allow 10 minutes.
  - a. Bring the group together in a circle.
  - b. Give each participant an index card and ask them to write down two things they are good at, and one thing that they anticipate needing support with.
  - c. Share with the group that this list is not intended to be an exhaustive one, but a starting place for the activity. Let them know that they will be asked to share their answers with the group.
  - d. Be prepared to give examples as necessary. Example: “I am good at organizing information, and communicating with people, but I could use some support prioritizing tasks.”
  - e. Before proceeding, answer questions.
2. Facilitate the activity. Allow 20 minutes.
  - a. Share that the purpose of the activity is to work together as a group to identify ways that we can support each other.
  - b. When everyone is ready, start the swap.
  - c. One person starts with the ball of string, and shares two things they are good at. If there are no volunteers, start it off as the facilitator using your own examples. Then share the areas that will need some support.
  - d. Once someone asks for support, wait for someone else in the circle to identify that they have that as one of their strengths. To create a web, the person asking for support holds onto the string, and passes the ball to this next person – it becomes their turn to share their strength and ask for support.
  - e. Keep going until everyone gets a turn, or as long as time permits.
3. Debrief the activity. Allow 10 minutes.

When the activity is finished, before letting go of the web, reflect as a group on the complexity of the web, and how the different connections were made. This might also be an appropriate time to introduce the idea of asset-based community development.

## activity 7

This activity shows participants visually how relationships can be created to achieve project goals.

—YOUTHSCAPE HRM



## activity 8

This activity is perfect for youth to use their creativity and team building skills in creating and nurturing relationships with each other and with their adult allies.

—YOUTHSCAPE CALGARY

# Family Portrait Game

## OBJECTIVE

This game is designed for participants to use their creativity and team building skills.

## WHAT YOU NEED

- A group of about 8-30 people – split into two or three teams of 4-10 people

## HOW IT WORKS

1. The facilitator shouts out a family portrait name that each team must act out or pose as for a set amount of time. The team is allowed to make noises.  
Example: If the facilitator shouts out the “Rock Family”, one team might pose as boulders, while another group might act out a rock and roll band.
2. When time runs out, the facilitator goes around judging each team and gives a point to the most creative and remarkable family portrait. Multiple rounds can be played. This is up to the discretion of the group and the facilitator.

## FAMILY PORTRAIT IDEAS THAT THE FACILITATOR CAN USE

Happy Family / Sad Family / Ninja Family / Rock Family / Excited Family / Old Family / Jungle Family / Fun Family / Strong Family / Dance Family / Nerdy Family / Cool Family / Nature Family / Future Family / Jetsons Family / Flintstones Family / Simpsons Family / Addams Family



MUSIC FAMILY

# Magic Carpet Ride

## OBJECTIVE:

To work together as a team in a new and different way.

## WHAT YOU NEED

- As many people as can fit safely on your carpet (usually 8-10 people per carpet)
- A carpet, tarp or blanket

## HOW IT WORKS

1. Ask everyone to stand on the carpet. Explain that we are about to take off on a magic carpet ride across the desert.
2. Ask everyone to close their eyes and imagine that they are taking off, flying high in the air...they see camels and trees etc. Paint a picture of some of the things they may see as they soar through the air. You can add in different elements to teach different lessons.
3. It is now time to come into land. But now, because of all the wonderful things you have seen and learned on your journey you need to make some changes. As a group you will need to try to flip the carpet to the other side, without losing anyone.
4. As people are trying to flip the carpet over, walk around and remind them to watch out for their friends, so that no one falls off. Draw parallels to other things that are going on. For example, don't let the youngest child fall off, she is special.
5. Once the carpet has been safely flipped over and everyone is on the other side discuss some of the themes from the journey as a group.

Allow 15 - 20 minutes for the whole activity.

## KEY DISCUSSION POINTS

- The magic carpet is a good way to look at old challenges in a new light
- It is about being creative, innovative and supporting everyone as we find new ways of working or living
- We need to make sure that no one is left out when we make changes, and we need to work together to find ways to do this
- There are many different ways to work out problems, and if you have more than one team then you may see different strategies used – there is no right and wrong here

## activity 9

This activity will reveal how we all need to work together as a team to accomplish our objectives, even if this means finding new and innovative ways to approach our goals.

—IICRD





Find YouthScape resources online including great stories, articles and more information on effective youth engagement:  
» [www.youthscape.ca](http://www.youthscape.ca)

## Resources

- YouthScape video: “YouthScape – Building Stronger Communities: Youth and Social Change”
- YouthScape: A Funder’s Perspective
- YouthScape Ripples: Looking at Impact
- Engager les Jeunes au sein de nos milieux Guide 1 (Engaging Youth within our Communities Guide 1)
- DE 201: A Practitioner’s Guide to Developmental Evaluation
- HeadWaters: YouthScape Newsletters (2007-2009)
- Scoop on the Scape e-newsletters (2008-2010)

You can find these and other YouthScape resources online including great stories, articles and more information on effective youth engagement.



# YouthScape Contacts

The following convening organizations are co-founders of the YouthScape movement and can be contacted for support, information or capacity building related to this guidebook.

## INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR CHILD RIGHTS AND DEVELOPMENT

Over the past 15 years, the International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD) has worked nationally and internationally in large-scale initiatives to enhance the capacity of individuals, organizations and governments to effectively use the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and transform systems for children and youth.

Center for Global Studies  
University of Victoria  
PO Box 1700 Victoria STN CSC  
Victoria, BC V8W 2Y2  
T: 250-472-4762  
E: [iicrd@uvic.ca](mailto:iicrd@uvic.ca)  
>> [www.iicrd.org](http://www.iicrd.org)



INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE  
FOR CHILD RIGHTS  
AND DEVELOPMENT

## HEARTWOOD CENTRE FOR COMMUNITY YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development focuses on youth engagement for positive community change. HeartWood works with all levels of government agencies, community partners, groups and private citizens to create unique initiatives that promote and support community-based youth development.

5516 Spring Garden Road, Suite 202  
Halifax, NS B3J 1G6  
T: 902-444-5885  
E: [home-place@heartwood.ns.ca](mailto:home-place@heartwood.ns.ca)  
>> [www.heartwood.ns.ca](http://www.heartwood.ns.ca)



## BOSCOVILLE 2000



Boscoville 2000 is a center of excellence located in Rivière des Prairies near Montreal, which works with young people between 6 and 12 years old, and between 12 and 25. Boscoville 2000 brings together young people and local actors who initiate or support community projects within Rivière des Prairies.

10 950, boulevard Perras  
Montréal, Québec H1C 1B3  
T: 514-648-6006  
E: boscoville2000@ssss.gouv.qc.ca  
» [www.boscoville2000.ca](http://www.boscoville2000.ca)

### UNITED WAY OF THUNDER BAY

The United Way of Thunder Bay promotes, supports and facilitates the organized capacity of people to help one another. The organization serves to help fulfill the community needs of Thunder Bay by allocating funds to service providers and encouraging participation through volunteerism.



1093 Barton Street  
Thunder Bay, Ontario P7B 5N3  
T: 807-623-6420  
E: [email@unitedway-tbay.on.ca](mailto:email@unitedway-tbay.on.ca)  
» [www.unitedway-tbay.on.ca](http://www.unitedway-tbay.on.ca)

### CHILD AND YOUTH FRIENDLY CALGARY

Child and Youth Friendly Calgary strives to provide meaningful opportunities for young people to contribute to building their community. Children and youth are engaged, informed, involved and inspired in an environment that believes that youth who participate in community building will grow up with a continued sense of pride and responsibility to their community.



820, 1202 Centre Street SE  
Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2G 5A5  
T: 403-266-5448  
E: [friendly@cyfc.ca](mailto:friendly@cyfc.ca)  
» [www.cyfc.ca](http://www.cyfc.ca)

### LIFECYCLES

### CONTACTS

A community-based organization dedicated to creating awareness of and establishing action around food, health and urban sustainability in the Greater Victoria community. LifeCycles is driven by youth who are dedicated to education and community building which is established through hands-on projects.

Unit # 2 - 625 Hillside Avenue  
Victoria, BC V8T 1Z1  
T: 250-383-5800  
E: [info@lifecyclesproject.ca](mailto:info@lifecyclesproject.ca)  
» [www.lifecyclesproject.ca](http://www.lifecyclesproject.ca)



## YouthScape Learning Communities

### YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND ACTION IN HAMILTON

Youth Engagement and Action in Hamilton is a city-wide collaborative that seeks to improve avenues for youth engagement in Hamilton. Young people are connected to each other and to opportunities to become involved in community development through projects that are youth-led and youth-directed.

Careerworx, YMCA of Hamilton/Burlington  
23 Main St E, Hamilton, ON L8N 1E7z  
T: 905-540-9679 Fax: 905-540-9613  
E: [lily\\_lumsden@ymca.ca](mailto:lily_lumsden@ymca.ca)  
» [www.ymca.ca](http://www.ymca.ca)



### COMMUNITIES FOR CHILDREN

Communities for Children is a joint government and community initiative in Saskatoon committed to improving the lives of children and families. Communities for Children strives to support strong and effective systems that serve children and families while simultaneously building linkages between government and community.

226 Avenue V South  
Saskatoon, SK S7M 3E3  
T: 306-956-6147  
E: [admin@communitiesforchildren.net](mailto:admin@communitiesforchildren.net)  
» [www.communitiesforchildren.net](http://www.communitiesforchildren.net)



**THE J.W. McCONNELL  
FAMILY FOUNDATION**

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**LA FONDATION DE LA  
FAMILLE J.W. McCONNELL**



## Funders

### THE J.W. McCONNELL FAMILY FOUNDATION

The J.W. McConnell Foundation is a private family foundation that funds innovative programs to foster a more inclusive, sustainable and resilient society.

Suite 1800 - 1002 Sherbrooke Street West  
Montreal, QC H3A 3L6

T: 514-288-2133

E: [information@mcconnellfoundation.ca](mailto:information@mcconnellfoundation.ca)

» [www.mcconnellfoundation.ca](http://www.mcconnellfoundation.ca)

### UNITED WAY OF CALGARY AND AREA

United Way gives individuals and families the opportunity to reach their potential and improve their quality of life. Whether funding programs that teach conflict-resolution skills to a high-risk family, enable a senior to live independently or help a high school student stay in school, United Way's impact is local, tangible and meaningful.

Suite 600, 1202 Centre Street SE  
Calgary, Alberta T2G 5A5

T: 403-231-6265

E: [uway@calgaryunitedway.org](mailto:uway@calgaryunitedway.org)

» [www.calgaryunitedway.org](http://www.calgaryunitedway.org)



# Building Stronger Communities: Youth and Social Change An Inspirational Challenge

All across the country young people are finding creative 'out of the box' strategies for community development and are forming important partnerships to do so.

Inspired by the work of YouthScape, a Canada-wide initiative to create more resilient communities through the engagement of young people, *Building Stronger Communities: Youth and Social Change* is a valuable tool for you to take youth engagement to the next step.

It captures a group of young people and what they are learning as agents of change. Youth are leading a culture shift that is changing attitudes toward them, from people 'needing development' to 'leaders motivating change'.

Inspire and challenge government agencies, municipalities, practitioners, funders – and all individuals interested in advancing youth engagement and social change strategies across Canada – with this short video clip.

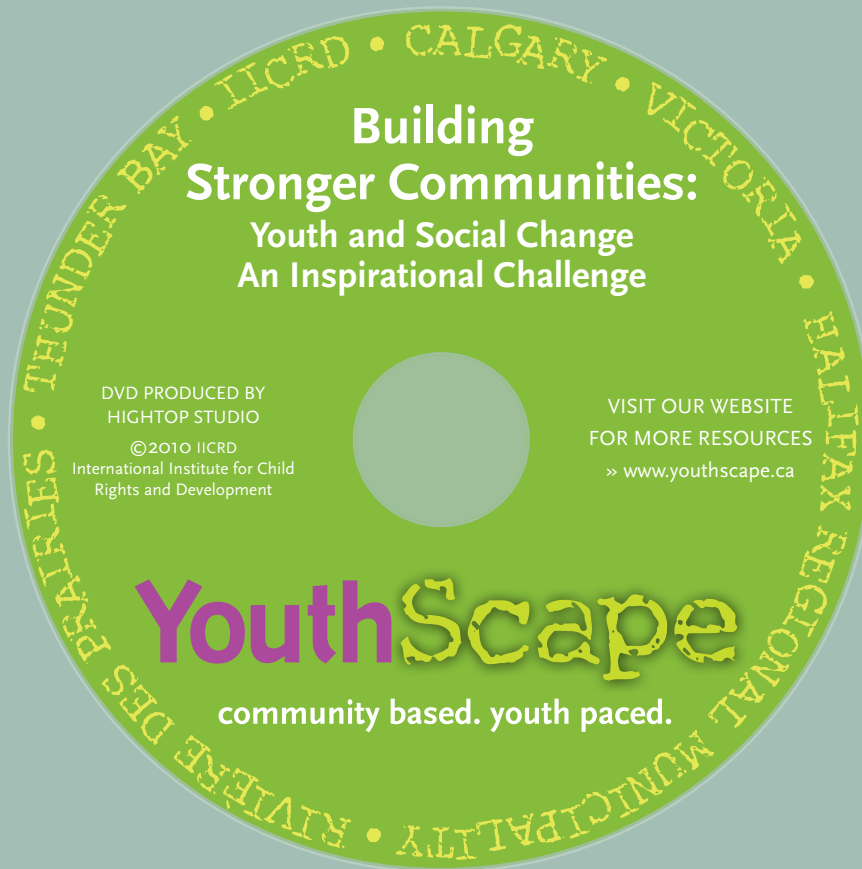
*Building Stronger Communities: Youth and Social Change* was produced by Hightop Studio for YouthScape, in partnership with the International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD); the HeartWood Center for Community Youth Development; Boscoville 2000; United Way Thunder Bay; Child and Youth Friendly Calgary; YouthCore and the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation.

This DVD, produced by Hightop Studio, can be found at the YouthScape website:

» [www.youthscape.ca](http://www.youthscape.ca)

HIGHTOP  
STUDIO

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# Guidebook

Through case studies, stories, activities, real life lessons and practical recommendations, this Guidebook offers insights and tools to bring youth engagement to life in organizations and communities. Five steps to change the landscape include:

- Step 1: UNDERSTANDING THE VALUE OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT
- Step 2: PREPARING A STRONG FOUNDATION
- Step 3: TAKING EFFECTIVE ACTION
- Step 4: NURTURING RELATIONSHIPS
- Step 5: MEASURING IMPACT

If you are intrigued by the idea of engaging disengaged youth, this guide will be a valuable tool for you.

It is a must for:

- Practitioners doing front-line work with youth
- Organizations and local governments wanting to engage youth
- Youth leaders seeking new approaches and ideas

## YouthScape

community based. youth paced.

