

The Students
Commission
of Canada
*Centre of Excellence for
Youth Engagement*



La commission
des élèves du
Canada
*Le centre d'excellence pour
l'engagement des jeunes*



AGAINST THE CURRENT KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

It takes a village to raise a young leader

**May 14
2025**

**🕒 Openings at:
08:45AM**

**📍 Location:
Toronto Reference
Library**



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Registration & Welcome Breakfast

7:30AM – 8:45AM

Opening Remarks & Session 1

8:45AM – 10:15AM

Nurturing and Nudging Youth Leadership

Session 2

10:15AM – 11:30AM

Nurturing Our Gifts: Cultural Approaches to Becoming First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Leaders

Session 3

11:30AM – 12:45AM

Challenging Power: Youth Leadership in System Change

Lunch

12:45AM – 1:30PM

Session 4

1:30PM – 2:45PM

Challenging Norms: Leadership in Sports, Leisure and Recreation

Session 5

2:45PM – 4:00PM

Barriers to Youth Engagement in Leadership

Closing Remarks

4:00PM – 5:00PM

Cultivating Youth Changemakers

PROGRAM FLOW

Against the Current invites participants to explore the question: What is Youth Leadership?

Rooted in decades of youth-led action, research, and practice, this knowledge exchange explores leadership as a dynamic process of learning, collaboration, and meaningful change.

Throughout the day, participants will journey through a "Leadership Village," engaging in conversations that nurture leadership at individual, social, and systemic levels. Together, we'll create a space where diverse forms of leadership are recognized, barriers are dismantled, and young people are supported in shaping the future.

How will the day flow?

Each session block begins with a Kick Start Presentation at the front of the room. Led by a team of youth leaders, adult allies from the non-profit sector, and academic partners from the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, these 15-minute presentations combine evidence, lived experience, and critical questions.

After a short transition, participants head into their chosen Neighbourhood breakouts, where they'll engage in a 40-minute small group activity or conversation. These sessions are co-led by youth and adult facilitators and offer different ways of engaging with the session's central question.

Each 75-minute session block includes time to recharge between sessions—grab a coffee, keep a conversation going, or pause for reflection.

Neighbourhoods to Explore

Each Neighbourhood offers a distinct way to experience and explore youth leadership:

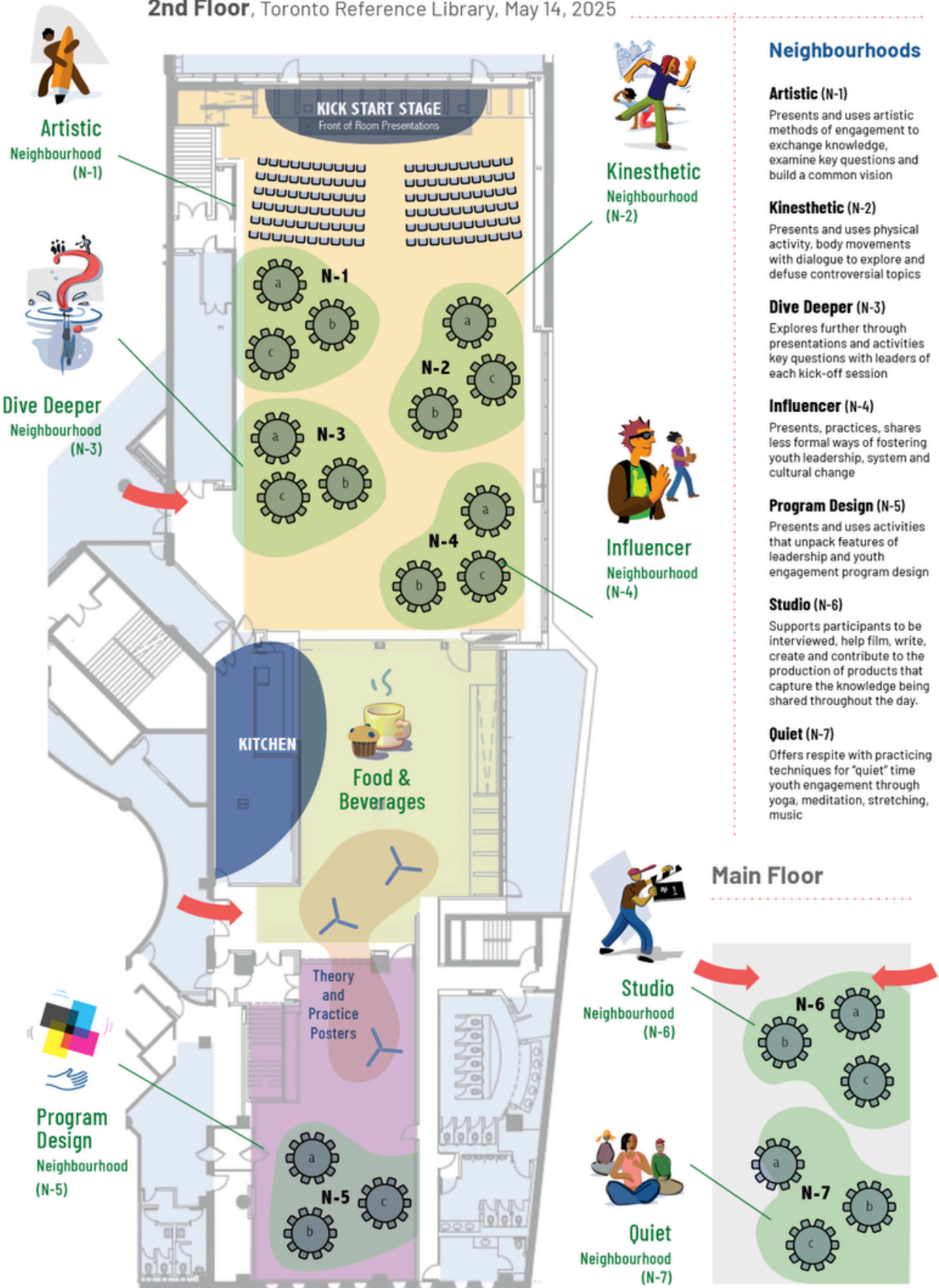
1. **Artistic Neighbourhood:** Uses creative methods (art, storytelling, performance) to examine key questions and build shared understanding.
2. **Kinesthetic Neighbourhood:** Uses physical movement and activity to explore complex or controversial leadership topics in an embodied way.
3. **Dive Deeper into Kick Start Neighbourhood:** Extends the kick start conversation with interactive discussions and activities led by the presenters.
4. **Influencer Neighbourhood:** Highlights grassroots and informal approaches to fostering youth leadership and systems change through real-world case studies.
5. **Program Design Neighbourhood:** Focuses on unpacking the building blocks of youth leadership programming, with hands-on tools and discussions.
6. **Studio Neighbourhood:** Offers participants a chance to help document the day—record interviews, create content, and contribute to collective knowledge mobilization.
7. **Quiet Neighbourhood:** Provides a space for rest and introspection through mindfulness practices like yoga, meditation, music, and gentle movement.

Throughout the day, you can also visit our Theory & Practice Poster Zone, where participants, academics, and community partners showcase models and research related to youth leadership and engagement. It's a great place to gather inspiration and take away tangible ideas.

YOUTH LEADERSHIP VILLAGE

Exploring evidence, environments and techniques

2nd Floor, Toronto Reference Library, May 14, 2025



AGAINST THE CURRENT 2025

SESSION DETAILS

Nurturing and Nudging Youth Leadership

A discussion about the functions of generativity, intergenerational partnership and tapping into existing youth agency for reciprocal leadership development.

Heather Lawford, PhD, Professor, Bishop's University, SSHRC TII Canada Research Chair, Youth Development, 3M National Teaching Fellow

Sharif Mahdy, Chief Executive Officer, The Students Commission of Canada

Nola Charles, Youth Leader, Vancouver Youth Strategy

Mohamad Zaher Sharbaji, Youth Leader, New Brunswick Teen Resource Centre

Nurturing Our Gifts: Cultural Approaches to Becoming First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Leaders

Upstream parallel paths across the land: youth leaders' voices with stronger sense of self, cultural identity, pride, and a sense of direction, contributing to their communities for downstream results.

Jennifer Markides, PhD, SSHRC TII Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Youth Wellbeing and Education Associate Professor, Curriculum and Learning, Werklund School of Education & Faculty of Social Work, University of Calgary

Leah Lizotte, Human Resources Director, Beaver First Nation, Alberta

Dominique Bloxom, Traditional and emerging First Nations, Inuit and Métis leader

Sky Scrimshaw, Youth Leader from Beaver First Nation, Alberta

Leadership in Sports, Leisure and Recreation

Discussion of opportunities and obstacles for youth leadership development in a variety of sport and recreational activities.

Linda Rose-Krasnor, PhD, Professor Emeritus, Brock University, Founding Academic Director of the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement

Victoria McLuckie, with Cadets Olivia Lee-Wo and Lillian Veal

Steven Whitaker, Sports, Wellness and Achievement Network (SWAN)

Challenging Power: Youth Leadership in System Change

An orientation to upstream youth engagement leadership and the importance of avoiding lifestyle drift in system change

Tanya Halsall, PhD, Scientist, University of Ottawa Institute of Mental Health Research at The Royal, Assistant Professor, School of Epidemiology and Public Health, University of Ottawa

Amanda Bellefeuille, Research Assistant, Carleton University

Laurel Donison

Barriers to Youth Engagement in Leadership

An exploration of barriers existing at individual, family and community levels and the importance of resilience and safer spaces to create opportunity.

Yana Berardini, PhD, Assistant Professor, Child and Youth Studies, Trent University and member of the Centre of Excellence of Youth Engagement and the Canadian Centre for Caregiving Excellence

Matt Drabenstott, PhD, Program and Research Fidelity Lead, The Students Commission of Canada

Fiona Lacey, Program Lead, Peer Support and Young Caregivers, The Ontario Caregiver Organization

Rebekah A. Norman, MA (She/Her), Research Coordinator and Relief Program Facilitator, Young Caregivers Association

Cultivating Youth Changemakers & Closing Remarks

Understanding and supporting diverse leadership journeys, with a summary wrap-up.

Heather Ramey, CYW, PhD, Associate Professor and Graduate Program Director, Department of Child and Youth Studies, Brock University

Sharif Mahdy, Chief Executive Officer, The Students Commission of Canada