



Youth Engagement

Youth engagement in context

context

"Nothing about us without us."

-G.J. Strangler and M. Shirk (2004). *On Their Own: What Happens to Kids When They Age Out of the Foster Care System*. Westview Press. p 260.

Youth engagement is a process that offers meaningful participation and opportunities for youth to take responsibility and take leadership while working in partnership with others who value, respect, and share power with them.

The Inter-Council Network's national context analysis (link to it) of public engagement in Canada identified youth engagement as an integral component of public engagement. Primary, secondary, and postsecondary students, as well as youth more broadly, were among the top five target audiences of organizations' public engagement efforts in Canada. This identification of youth engagement as a priority focus of the international development sector has helped to open space for critical reflection and discussion around the effectiveness of youth engagement in Canada.

Youth have increased knowledge of the most pressing global issues of our time, including the compounded global economic, ecological, and socio-political crises. As a result, youth are experiencing anomie, the breakdown of the bonds between an individual and their community, through an uncertain financial future, lack of access to affordable education, lack of employment opportunities, inherited fiscal and ecological debt, and widespread passive citizenship and cynicism toward the democratic process.

The content of this toolkit that is specific to youth engagement aims to highlight the successes and challenges of youth engagement, as well as to showcase good practices, strategies, tools, and resources to support sustained youth-based public engagement efforts. The knowledge hub process allowed participants to disseminate the goals of youth-based public engagement.

Knowledge hub participants identified the following principles of good practice for sustained, cross-generational youth engagement:

- Operate from an anti-oppressive perspective and provide youth with opportunities to develop an anti-oppressive lens;
- Engage post-high-school and post-secondary-aged youth (18-30) in social change;
- Support youth as they take care of themselves and each other;
- Use arts-based programming as a method to engage a broader spectrum of youth;
- Effectively use social media to engage youth;
- Plan programs and projects that are accessible to all youth, especially to rural, at-risk, on-reserve, and under-engaged youth.
- Sustain youth engagement by developing meaningful connections and relationships.

The youth-based knowledge hub participants operated from the following assumptions about good practices in engaging youth:

- Privilege is an [invisible backpack](#) that we carry around. We do not always recognize the effects of oppression or do much to defend against them;
- Opportunities for engagement often exist in structured environments like elementary and high schools, but structured programming for youth (aged 18-30) outside of these structures is difficult to find;
- Generally, people have difficulty prioritizing taking care of themselves and finding balance in their work, volunteering, home, health (mental, physical, emotional, psychological), and social lives;
- Using arts-based programming to express ideas, issues, feelings, and topics has proven to be a transformative method to engage youth;
- To use social media to engage youth means being responsive to new opportunities and platforms;
- Finding alternative ways to engage diverse groups of youth makes programming more accessible.
- Internship programs are effective in sustaining youth engagement because they offer context and exposure to global issues that can be addressed at home and abroad. As a result, these types of youth engagement opportunities are often transformative.

The group also determined that the goals of fostering cross-generational understanding and provoking meaningful and sustained engagement were threads that seamlessly run through all the good practices of youth engagement. The most significant factor in

engaging youth, which translates into sustained youth engagement, is that the actions must be youth-led and youth-focussed.

Improved cross-generational engagement involves finding ways that allow people from different generations to come together to share knowledge, questions, experiences, hopes and fears with the goal of becoming allies. Cross-generational understanding promotes a recognition that there are insights that can be learned from past social change work and that we can use that knowledge to deepen the work being done today. There is considerable and largely untapped potential inherent in having veterans of change and young people working together on social change efforts – young and old serving as society’s bookends, as it were.

“Because of the complexity and interconnected nature of the issues we face today, we need as many people involved in the collective work of social change as possible.”

-Kevin Millsip, Next Up

Provide youth with opportunities to develop an anti-oppressive lens

good practices

In general, ensuring a good spectrum of gender, race, and class representation in organizing is more effective because groups make better decisions and are better able to reach out to diverse audiences when the group itself is diverse. When there is diversity and buy-in from these groups at the highest levels of decision making, the group can be actively engaged in an ongoing, open dialogue about these underlying power structures, and the group of organizers tends to be more comfortable keeping each other accountable to anti-oppression principles.

Anti-oppression work seeks to recognize the oppression that pervades society and attempts to mitigate its effects and eventually equalize the power imbalance in our communities. Doing effective public engagement for social change with youth requires practitioners to operate from an anti-oppressive perspective and provide youth with opportunities to develop an anti-oppressive lens. That can be done in a number of ways, but is often achieved through the development of community norms, undertaking a specific workshop on oppression, or leaving space for difficult discussions within the programming.

Though many youth public engagement practitioners are not experts on power and privilege, we should all strive to use inclusive language, pay attention to the dynamic within the group we are working with, and consider bringing in someone trained in anti-oppression to provide leadership to the youth. This is delicate and challenging work, but can be essential for youth to understand root causes of social ills and to see their place in making change.

Generating momentum (Challenge case study)

case studies

This case study highlights the challenges of providing youth with opportunities to develop an anti-oppressive lens. In particular it discusses the following challenges: the fact that identity politics can be divisive; the fact that addressing power, privilege, and oppression takes time, which is a limited resource; the fact that anti-oppression work pushes people out of their comfort zones and often provokes reactions (e.g. guilt) and resistance; and the fact that participants and facilitators alike are often afraid of provoking conflict.

Developing an anti-oppressive lens is an ongoing process, both for youth and for public engagement practitioners. Providing an entry point for these tough conversations in public engagement programming for youth is essential, but it is not without significant challenges. When we began planning our first annual Generating Momentum: Youth Activist Leadership Training Camp (a three-day camp for 18-30 year-olds interested in gaining skills to make change in their communities), we knew that including a session on anti-oppression at the beginning of the camp was vital, and that it would take effective facilitation to be successful. Since many of the ‘big names’ in the anti-o world were booked or unavailable, one of the coordinators of the camp decided to take on the session.

The participants at the camp were, overall, quite diverse. With around 50 people, there were more women than men, more students than not, participants and facilitators were between 18-35 years old, and everyone was there to learn how to make the world a better place. Included in this mix were three self-identified straight, middle class, white men who had never done this type of training. Although they had good intentions, they had never been challenged to look at themselves and the unearned privileges they personally enjoyed.

Talking about power and privilege, and seeing how we can be complicit in perpetuating oppression, is never easy, and feelings of denial or guilt are normal at the beginning. What made this particular anti-oppression session a failure (in the eyes of the organizers) was that, as a result of these feelings, these three white men hijacked the conversation. What started as a conversation about systemically disadvantaged groups quickly turned into the spouting of individual experiences and (ill-informed) beefs with affirmative action. Since there wasn’t a well-versed and experienced facilitator, and because these three individuals held power in the group, the conversation was derailed and never got back on track.

There is no easy formula for effective anti-oppression training, but these sessions ideally should be led by someone with experience facilitating difficult conversations. Otherwise, the goal of equipping participants with a lens to navigate the systemic oppressive practices in their schools, workplaces, and organizations may be lost.

Some challenges to doing anti-oppression work with youth include:

- Lack of time. Exploring privilege can be difficult and painful. Youth need time to unpack and debrief in order to fully absorb the learning.
- There may not be space built into the type of programming being done. Youth public engagement programming often has other objectives, wants to appear light-hearted and fun, or is done in one-time sessions not allowing for deep analysis.
- Public engagement work is frequently done with homogenous groups (all middle-class, all straight, etc). The same is true for youth public engagement. It is difficult to talk about diversity and oppression when there is not a diversity of experience present.

Identity politics can be divisive. Including anti-oppressive training can build cohesion and solidarity, or it can lead to conflict and recrimination.

Related Challenges:

- Tokenism: the language of anti-oppression is a barrier in itself: few opportunities outside of activist circles to learn about/engage with the ideas;
- Fostering and discussing diversity in homogeneous spaces is complicated;
- Discussing diversity in heterogeneous spaces is also complicated;
- Anti-oppression frames things in the negative (anti);
- It's easy to assume people already 'get it' in activist and marginalized communities;
- Sometimes attempts to create anti-oppressive spaces discourage curiosity;
- Exclusion in a room does not always fall along systemic lines.

Tiered anti-oppression training (Success case study)

case studies

***Tiered Anti-Oppression Training** is a case study that highlights some successes in provides youth with opportunities to develop an anti-oppressive lens. In particular it highlights the following achievements: recognizing and acknowledging anti-oppressive education as a continual process; bringing in outside facilitation help; taking stock of group and context to help decide how to proceed; and the use of diagnostic tools for assessment.*

In our third year of Generating Momentum: Youth Activist Leadership Training Camp (a 3-day camp for 18-30 year olds interested in gaining skills to make change in their communities), we utilized a more responsive model for running anti-oppression training. We knew that providing this training was absolutely essential for participants to better understand power, systemic oppression, privilege, and how to be a good ally. However, in previous attempts, some found these concepts new and overwhelming, while others who were more seasoned wanted to dive deeper into the issues. Camp coordinators also knew that having a strong facilitator was essential, but if there were repeat participants doing the same session, with the same facilitator, it would seem redundant. Additionally, we wanted to make sure every person got the training at the beginning of the three days, but doing anti-oppression with the full group did not leave enough space for shy or introverted participants to get involved.

In order to try and address many of these issues, we decided to run two simultaneous workshops: one that covered the basics of anti-oppression, and the other that went deeper into a few areas, depending on the will of the participants. When registering, we asked youth to self-declare their level of training and understanding, based on a scale we created, and we divided the groups from these identifications. The facilitator of the first group was the same strong, well-organized individual that we had used the year before, and the second facilitator had those same skills and happened to be a colleague of the first. During evaluations of the camp, participants spoke very highly of this split format.

Due to the nature of Generating Momentum (youth living together for three days), doing this training at the beginning is absolutely vital. It teaches us to see the diversity (or lack thereof) in the group or any smaller groups we form. It can teach us how to come to consensus, and to recognize whose voices aren't being heard. It also creates a foundation for the youth to build a community on — difference is heard and respected, power is acknowledged and dissipated, and we all leave after living for three days in an ideal society that we as activists are trying to recreate.

Heterosexual Questionnaire

tools

[Creating Safe Space for GLBTQ Youth: Heterosexual Questionnaire](#)

Purpose: To give straight people an opportunity to experience the types of questions that are often asked of gay, lesbian, and/or bisexual people

Time: 40 minutes

Materials: Handout Heterosexual Questionnaire

Procedure:

1. Explain to the group that when gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth are beginning to 'come out,' they are often asked questions that are nearly impossible to answer. In order to help participants understand the heterosexist bias in our culture, you will ask them to grapple with these same questions in regard to heterosexuality.
2. Say that you will give them each a handout. They will break up into groups of four or five and try to come up with answers. Say that you want them to try to answer each question as well as to react to the questions as a whole.
3. Irrespective of each participant's sexual orientation, everyone should attempt to answer as though he/she is heterosexual.
4. After about 10 minutes, ask everyone to reassemble in the large group. Ask the participants the discussion questions below.

Discussion Questions:

1. Did you find the questions hard to answer? Were some harder than others? Which? What, specifically, was so difficult?
2. How did the questions make you feel?
3. What does it say about our society that gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth are asked similar questions?
4. What can you do in the future if you hear someone asking such questions?

Heterosexual Questionnaire Handout

Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible.

1. What do you think caused your heterosexuality?
2. When and how did you first decide you were heterosexual?
3. Is it possible that your heterosexuality is just a phase you may grow out of?
4. Is it possible that your heterosexuality stems from a fear of others of the same sex?
5. If you have never slept with a member of your own sex, is it possible that you might be gay if you tried it?
6. If heterosexuality is normal, why are so many mental patients heterosexual?
7. Why do you straight people try to seduce others into your lifestyle?
8. Why do you flaunt your heterosexuality? Can't you just be who you are and keep it quiet?
9. The great majority of child molesters are straight. Do you consider it safe to expose your children to straight teachers?
10. Even with all the societal support that marriage receives, the divorce rate is spiraling. Why are there so few stable relationships among straight people?
11. Why are straight people so promiscuous?
12. Would you want your children to be straight, knowing the problems they would face, such as heartbreak, disease, and divorce?

Checklist for anti-oppression trainings

tools

Source: [Rainbow Health Network](#)

Training using an integrated anti-oppression framework requires that participants, trainers and activists engage in a discussion of systemic and social change. In addition to helping the individual understand the impacts of oppression and marginalization, there has to be a focus on the systemic and social behaviours that maintain oppression and exclusion and how individuals are responsible for changing the whole.

The discussions with social justice trainers, activists and community educators that have informed this educational tool have emphasized that finding ways to become allies is key to being agents of change. By understanding the ways in which each of us both has power and lacks power, we can learn how to work together. Everyone is at a different level of understanding. As we challenge ourselves to deepen our own understanding, we will be more effective as trainers and educators.

Checklist: Applying an Integrated Anti-Oppression Framework to Training

These questions may prove helpful to consider as you design your anti-oppression programming:

1. How will the activities in the training meet the different learning needs of the participants?
2. How will activities be modified and reflect inclusion of all participants attending the training?
3. How will the training requested explore and identify the differential impacts of systemic discrimination and marginalization for different people?

4. How will the training address different people's lived experience?

5. How will the training address issues of who benefits from maintaining the dominant culture, power and privilege and multiple identities and marginalisation?

6. In what ways can I facilitate learning and skill development to potential trainers on queer issues through this training?

Anti-oppression resources

resources

- [Power Flower](#) activity
- Beautiful Trouble's [Anti-Oppression Theory](#) by Lisa Fithian & Dave Mitchell
- Global Exchange [Anti-Oppression Reader](#)
- [Sierra Youth Coalition](#)'s anti-oppression page

Engage post-high school and postsecondary-aged youth in social change

good practices

University may be the first time people are engaged in social change, and so participants need to be reminded how much space they are taking up in the group. Men need to make sure they are not speaking much more than women and that ideas are being contributed from everyone. Childcare and child-friendly spaces should also be a consideration to ensure the inclusion of women, who are often the primary caregivers.

When organizing on campus, it is important to include people from a variety of faculties and departments. Faculties that are dominated by men (Engineering, Science, etc.) are often less involved in social change work. Intentional recruitment and engagement from these groups, which are often dominated by men, can help mitigate this imbalance.

It is also important to look at the diversity of leaders and role models on campus. Is there a gender balance among guest speakers and lecturers your group brings in? Is there a visible gender balance among organizational leaders? Are good role models provided?

Four more years! (Challenge case study)

case studies

This case study highlights the challenges of engaging post-high-school and postsecondary-aged youth (18-30) in social change. It showcases the following challenges in doing on-campus engagement: operating from the dominant worldview of leadership; the fact that intergenerational dialogue and collaboration are not common practice; and the lack of continuous succession planning for maintaining and considering the institutional knowledge.

Doing social change work in a university setting can be incredibly rewarding. Surrounded by critical thinkers, young idealists, and a plethora of student groups keen to attract members, universities are a hotbed of social change activity. As a student who got involved in several campus social justice groups, volunteering was part obligation, part social pressure, and part personal improvement. There were several challenges faced by campus groups, but none so distressing as leadership turnover and poor institutional memory.

Students generally volunteer with a group for two to four years. Even staffed organizations like PIRGs experience turnover. People leave at the height of their competence, having achieved a degree and moved beyond the institution. Without succession planning and/or alumni retention, this can doom campus groups and organizations — mistakes can be repeated, good ideas forgotten, or it can even mean the end of a group's existence on campus.

There are ways to combat institutional memory loss:

1. Spend time and effort on transition planning. Do recruitment before the end of a semester.
2. Have alumni or outgoing leaders act as mentors to newer members.
3. Have systems and processes with training materials well documented so that they can be passed from one cohort to the next.
4. Engage people on campus who do not leave every four years. Have a faculty member or staff person involved in your group. Or set up a whole faculty advisory committee to serve as an institutional memory.

PIRG (Success case study)

case studies

PIRG! is a case study that highlights some successes in engaging post-high-school and postsecondary-aged youth (18-30) in social change. It discusses the following successes: immersion in a program; inclusivity; accessibility; the power of shared experiences; chapter or club recruiting; peer-to-peer relationships; as well as skills, capacity, and confidence building.

One highly successful model for engaging students enrolled in postsecondary institutions are Public Interest Research Groups, or PIRGs. A PIRG is a membership-based group, usually centred on the local campus, whose student and community volunteers work to expose and confront systemic injustices that have been overlooked or ignored by governing bodies. PIRGs believe that the health of a democracy is measured by the level of participation of its citizens.

Each PIRG is student-funded and student-led. Students take up positions of leadership and responsibility and, through consensus, decide which projects, initiatives, activities and research fit within their debated definitions of social and environmental justice.

Contributing to the success of PIRGs is the fact that they have stable financial resources, one or several paid staff to manage the day-to-day operations, and serve as an access point, or gateway, of the institutional memory and to introducing or maintaining students' interest and motivation in a variety of justice causes. In addition, it is advantageous to have professors as volunteer resources to support the PIRG and its succession.

Each PIRG is organized slightly differently. PIRG.ca was designed as a gateway to all Canadian PIRGs.

Related indicators of success:

- Determining group norms;
- Social space;
- Knowing what you are going to get out of it;
- Successful marketing and promotions;
- Alumni of programs organize own event or project;
- Providing a framework to support; evaluation; follow-up.

Engaging post-high school youth checklist

tools

This checklist should be used on the planning and development of activities, programs and projects.

1. Create a sense of community and belonging

- Create group norms
- Welcome new members, and make sure their ideas and opinions are heard
- Watch out for clichés. Be inclusive.
- Have some focus on relationship development
- Have fun, and create shared experiences

2. Focus on developing leaders and leadership skills

- Do peer-to-peer recruitment
- Make it clear what participants are going to get out of their involvement
- Keep alumni engaged. Have them act as mentors, or organize events or projects
- Develop a framework of support to enable youth to achieve success
- Plan for frequent turn-over as students graduate

3. See increased knowledge as a main objective

- Utilize the expertise that exists in a university setting
- Beware of jargon and appearing closed-minded. Newcomers need to feel like they can be a part of something and have something to offer.
- Attract students by offering skill and capacity building
- Make participation accessible (cost, time, location, services provided, etc)

Evaluate everything! Engage everyone who is a part of your programming, and learn from their feedback. These evaluations need not always be formal!

Support youth as they take care of themselves and each

other

good practices

Taking care of ourselves and each other was a topic that we felt was essential to cover in our discussion of youth-based public engagement because, as author Michael Albert says, "if social change isn't fun, the probability that people will keep trying to do it through hard times and over the long haul is vastly reduced."

Unfortunately, too often, young people who get involved in social change work become overwhelmed by the enormity of global justice issues, the apathy they encounter around them, and feelings of isolation and futility. Young people are at higher risk of depression and other mental health problems anyway, but for engaged young people facing the added challenge of burn-out, the risks are even greater. As public engagement practitioners, we must include discussions on taking care of ourselves and each other and provide tools for doing so in our programming, especially with ongoing groups.

There may also be a gendered aspect to experiences of burnout and how they are treated. The vast majority of people writing and teaching about self-care are women, short-term and trivializing solutions focused on bubble baths & chocolate tend to be directed at women, and the covers of self-care books tend to have pretty sea shell themes. This may mean that men are discouraged from acknowledging or admitting their experience of burnout, both before and after it occurs. Furthermore, the focus on treating yourself with stuff like chocolate and bath salts, and on "retail therapy" as a form of self-care, means that people, especially women, don't learn how to really care for themselves, and instead increase their engagement in the same hyper-consumer culture that has caused community networks to break down and people to lack supports in the first place.

Youth-run leadership conference I (Challenge case study)

case studies

***Youth-Run Leadership Conference I** is a case study that highlights the challenges of youth failing to take care of themselves and each other. Often there is an expectation that activists should be 'rock stars' who take on as much as they can; there is a fine line between commitment and overworking, and overworking is often encouraged, jeopardizing studies, work, or health.*

Imagine a youth-run leadership conference is being pulled together in your town. Lots of young people are eager to sign on for what promises to be an exciting, inspiring and rewarding experience. The excitement and energy in the air lead the organizers to start thinking and talking bigger and better. The targets for attendance grow, along with the budget and scale of the venues, the cost and caliber of musical acts and the dreams of the organizing team.

Unfortunately, stress levels and workloads start to increase too. As the event draws closer and the pressure rises, with everyone facing other demands from school and work, some people start to withdraw from the organizing. They are too busy and need to prioritize other commitments over the conference. Meanwhile, a small group of people including you, are left holding the bag for this event that is still sometimes exciting but most of the time feels like an overwhelming, unwieldy beast.

You're not sure how you ended up here. You try to draw boundaries but every time you do so, other organizers talk about how overwhelmed they feel too, and you feel like you would be letting them down by setting limits or taking a step back. You are also told that your stress is a "first-world problem" and lots of people have worse things to deal with, so you resolve to try harder, be stronger and get through it. The more exhausted and stressed out you get, the more compliments you get; people tell you that you are so awesome, you're doing such great work, and this event couldn't happen without you. You begin to believe that. You are losing sleep at night from all the stress and still getting up early because there is so much to do and if you don't do it, no one else will.

The weekend of the conference comes and it flies by in the blink of an eye. You have some fleeting exciting moments of meeting celebrities and dancing with your friends, but you spend most of the weekend running around in such a blur that you are just glad when it is over. You get sick for three days after the conference and then you have to get back to work on all the things you set aside in order to focus on the conference. Your mental health hangs by a thread and you've lost sight of why you wanted to do this in the first place. When people talk about the conference becoming an annual event, you and the other organizers are quick to turn the idea down.

Youth-run leadership conference II

case studies

***Youth-Run leadership conference II** is a case study that highlights some indicators of success when youth take care of themselves and each other. As the case study highlights, for youth to practice self care there must be: opportunities to celebrate success; others who model realistic and healthy participation; intentional space for self care conversations/workshops/learning; opportunities to step aside; clear backup and contingency planning; strategies to support employees/volunteers through self care and burnout; clear expectations; and achievable goals.*

Now, imagine a different youth-run leadership conference. You are among the group of young people that start organizing by

putting together a planning and visioning session to get your ideas out. You all dream big but also discuss your schedules and how much time you will realistically be able to dedicate. You make agreements about how you will support one another in the organizing process. Among the goals the group sets for the conference is that you will strive to make the organizing process and the conference itself as enjoyable as possible for your team. You are excited for the event. You appreciate everyone's positive energy and commitment but you also like how everyone is being clear about their own limits and boundaries and what they can realistically contribute to the event. It's not always sunshine and rainbows — occasionally being this honest with each other involves some really hard moments, people make themselves vulnerable and have to take big risks. But you work through these tough times as a team and, as a result, you become stronger and more trusting of one another.

There are countless ideas for the conference but not all of them can be used this time. You establish a fair process to decide which ideas will be used this time and which will be put away for a future occasion so they won't be lost.

The energy behind the conference continues to grow, and more people are drawn to help and contribute what they can. Everyone is working from their strengths and all involved are careful to recognize what each person gives to the conference, however big or small. Soon, there are enough people involved that everyone has at least one other person to share their role with. These pairs help each other out, bounce ideas around and share the workload as it grows. When, in a particularly stressful personal moment, you have to step back for awhile, there is someone to cover for you in your absence, once you have communicated your needs clearly.

As the conference approaches, excitement grows, and all involved feel good about your contribution. The huge number of volunteers that have been drawn to this positive, collaborative project proves once again that many hands do make light work; you even get to take a whole afternoon and evening off during the conference to sit back and enjoy it. When it is over, you are tired but also energized. You can hardly wait for next year!

Practicing 'no'

tools

This 30-45 minute group exercise, developed by Tracey Mitchell based on Cheryl Richardson's, The Art of Extreme Self-Care, should be used on the planning and development of activities, programs, projects, etc.

1. To begin, ask participants what makes it hard to say no. You may or may not choose to write down the ideas as they come out. If the group doesn't bring them up, suggest the following:

- We don't want to feel guilty.
- We know how it feels to be disappointed and we don't want to disappoint others.
- We don't have the language to say no gracefully.
- Our fear of conflict keeps us from telling the truth.
- We want people to like us and are uncomfortable when they don't.

2. Share the following 'steps for saying no' with participants :

1. Buy some time.
2. Do a gut check
3. Tell the truth directly, with grace and love.

Tips:

1. Be honest without over-explaining yourself. Express regret but don't leave the door open when what you need is a wall.
2. Tell the truth directly and simply.
3. Depending on the situation, you might offer to help the person asking for something get the help they need ('No, but...').
4. It can sometimes help to create your own absolute yes and no lists so that if there are certain traps you tend to fall into or things you no longer want to do, you can put those on your "no" list. Things you know you want more of in your life can be on your "yes" list.

3. Have participants form two lines so that each person is lined up with a partner. Give the participants a scenario in which someone is being asked to do something, preferably something that would be a common experience for the folks in your group. One side of the group will make the request persistently, the other side will practice saying no, using the steps above (the visible steps will be 'buy some time' & 'say no truthfully and directly with grace & love'). Have participants practice acting this out and then change up the scenario a bit and switch roles to make sure both sides have a chance to do both parts of this. Here's an example scenario:

"Twos, you are with a local environmental organization and you are asking the person in front of you to join your board. Ones, you are enthusiastic about environmental issues and this is an organization that you have great respect for and it is your DREAM employer. However, you are maxed out to the limit and simply don't have time right now."

4. Debrief: Ask some or all of the following questions...

What was it like to be the person saying no? How did it feel? What made it easier or more difficult? What would make it easier or

harder to say no in a real-life situation? What was it like to be the person making the request and getting no for an answer? What made it easier or harder for you to be told no? What worked?

Youth self-care resources

resources

- [20 Great Self-Care Resources](#) from the Hollyhock Leadership Institute
- "[The Health of a Trainer](#)" by Celia Kutz, Training for Change
- "[Preventing Grassroots Wilt: Tips for avoiding burnout along the volunteer trail.](#)" By Charles Dobson, 19 Dec 2003, TheTyee.ca
- "[Pace Yourself](#)" Principle by Tracey Mitchell from BeautifulTrouble.org
- "[Letter to An Activist](#)" by Tooker Gomborg
- "[Potential Passion Purpose](#)" exercise

Use arts-based programming to engage a broader spectrum of youth

good practices

There is, more often than not, a connection between arts-based approaches and social media for public engagement. Often campaigns will have produced some kind of logo, symbol, or tool that acts as a quick visual reminder of messaging or cause/purpose. For example, the white wristband was internationally known as the symbol of the global fight to end poverty for the Make Poverty History awareness campaign, just as MADD Canada's Red Ribbon is a symbol of the efforts to stop impaired driving. Using art as a creative expression to illuminate pressing global issues and then distribute that message contributes to effective marketing of an issue.

Art is part of our culture and shapes our values as a society. We need art that aligns with social change ideals and objectives. Art builds healthy, economically vibrant, inclusive, creative communities that promote citizen engagement. Though there are a variety of skills applicable to arts-based programming, there is significant differences in enrollment of young men to young women. Women tend to be more engaged in arts-based youth engagement.

An arts-based approach to youth engagement is effective for engaging a broader spectrum of youth. Using art and creativity as the medium for showing understanding, experience, and perspective offers a unique opportunity for youth from various socio-economic statuses and backgrounds to access and connect with specific issues. Creative methods of engaging have shown, over time, to be fun and effective.

Sometimes the medium is not the message (Challenge case study)

case studies

Sometimes the medium is not the message is a case study that highlights the challenges involved in using arts-based programming as a method to engage youth. The case study focuses on a situation when the arts-based programming is not accompanied by any issue-based learning. The youth must be connected and engaged in an issue for the art to be meaningful and memorable.

An organization I was working with had funding available for youth, or organizations that work with youth, to do art-based projects on global justice issues. We asked that youth and youth-focused groups apply, telling us what they are going to do, how much money they need, and how it links to a global justice issue. We received several diverse applications, most of which were accepted. One of the most exciting applications came from a group that wanted to pair inner-city youth with youth from a developing country (via Canada World Youth) to create a movable mural on the theme of "more and better aid." This application was a dream! It brought youth into our programming that we had not been very successful at engaging in the past and had them create something that we could use on an ongoing basis. They received funding without a second thought.

A few months went by during which I kept in contact with the project, and from the sounds of things it was going really well. When we were presented with the final project it was a bright six-by-nine-foot mural. At first glance I was thrilled, but as I looked at the content of the mural I became more disappointed. "More and Better Aid" showed a bird's-eye view of the world. On one side (presumably North America) there were smiling white faces and a factory pumping out boxes with the Red Cross insignia on them. Trucks were then driving the boxes to airplanes where they were being air dropped to people across a body of water (presumably Africa). There were desperate looking black faces on this land (and a giraffe).

Though well-meaning, and though not the fault of the youth, the message in this mural is very problematic. This type of disaster aid

is what most people see on the news. It is also the type of aid that is demonstrated in many commercials. However this type of aid is not at all what our organization means when it talks about “better aid.” Concepts like solidarity, empowerment, capacity building, and so on were what we thought would be explored through this mural. How we thought these inner-city and developing-country youth would magically know this, and be able to transform complex ideas into a mural escapes me now.

The lesson learned here is that using the arts and creative media are effective ways to bring more and different youth into your programming, but for it to be meaningful, the youth also have to be engaged with the issues.

Defining Moments program (Success case study)

case studies

The Defining Moments Program is a case study that highlights the ways organizations can find success in engaging a broader spectrum of youth. This example of engaging youth through arts-based programming highlights the following indicators of success: providing arts-based opportunities for participants to self-express in creative ways; dedicating spaces to share artistic creations; inviting artists to share their talent, and having programming to enrich their experience.

The Defining Moments Program is offered by TakingITGlobal and supported by Canadian Heritage. The program is a national digital media arts and citizenship project and was designed to provide youth from diverse backgrounds and experiences opportunities to reflect on and explore their identity, and express and showcase their perspectives and relationship to Canada.

As TakingITGlobal describes, the program consists of three phases that provide youth with the opportunity to create “visible expressions of thoughtful reflection on social environmental/political issues of concern through art (spoken word, theatre, song, sculpture, dance, film, murals). The first phase involved workshops led by youth (train-the-trainer sharing in small groups) and invited open-ended questions provoking creativity and sparking interest in and helping youth express a defining moment as a Canadian.

The second phase was an open contest and collection where youth from throughout Canada could submit their artwork online, even though they were created from a variety of media including photography, painting, collage, video, song, and poetry. These works are showcased in a Global Gallery. This phase of the program would be more effective if there was an art creation workshop to ensure that the art creation takes place.

The third phase of the program is a Travelling Exhibit. The art collection is shown in every province and territory in Canada and is intended to provide youth with the opportunity to share their creative expression with the community and create platforms for audiences to be reached. Arts-based programming is effective because it gives people avenues of expression and inclusion through a range of mediums which invite creativity.

These three phases of the Defining Moments Program engage the artist by offering access points that build awareness around issues; allows young people to interact, understand, and relate with each other through art; supports individual growth as they find ways to understand themselves; and connects them to a range of mediums for expression.

Tips for arts-based programming

tools

These tips should be used as guidelines when developing arts-based programming for youth engagement.

1. Invite personal reflection with acknowledgement of broader social context prior to art creation.
2. Provide educational opportunities and a wide range of materials to encourage the use of a variety of mediums that are relevant to the message.
3. Create safe spaces for youth to share artwork with one another and to elaborate on meaning.
4. Leverage social media to promote ideas and messages displayed through artistic expressions.
5. Offer opportunities for youth artistic expression to be showcased within broader communities.

Arts-based education resources for youth engagement

resources

- [Defining Moments: Discovering Our Canadian Stories](#) is an online collection and travelling exhibit of artwork created by youth. Each piece expresses the artist's identity and experiences living in Canada. This is an example of how arts-based youth programming combined with an online platform and be both engaging and effective.
- [EVOKE](#) is a cross-Canadian, online, multi-disciplinary art contest for expressions of human rights. The project uses artistic expression and online tools and resources to engage youth and provide them with a platform for human rights dialogue.
- [The Creative City Centre](#) is a creative hub in downtown Regina that gives artists a space to create and collaborate, and engages the community in arts and culture through a myriad of new programming and activities. It's a resource for arts-based youth engagement because the methods used to create this hub could be replicated in other spaces.

- [Beautiful City Campaign](#) is an online, interactive, youth-led campaign to get people interested and excited about improving and expanding access to creative expression in public spaces.
- [El Systema](#) is a blog on art and activism and is meant for artists who are making art that is both visually engaging and conceptually focused on issues of social importance.
- [Theatre of the Oppressed](#) is a participatory, transformative process that involves playing and learning together with a goal of dealing with local problems. It is a method of engagement that demands creativity and is highly effective in social transformation.
- [Creating Local Connections \(CLC\)](#) aims to foster a vibrant culture of youth participation and exchange among Canadian youth by promoting and supporting local, provincial/territorial, and national initiatives.

Effectively use social media to engage youth

good practices

While social media tools have the potential to create open and inclusive environments, it is important to note that they can also reinforce and lead to unhealthy behaviours such as cyberbullying, isolation, and reinforcing stereotypes. It's important to realize that one's experiences are impacted by one's gender, and this can either create community or divide groups and impacts how people access public spaces, including online spaces.

Social media platforms are increasingly becoming the preferred communication tool and platform for youth. There are many different social media tools and platforms online with sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Tumblr allowing the users to discover, share, and publish content. This connection and discovery is happening in real time on smart phones that more and more youth carry with them.

Youth see social media as spaces where they can come together, hang out, make plans and exchange ideas and information. While social media sites continue to be places where many youth share photos, talk about what is going on in their lives, and build friendships, they are also places where youth learn about what is going on in their communities and are exposed to different perspectives. Increasingly, social media sites can be places where youth engage in dialogue about specific issues. Finally, social media sites can offer key entry points to social justice actions for many youth.

Slacktivism (Challenge case study)

case studies

"We don't have a choice of whether we do social media, the question is how well we do it."

-Erik Qualman [SocialMediaSMART.co.uk #in #fb #n_plus](#)

Slacktivism is a case study that highlights the challenges of using social media to engage youth. The following are a few of the challenges of using social media for youth engagement: youth might feel like they have an exaggerated sense of their contribution to a cause; the issues can be oversimplified; organizers and youth have varying degrees of knowledge and skill with specific platforms; platforms and online tools are perpetually changing and it is difficult to keep up with each new method; it is difficult to track and measure public engagement via social media beyond 'views' and 'likes.'

Social media tools are ever-changing and dynamic communication vehicles. As one educator who works primarily in youth education shared, "I have often been asked by other practitioners about how we 'do' social media. I think that many organizations realize that the potential for social media to augment their activities but are not always familiar with the tools and platform that are available – and this can be intimidating."

It is also increasingly challenging to gauge real attendance numbers or support for an event from online event posts. How many of us have organized an event where lots of people have indicated they are attending on Facebook but significantly fewer actually attends? A lesson to be learned from Facebook events is that 'yes' means 'maybe' and 'maybe' means 'no.'

The concept of *slacktivism* describes the idea that people are increasingly taking small personally satisfying acts in support of an issue or social cause, that have little or no practical effect other than making that individual feel good. An example of this would be indicating attending a Facebook event in support of an issue or social cause but not actually attending and participating in the event. This false sense of contribution to a cause is another challenge of using social media as a tool to effectively engage youth.

350.org (Success case study)

case studies

Success Case Study: "350.org"

350.org is a case study that highlights how social media can be used effectively to engage youth. The indicators of success for youth engaged through social media highlighted in this case include: the fact that youth have not only engaged with social

media but have taken concrete actions such as writing a letter, changing behaviour, or engaging in deeper personal reflection; the fact that it uses clear indicators for evaluating the success of the event (number of people at events, number of events, participants in local groups, etc.); the fact that it is both place-based and virtual; the fact that there is a progression from low to high commitment; and the fact that it offers multiple prongs for engagement or involvement.

350.org is a unifying campaign that has advanced a global movement to solve the climate crisis. They offer a wide range of opportunities for people to engage, and effectively reinforce their actions on the ground through the use of social media.

Levels of Engagement through Social Media Platforms

With simple goals, multiple access points and different levels of involvement, 350.org is a strong example of effective engagement through social media. It employs a multi-phase model of engagement that ranges from high to low commitment and builds momentum by moving individuals towards increasing their commitment and engagement across the campaign:

Level 1: Knowledge and Awareness Building; Showing Affiliation

- 'Like' on Facebook
- Follow Twitter feed
- Join email list
- Buy 350 t-shirts, buttons and other branded gear.

Level 2: Effective Attendance at Events

- Mass public actions – incorporate easy ways for people to participate in mass public actions.
- People attend events that are centralized around specific days so everyone can take action on that day.
- Take photos, upload and tag them at live events (Flickr).
- Generates momentum by creating a buzz and documenting the event (Live Tweeting, live streams).
- Participating in educational components to the event.

Level 3: Organizing - equipping people with the knowledge and resources to both learn and influence.

- People can take and use their graphics, logos, or templates.
- Organizing Guides and Project Ideas
- Multimedia
- Web Resources
- Printable Fact Sheets or Sign Up Sheets

Tips to keep in mind when running an online campaign

tools

Here are a few useful guidelines to keep in mind when developing your online campaign.

1. Have a clear campaign goal and target in mind.
2. Determine the measures for success (each campaign will have unique impact metrics) because they are not standardized).
3. Decide on whether or not the campaign needs its own set of social media accounts and if they are available for use.
4. Set dates and determine appropriate venues (place-based and virtual) where people can gather to show their support and interact.
5. Provide regular updates and interact frequently with friends and followers based on their interests.
6. Offer a range of opportunities for people to learn, interact and contribute meaningfully as co-contributors.

Resources for using social media to engage youth

resources

- [Non-profit tech 2.0: How-To Guide for Non-profits](#). Nonprofit Tech 2.0 selects 31 new 'favourite nonprofits' that have implemented good, great and exceptional social media campaigns.
- [Web 2.0 for Social Change: A Facilitators Guide](#), **TakingITGlobal (2008)** includes information about how to mobilize using social media including: Social Networking (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn), blogging, RSS: Really Simple Syndication, Wikis, Mobile Technologies and Podcasting.
- [Social Media for Social Good: A How-To Guide for Nonprofits](#), written by Heather Mansfield, is packed with more than a hundred best practices covering Web 1.0, Web 2.0, and Web 3.0 non-profit communications and fundraising. Learn how to build your e-newsletter list, find your "Twitter voice", launch a mobile website and texting campaign on a small budget. This guide presents a step-by-step strategic plan for launching and maintaining successful social media and mobile marketing campaigns.

Plan programs and projects that are accessible to all youth

good practices

Engaging youth that do not have easy access to programming, live in rural areas, on-reserve, or that are typically thought of as being 'at-risk' (or 'at-promise', as we like to say) takes a different approach than doing programming geared towards youth who are easily engaged.

Making programs and projects accessible to under-engaged youth takes flexibility in program planning, attention to logistics around safe spaces and transportation, inclusivity and attention to differing learning styles, as well as setting clear expectations of participants and organizers. In order to make it work, organizers also need to be aware of and responsive to local knowledge. From making your programming relevant to the experiences of youth, to ensuring that the role models or leadership in your programming are culturally affirming and representative of the participants, planning outside-of-the-box for this cohort is the key to success.

As with all responsible programming, addressing barriers is a core part of planning and measures should be consciously taken to make all activities inclusive to all youth. For under-engaged youth, mitigating these barriers should garner significant attention. These barriers could be around making sure there is accessible child care, paying attention to how washrooms are segregated, carefully planning the sleeping arrangements in order to make spaces safe, and paying attention to the gender of your participants, and what this will mean for your facilitator needs. Again, it is also important to make sure that role models in your programming are culturally affirming, and that the leadership in the programming is representative of the participants.

Southern Exposure (Challenge case study)

case studies

Southern Exposure is a case study that highlights some challenges in planning programs and projects that are accessible to all youth, including lack of clear expectations of youth and organizers; real or perceived racism; lack of support before/during/after an event; language and cultural barriers and lack of translation; and failure to make language accessible.

Youth from remote, Northern, Aboriginal communities can have a lot to overcome and deal with when they decide to attend a camp several hours south of their home community. Having to contend with clueless camp organizers who are unaware of the needs or challenges they may face and how to deal with them does not have to be among the challenges – but sometimes it is.

At a global justice leadership camp for youth a few years ago, organizers were very excited to have a small group of participants attending from the North. We did a few things right: covering the cost of travel to make sure the participants could attend, for instance. However, we didn't anticipate that the participants may have rarely or never left their home community, or that they were very nervous about interacting with the other participants and staff, most of whom were white, while there were virtually no white folks in their community. We also failed to prepare them for what to expect at the camp in terms of activities and global justice content. The Northern participants may also have been expecting to go to a well-resourced city with lots of attractions that they didn't have at home, rather than to a rural camp setting.

On arrival at the camp, we opened with some games and activities, and participants seemed to be interacting well, though there was definite shyness and the Northern youth stuck close together. Some of the activities assumed that participants had prior knowledge of global justice issues and contained some jargon that may have been quite unclear. When we broke for supper and the Northern participants sat at a separate table from everyone else, other participants moved to join them at their table. However, the challenges must have felt insurmountable on the part of the Northern participants, and they were certain they were being judged and facing racism from the other participants.

The Northern youth decided to leave on the first night of camp. No examples of racism were given when we asked for more detail in order to act on their complaints, but the participants undoubtedly felt outside the rest of the group and felt judged, and those feelings matter more than the exact details of what happened. We as staff had much to learn about how to provide a genuinely welcoming and safe environment, in what we did to prepare ourselves and participants before camps and in the activities we did at the camp itself.

Related challenges:

- distance and transportation logistics
- emotional gear-switching
- lack of organizational policy and support
- different learning styles.

Youth Empowerment for Civic Engagement (Success case study)

case studies

Youth Empowerment for Civic Engagement is a case study that highlights an example of accessible youth programming. This is an instructive example because it showcases indicators of success including meeting youth where they are at; relationship building; programming informed by those who participate; clear community standards or group norms; adult support for youth; and identifiable allies and network support for youth.

Youth Empowerment for Civic Engagement was an event put on by the Saskatoon Open Door Society. It was a partnership between an immigrant and refugee settlement agency and an aboriginal school, Oskayak School. Youth were provided transportation to the event location, which helped overcome the geographical barriers to participation. The sessions took place in late afternoon and early evening, where supper was also provided, so that there would be maximum opportunity for attendance. Through experiential learning, youth were encouraged to apply the skills for empowerment they learned to an issue that they were concerned about. This provided them with the opportunity for agency in their own learning processes.

After having created the opportunities for programming informed by participants, the youth were invested in their project. They determined that there were two issues of particular interest, tourism and improving the local bus system. These were issues that affected the youth directly because the local public transportation system was not meeting the needs of the patrons.

Tourism in their community was also an important issue because of the lack of knowledge about the school and communities from which the youth represent. These youth wanted to put their home on the map and to increase awareness. This event, from its inception, had the intent of inclusion and created the means to be open to youth from diverse communities. Through these active learning opportunities, youth had the opportunity to make meaningful change in their communities as well as meet with the mayor, city councillors, and school trustees.

Resources

After Halifax's Heartwood Centre for Community Youth Development did research on youth engagement, a group of dynamic youth developed "[the Circle of Awesomeness](#)" as a tool to guide public engagement practitioners in linking people to their communities. The tool's end goal is sustained youth engagement. This tool can be used as a guide during the development of an organization's activities, programs, or projects.

Related Indicators of Success

- Diversity is understood, valued, and named;
- Youth have had previous interactions with organizers;
- Group understands harassment statement;
- Situations are addressed in a constructive way;
- Youth have strategies to engage with the status quo;
- Youth are trained to respond to injustices they encounter;
- Language translation is provided;
- Programs explicitly use a diversity of learning and teaching tools;
- Flexibility in program design and delivery to respond to and support local context;
- Adult and peer support are welcome to attend;
- Organizational or institutional policy exist regarding barriers to participation with those you are serving, or want to serve.

Accessible programming for youth checklist

tools

This checklist should be used to guide the development of your activities, programs, or projects.

- Clear group norms have been established, informed by participants;
- Group understands harassment statement;
- Programming is informed by those who participate;
- Youth have identifiable allies and network support;
- Opportunities for relationship-building among participants exist;
- Diversity is welcome;
- Staff have anti-oppression training;
- An assessment of where youth are at has been done;
- An inclusion statement has been drafted;
- Childcare options are provided;
- Plain language is used, jargon is flagged and language is translated.

Anti-harassment Statement from the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour

tools

The following statement, from the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour, can be adapted for use within your activities, programs, or projects.

STATEMENT ON A HARASSMENT-FREE CONVENTION

We as participants, agree that everyone here has equal value.

Harassment divides groups

Racism, sexism, and other forms of harassment pit groups of workers against one another and divide groups. Division undermines our struggle for social and economic justice.

Harassment hurts people

Racist, sexist, ethnic and homophobic remarks and graffiti create unease and stress among people. Victims of the remarks never know what other forms of harassment this will lead to.

When a joke is not a joke

Racial, ethnic, sexist and homophobic jokes originated in times when groups of people were socially under attack and lacked the power to respond effectively. These jokes are a reminder of this history. They can create an environment where more serious forms of discrimination and abuse can happen.

Equality and solidarity

We must all work together to advance the cause of social and environmental justice. Harassment divides us. It has no place at this event. As sisters and brothers we will not make comments or gestures, or commit any acts that are humiliating or derogatory, or cause a delegate to feel uncomfortable.

We declare this a harassment-free event, and encourage participants to challenge issues, not individuals.

Resources for making programs and projects accessible to all youth

resources

"[Break the Rules: How Ground Rules Can Hurt Us](#)," by Daniel Hunter, Training for Change.

"Workshop 10: Jargon Flags", "Workshop 11: Power, Trust & Respect", and "Workshop 12: Ground Rules" in [The Freechild Project Youth Engagement Workshop Guide](#).

Sustain youth engagement by fostering meaningful connections and relationships

good practices

Educators, policymakers, community leaders, and service providers have the opportunity to impart youth with the skills, knowledge, abilities, and opportunities to become active participants in influential decision-making settings. The main approach to sustain youth engagement is by placing youth in the centre of those initiatives (Institute for Community Research, ICR).

When youth are provided the opportunity to participate meaningfully in the development and carrying-out of programs, they tend to become more motivated and more capable of further engagement. As they work with other youth or adults, who facilitate and support their progress, meaningful relationships are cultivated.

Where We Fall Short: Challenges in Sustaining Youth Engagement

case studies

***Where We Fall Short: Challenges in Sustaining Youth Engagement** is a case study that highlights the challenges in sustaining youth engagement. Some of the factors that reduce opportunities to sustain youth engagement include: lack of*

participation needed to sustain the work and a lack of core operational support that makes leaders unable to access or efficiently use the monetary and community resources available.

“Sustaining organizations and initiatives that promote youth engagement, as well as sustaining youth engagement itself, is challenging. Young people are critical contributors to program design, service delivery, and evaluation. Yet initiatives face significant challenges in developing the stable resources and strong organizational structures and systems needed to sustain their work. Many initiatives show initial promise in their start-up phase, but they often fade away because they are unable to access or efficiently use the fiscal and community resources that could help them thrive”

[[Institute for Community Research \(ICR\)](#)].

SCIC's Do-It-Yourself Media Camps were opportunities for youth to cultivate their creative expressions on international development and global justice issues. The goal was to train youth in do-it-yourself media like film making, comic books, drawing, drama, and theatre as activism. The camp took place over a weekend where youth were offered trainings on the creative media skills. Youth spent their time working on their creative media projects and nearing the end of the camp the youth compiled all of their material and published several zines. After the camp, they were prompted and expected to take part in the youth media spin-off project where they were to do a different media project. Without the prescriptive, immediate, and intentional support the youth were no longer engaged and did not complete the spin-off projects.

Related Challenges:

- Lack of jobs in sector
- Exclusivity of activist communities

Related principles of good practice:

Sustain youth engagement by developing meaningful connections and relationships.

Canada World Youth - Internships for Sustained Engagement

case studies

***Internships for Sustained Engagement** is a case study that highlights the features of successful sustained engagement. These features include: internship programs that are creative, adaptable, and industrious; capacity-building opportunities; understanding that youth learning is critical and transformative; programs that build on the knowledge and experience of the youth; hands-on learning and direct participation in community-driven development and local cultural activities; and paired groupings of Canadian youth and youth from the exchange country for strengthened relationships and sustained engagement.*

Canada World Youth has been running youth internship programs for many years and has been able to sustain and expand its work over time. Canada World Youth has had to be creative, adaptable, industrious, and committed to their programming and capacity-building. Sustained youth engagement means that youth learning is critical and transformative, youth understand how and why they are already engaged, and programs build on the knowledge and experience of the youth.

Canada World Youth offers Canadian youth (aged 17 to 25) the opportunity to have hands-on volunteer experience through the Youth Leaders in Action program. The program “allows youth to directly participate in community-driven development projects in the areas of environment, health and gender equity in one of their 13 partner countries” (CWY).

Youth are part of a team of young people from Canada and from a partner country who volunteer for 6 weeks (short program) or 4-6 months (standard program) on community-driven development projects. The 4-6 month Youth Leaders in Action program includes one phase in Canada and a second phase in a partner country. Each Canadian volunteer is paired with a volunteer from the exchange country for the duration of the program. The reciprocity of this program and relationship building is, in part, what makes it an example of sustained youth engagement.

The 6-week, short Youth Leaders in Action program takes place in the partner country only. While in the partner country youth are busy doing volunteer work, community-based activities, spending time with the host family, and group activities. Both the 6-week and the 4- to 6-month Youth Leaders in Action programs include:

- Intercultural learning that allows youth to directly engage with and learn about the cultural activities of the local community through active participation. Living with a host family is one of the main ways youth get to know another culture, community, lifestyle, language and food.
- The volunteer work youth participate in is led by the partner organizations and the community. While overseas, participants contribute to community-driven development projects run by CWY's partner organizations. During the 4-6 month program, in Canada, youth volunteer for local community service organizations such as homeless shelters, food banks, youth clubs, environmental conservation centres, meals-on-wheels services, schools, assisted living centres, or divisions of local government.
- Pre-departure training, volunteer orientation camps, community orientation camps and educational activity days (CWY).

Youth who have completed the Youth Leaders in Action program have returned from internships with a broad exposure of international development issues, a context for global relations and cultural identities, as well as a transformative learning experience, often changing the direction of their lives. Learning about home and abroad are essential components of solidarity building, providing youth with a sense of the larger picture that informs the issues in which they get involved. These youth have often sustained their engagement through getting involved in other youth-serving organizations, employment as project supervisors with Canada World Youth, participated in Canada World Youth's Alumni Program or the Student Network, or, alternatively, found employment with other organizations that do similar youth-related work.

Related indicators of success

Organizations have:

- a well-articulated vision;
- the ability to document and demonstrate success;
- the ability to adjust to changing social, economic, and political trends;
- support from policymakers and the public;
- the ability to identify and tap into necessary monetary and in-kind resources;
- strong internal governance systems;
- clear and convincing plans to harness key resources for sustainability;
- further opportunities for engagement after completing a one-off action;
- youth shared agency between youth and mentors.

Reflection questions for effective youth engagement

tools

Consider the main ways your organization engages youth.

1. How does your youth engagement programming translate into changed behaviour?
2. How does your organization sustain youth engagement? (Short-term, medium-term, and throughout their adulthood?)
3. How will youth engagement affect participants as adults?
4. What is the intended impact (after 10 years) of your youth engagement?
5. When planning youth engagement programs, how can you incorporate art, social media, or self-care?
6. Can your programming foster cross-generational support and initiatives?
7. How does your programming appeal to and engage diverse groups of youth: rural, at-risk, at-promise, on-reserve, under-engaged?
8. What kind of programming would you implement to engage youth?
9. What youth engagement practices does/will your organization employ to effectively engage youth?
10. How can incorporating an anti-oppressive lens improve the quality of your youth engagement?

Resources for sustaining youth engagement

resources

- Canada World Youth developed this [Impact Assessment](#) of their youth engagement programs.
- The Summer Youth Research Institute for Community Research (ICR) offers a [method to get teens to research and solve important social issues](#).
- HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development in Halifax created this "[Circle of Awesomeness](#)" as a conceptual tool for building sustained youth engagement.