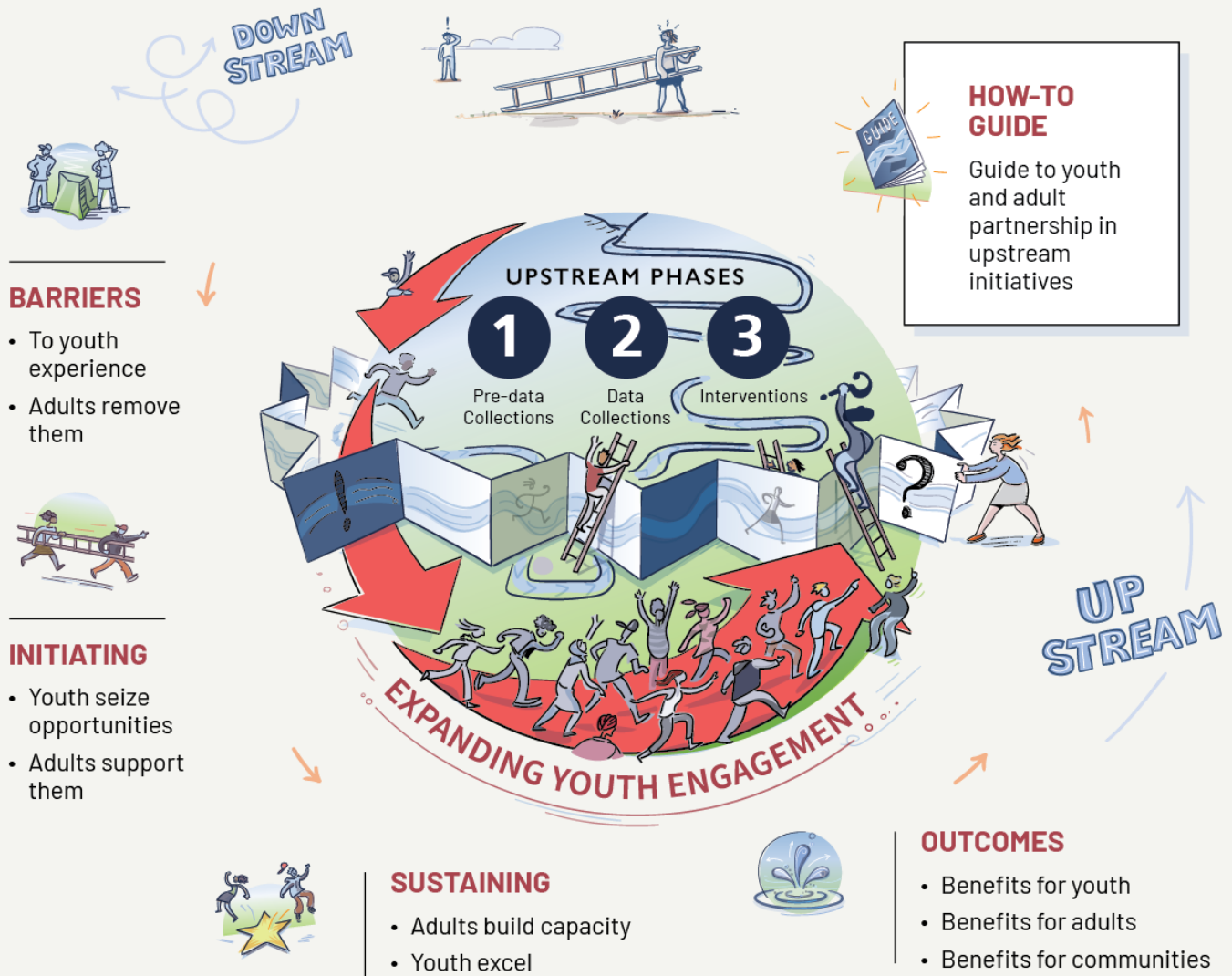


Youth Shift: Amplifying Youth Engagement in Prevention



April 2026

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

kdehub
Youth Substance
Use Prevention



carrefourdéc
Prévention de la consommation
de substances chez les jeunes

Table of Contents

Purpose, Background, and Contextualizing Youth Shift	3
Purpose	3
Background	3
The Theoretical Backbone of Youth Shift	3
Scoping Youth Shift: Beyond the Icelandic Prevention Model (IPM).....	4
Upstream Approaches	5
A Framework and How-To Guide to Amplify Youth Voice in Prevention Efforts	6
3 Critical Factors to Spark and Sustain meaningful youth Engagement	6
<i>Barriers</i>	7
<i>Initiators</i>	11
<i>Sustainers</i>	15
<i>Outcomes</i>	20
Mutually Reinforcing Process and Outcomes	22
Share Your Feedback	22
References	22

The Students Commission of Canada & The KDE Hub. (2026). Youth Shift
Framework: Amplifying Youth Engagement in Prevention.

Purpose, Background, and Contextualizing Youth Shift

Purpose

Youth Shift is a framework and how-to guide for amplifying youth voice in long-term, community-based upstream initiatives. Whether you're at the starting line of youth engagement or already have youth buy-in, this comprehensive framework details steps for sustained, meaningful youth engagement and intergenerational partnership at every phase of your project.

Background

The Students Commission of Canada partnered with the KDE Hub in 2025 to form a Youth Engagement Working Group with the goal of co-creating a knowledge product that boosts youth engagement in the implementation of the Icelandic Prevention Model (IPM) in Canada. The working group was an offshoot of a community of practice hosted by the KDE Hub for Youth Substance Use Prevention Program recipients (community initiatives funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada to implement the IPM). Forty-six practitioners, researchers, and youth from across Canada took part in four working group meetings (Jun 2025-Feb 2026). Participants represented 10 communities (9 of which were Planet Youth communities) across Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia, and New Brunswick. Sessions (90 minutes) were designed to maximize participants sharing successes, needs, and gaps around youth engagement, each session building on voice and progress from prior sessions. Youth Shift is a co-created product rising out of sessions.

The Theoretical Backbone of Youth Shift

“Without being driven by youth,” prevention efforts are “not relevant, credible, or potentially impactful” (working group participant). Youth bring “new and innovative ideas required to change the world”, and without their voices, “we would completely miss the boat” (participants). Another participant described youth engagement as a “pillar” of prevention. These answers came from an initial session where we asked the working group two questions:

- Why does youth engagement matter for prevention?
- How can youth be engaged in your prevention efforts?

Participants' flurry of responses, captured on a virtual whiteboard, could be distilled into three overarching themes: what limits or restricts youth engagement, how youth get involved, and roles young people are or could be taking on within initiatives.

These three categories map onto core dimensions of a youth engagement frame developed by the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement (CEYE) at the SCC (Rose-Krasnor, 2009). Their framework has been used to develop and evaluate youth engagement in every province and territory across Canada and even internationally (e.g., India, Costa Rica). Defined, youth engagement is the meaningful and sustained involvement in an activity with a focus outside of the self (Pancer et al., 2002). There are five components of youth engagement: how youth get involved (i.e., initiators), what keeps them involved (i.e., sustainers), restrictions (i.e., barriers), outcomes, and qualities surrounding activities. Working group participants' experiences and perspectives aligned with barriers to, initiators of, and sustainers of engagement. Threaded throughout their responses, participants highlighted program or relational qualities that were needed to open doors or support engagement. And, in subsequent sessions, participants were asked to envision the positive outcomes of engagement for adults, youth, and their communities. Resultingly, the CEYE's youth engagement anchored the process and development of this Youth Shift framework. An additional component of the framework worth noting here is that youth engagement occurs within and across three levels: individual (intrapersonal traits such as interests, passions, and journey within the program), social (interpersonal dynamics like peer relations or partnerships connected through the program), and system (surrounding environments, cultures, or communities) (Rose-Krasnor, 2009). These levels are folded into this how-to guide as lenses: agility to shift focus and work across levels will maximize engagement and impact.

Scoping Youth Shift: Beyond the Icelandic Prevention Model (IPM)

Most working group participants were implementing the IPM. Others were embarking on other prevention initiatives that were addressing other pressing issues in their community that included or were beyond the scope of substance use challenges. A few participants were at the planning stage of a prevention initiative or interested in what a youth-centred prevention approach could look like in their community. With a diverse group approaching prevention from multiple interests and experiences, the working group explored youth engagement within the context of three overarching phases of prevention: pre-data collection (e.g., coalition building, ensuring funding), data collection (e.g., surveying, rapid analysis), and interventions (e.g., upstream primary prevention solutions informed by quality, local data). The [IPM's 10 Steps of Implementation](#) fall into these three phases. As a process note, working group sessions were structured where participants could comment on prevention phases or IPM's steps; most participants opted to pin responses to phases, a key reason to why phases are visualized in the framework.

Upstream Approaches

Prevention efforts, like the IPM, are ‘upstream’ initiatives, seeking to push against the cascade of systemic challenges and risk factors that have and continue to threaten child and youth wellbeing, reshaping the environment around all young people so that they thrive (as opposed to a ‘downstream’ approach, where services and supports often struggle to meet crisis and wellness demands). Building on the rationale of centering youth voice in prevention efforts, participants stressed throughout sessions that employing a youth engagement approach contributes to and catalyzes the upstream approach. Two participants explained: “Engagement itself is a protective factor and prevention strategy”; “If youth weren’t involved, it takes away from the upstream nature of IPM and [initiatives] might not be sustainable at all!” In discussing the complexity of issues facing youth, several participants highlighted the need to sync and synergize efforts across all points in the stream (i.e., upper, middle, and down stream).

A Framework and How-To Guide to Amplify Youth Voice in Prevention Efforts

The Youth Shift framework wraps youth engagement and intergenerational partnership as expanding and evergreening processes woven through all phases of a prevention initiative. Youth Shift’s encompassing approach offers multiple points of entry into youth engagement from start-up efforts to initiatives with a thriving youth base. Youth Shift provides a holistic approach to fostering youth engagement while offering concrete steps to navigate context-specific challenges: “It’s very comprehensive...a holistic perspective into tackling everything together at once...while tell[ing] us exactly what we can do, giv[ing] us the exact steps of what we can be focusing our energy into” (working group participant). Following the orientations and ‘How tos’ outlined in this framework can shift the culture of project and a community toward youth-driven momentum, solutions anchored in youth voice, and intergenerational partnerships that spark belonging.

3 Critical Factors to Spark and Sustain meaningful youth Engagement

Barriers, Initiators, and Sustainers are 3 critical factors behind amplifying youth engagement in prevention initiatives. Youth engagement is most robust when prevention initiatives pay attention to and take action around these factors throughout prevention initiatives. At the early stages of an initiative or seeking to bring youth into project, barriers and initiators are key to prioritize. In the following sections, each factor is unpacked in four ways:

- Factors are defined.
- The experiences, needs, and desires of young people pertinent to the factor are explored.
- Overarching principles for initiatives, communities, and supporting adults to cultivate youth engagement are detailed.
- How-to steps for overcoming obstacles, strengthening intergenerational partnership, and expanding and deepening opportunities are outlined.

Barriers

Barriers prevents or limits youth engagement in prevention initiatives. Importantly, this section highlights how coalitions and adults can overcome these challenges. Outlined below are barriers that youth face identified by the working group. **Barriers are bundled into three categories:**

1. Barriers that impede youth from initiating engagement,
2. Barriers that occur between youth and adults, and
3. Barriers pertaining to time and competing priorities.

Following these barriers are competencies strategies adults can employ to overcome barriers and boost engagement.

1. Initiating Barriers

- Youth are unaware of prevention effort(s)
- Youth unsure of short-/long-term benefits
(Even if youth are aware of prevention projects):
- Youth don't believe the vision,
- Youth don't know how to contribute,
- Or participating is inaccessible to youth

Sample Working Group Participant Quotes

"Youth don't really know these projects exist."

"If we don't go meet them and talk to them about what this is all about, they won't know about it."

"Benefits are very long term and hard to motivate youth on that front"

"Youth might not believe the impact of it if it's just another project in the pile that exists that promises to focus on making things better for them."

"Youth may not be aware of how much of an impact they could have on these projects"

"Prioritization of time on the adult side. It might need more organization, but it's so important to take the time."

"How to accommodate all players with different schedules? lots of time and thought needed."

2. Intergenerational Barriers

- Lack of trust among youth and adults
- Adults are 'not listening'
- Youth voice can be tokenized

Sample Working Group Participant Quotes

“100% confirm, I am grade 11 right now and I always have a barrier when talking to adults with a feeling that they would never understand us.”

“Adult vs youth mentality; us vs them way of looking at it, makes it harder to find a middle ground and trust with both sides.”

“The project feels too bureaucratic and the adults on there are not actually listening to their inputs.”

“[There’s a tricky] balance of it not feeling like tokenism”

3. Time Barriers

- Youth have conflicting priorities (e.g., school, job, home)
- Youth take additional time and effort to reach

Sample Working Group Participant Quotes

“It takes a lot of energy/effort to bring youth to the table”

“Sometimes they [youth] are hard to engage”

“[Youth have] Conflicting priorities (i.e., school, job, caring for siblings)”

Overarching Principles to Removing Barriers:

There are three overarching principles that will assist initiatives in successfully naming and removing obstacles holding back youth engagement.

- Meaningful, sustained youth engagement is driven by adult champions and dedicating resources for more youth to connect, share, and take part.
- Continually evaluate what barriers are or could be restricting youth engagement.
- Meet youth where they are at: in communications, timelines, and project activities.



How Adults Remove Initiating Barriers

- Increase project awareness and accessibility by meeting youth where they are (virtually and in-person)
- Provide safe, free, and convenient, transportation to all activities across youth locations
- Create youth-accessible spaces, giving youth autonomy to shape spaces they want and need

Sample Working Group Participant Quotes

“Meet them where they're at - in school, sports, clubs, community centres, etc.”

“Support youth where they're at to create environments where they can be successful.”

“Transportation methods should be what the youth request and how they feel safe.”

“Transportation is a huge barrier. (Don't have public transport in all communities, so we rely on school buses.)”

“Create an atmosphere of fun and purpose that youth will value (not rushed, hear their voice, work from what we learn from them).”

“Provide SPACE (literal space, like rooms) where youth can make their own long-term hang out zones.”

“[I] still have to check myself on this, sometimes I will default to adult thinking and planning but this is so important.”

How Adults Remove Intergenerational Barriers

- “Let youth speak for themselves” and listen with curiosity
- Report back how their voice is making a difference
- Ensure youth involvement in establishing shared purpose
- Design and implement processes and structures that encourage youth involvement

Sample Working Group Participant Quotes

“Stop what you're doing and pay attention.”

“Listening to them before giving your opinion.”

“Creating space for youth to voice their needs without adult influence.”

“Consistency with youth engagement and reporting back so they know we're listening.”

“Create the vision with youth.”

“Create a way to ensure projects do not move forward without youth voice informing and deciding.”

“Consulting youth before decisions are made.”

How Adults Remove Time Barriers

- When applying for funding, budget time for and build timelines around youth engagement into the application.
- Shift project timelines around youth, even if that means slowing momentum

- Take time to build relationships with youth
- Dedicate resources (time, person(s), money) towards meaningful, sustained youth engagement
- Continually evaluate what barriers are/might be restricting youth involvement
- Advocate and secure dedicated time for youth to take part

Sample Working Group Participant Quotes

“Take time to hear from youth, scheduling may need to be slower so you can engage youth when they are available.”

“Suggest building out timelines when creating funding proposals for youth engagement. I think we need to start setting the expectation with funders that if we want engagement, we need to make the timelines realistic!”

“Don't expect youth to be on your timeline, they have busy lives too.”

“Give it time, small group of youth will invite friends and peers if enjoy and trust.”

“Taking the time to create relationships...you'll never get there if you don't take the time.”

“Youth engagement should be at the centre - not something that adults do as a "side" – [it takes] time and resources dedicated to this.”

“Critically analyze the barriers that might exist to participation (timing of meetings, format, platform, agenda setting process, weight of adults to youth).”

“Adults can help youth find balance (e.g., [securing] a day off from school to reduce pressure).”

Initiators

Initiators refer to how to spark youth interest to get involved with your project—getting young people ‘to the table’ or ‘through the door’.

Overarching Principles to Initiate Engagement:

There are three overarching principles that will assist in encouraging youth to show up to a prevention effort:

- Tailor communication, spaces, and project structures around youth interest and involvement (e.g., in their language on their preferred platform, fun and engaging spaces)
- Help young people see their role and value in the project early on.
- Prioritize trust and building-relationships among youth and adults.

Outlined below are **incentives for youth to show up**, followed by **favorable intergenerational structures and supports** that young people are looking for when getting involved in long-term, community initiatives.

Incentivize Showing up and Contribution

- Food, honoraria, gift cards, and/or swag are helpful incentives to get youth in the door or coming back
- Compensate youth for their time. This includes paying youth for their time and contribution (e.g., honoraria, budget for paid roles) and unpaid compensation (e.g., volunteer hour confirmation)
- Provide education or career advancement opportunities (e.g., letters of reference, micro-credentials)
- Obstacles that might prevent or complicate youth involvement are removed; youth are able to more fully show up and be engaged (see Barriers section above)

Sample Working Group Participant Quotes

“[We brought 10 youth together and] provided gift cards and food.”

“Ask youth what they like (e.g., food, swag interests).”

“Youth deserve to be paid for their hard work and contributions to projects and products. Experience is not a currency.”

“Incentive or value add - co-authoring, compensation, volunteer hours, certificate, reference letter, etc.”

“Youth need jobs and letting them be part of an employment team will boost their prospects.”

“Resume building opportunities – i.e., training, leadership opportunities.”

“[When scheduling or providing food] Be considerate or religious times of fasting.”

“Take care of the “adult stuff” -- room rentals, food, transportation, then allow the youth to be who they want to be.”

Intergenerational Structures and Supports

- Relationship-building is a core part of project activities
- Activities that are fun and engaging
- Youth can see their purpose and role within the project (e.g., decision making); youth feel needed and know adults are interested in hearing their voice
- Clear expectations, including an informative orientation
- Strength-based lenses and approaches
- Low stakes environment where youth feel safe to fail

Sample Working Group Participant Quotes

“This benefits everyone, not just youth, and sparks creativity and innovation.”

“There doesn't always need to be an agenda, gathering can happen for fun and to build relationships.”

“Make it fun and cool.”

“Involving contests, community events, and other engaging formats.”

“Being clear up front about how youth will be recognized and compensated and inviting them to tell you how they want to be.”

“Being involved helps us speak up about things that matter, like mental health, school stress, or safe spaces, and feel like our voice counts.”

“Be honest about the long-term nature of the work.”

“A good orientation / feeling supported and informed.”

“Don't make it about deficiencies ... make it about strengths and positive aspects.”

“Confidence comes from practice.”

“Allow youth to fail and learn from mistakes without fear of exclusion.”

“Permission to test and “fail” -- and test again.”

Working group participants detailed strategies for reaching out to youth and opening the door to project opportunities for youth. The strategies offered below are for recruiting youth as well as providing intergenerational strategies for removing barriers to ongoing youth participation. In turn, these

approaches are creating favorable conditions and relationships that attract and support youth engagement.

Recruitment Strategies (Initiate)

- Bring the initiative to where youth are already gathering
- Move project activities around the region
- Use popular social media to communicate about prevention initiatives and opportunities
- Have youth (co-)create social media posts
- Leverage existing networks and trusting relationships to source youth interest and buy-in
- Recruit youth who are furthest from opportunity (not just youth who initially show interest)
- Make recruitment and project messaging accessible to all youth
- Translate materials to all local languages

Sample Working Group Participant Quotes

“Where do youth feel themselves? Go there.”

“Going where the youth are to engage in conversation of needs and wellness.”

“Use social media that youth use, not adults.”

“Use social media to share opportunities with youth. (Reaches everyone, even those who can't always attend meetings.)”

“Power of working with youth elders. Leveraging youth to youth relationships in survey collection.”

“Network with parents/caregivers to elicit and support youth involvement “Un-involved parents will make enforcing policy harder.”

“Connect with most equity-deserving youth.”

“Engaging youth that don't show up or put their hand up first.”

“Include a diverse group of youth so they can see someone who is like them.”

“Translate [materials] into the languages of youth in community.”

Intergenerational Approaches (Initiate)

- Adults should build trust with youth by slowing down timelines to prioritize youth engagement and building reliable relationships with youth
- “Let youth lead” (Working group participant)
- Individualize opportunities for youth, and create multiple pathways for youth contribution and leadership

- ‘Choose your own adventure’: Afford youth the flexibility to chip- or dive-in as much as they have interest or time to invest
- Provide supportive roles and structures for mentoring and supporting youth growth (also a sustainer)
- Foster non-judgmental, comfortable spaces, which will spark youth interest and involvement

Sample Working Group Participant Quotes

“Setting unrealistic deadlines to complete the first 3 steps. Once the deadlines are fixed and funders have approved them, it can be a challenge to slow down to the speed of trust to make meaningful engagement.”

“Connect with youth on more general topics; build a relationship/make yourselves known (‘build cred’).”

“Challenge of funding timelines and needing to be flexible.”

“Get out of the way of youth. Let them drive initiatives.”

“Have different methods to engage, art, music, visuals, dance, videos, etc.”

“Offer different opportunities to participate based on what they feel most comfortable with (writing things down, presenting, just listening and being present).”

“Having flexibility to allow youth to participate on their own terms.”

“Bring youth along in the journey and allow them to share and participate wherever they would like to.”

“Supporting youth in developing their skills sets to provide them with leadership opportunities.”

“Being a role model for the youth.”

“Creating comfortable spaces in which they can contribute with no fear of judgement.”

Sustainers

What sparks youth interest and gets them through the door is not always what keeps them coming back, nor what helps them make their contribution or feel part of something larger than themselves. Working group participants identified 7 ways (i.e., 7 ‘sustainers’) youth can deepen their engagement and impact in a prevention initiative. Sustainers speak to value youth can add through their involvement and can shape into concrete roles youth can take on (e.g., a seat at the table, a say in what happens next). All seven sustainers can be incorporated throughout a prevention initiative. Take, for example, youth shaping and implementing research and evaluation: youth can be involved in co-creating an evaluation plan, creating hype around and facilitating data collection, interpreting findings, and recommending solutions based upon findings.

What Sustains Youth Engagement (Sustainers)

- Youth are a necessary part of decision making (e.g., governance, guiding new steps)
- Youth provide input and guidance as advisors and mentors
- Youth provide a vital perspective, filling in adult ‘blind spots’
- Youth are creative innovators of process and solution
- Youth align solutions to the larger issues
- Youth are mobilizers and implementers of community solutions (especially when youth care about the project and solution)
- Youth shape and implement project research and evaluation

Sample Working Group Participant Quotes

“Why should adults make all the decisions or be in all the discussions?”

“[We] cannot make decisions for the youth without having them at the table.”

“No decisions about us without us.”

“Youth Elders - In a mentorship role, taking on a peer support role. It's an on-going opportunity, and they can eventually grow into a bigger role. There's constant youth voice at the meetings, because the youth Elders come, and they are very involved in the schools.”

‘Hoping [youth ambassadors] will go to school meetings with us and PTA meetings and open, will act as advisors, and will be part of the community action team.’

“Their perspectives need to be included - they can bring ideas and thoughts adults haven't considered or know about.”

“They know things adults will never know. they can propose ideas that will be relevant to young people in today's world. If youth weren't involved, we would completely miss the boat.”

“Young people are courageous and ask for audacious things.”

“Youth bring a variety of new and innovative ideas that are required to change the world.”

“Every young person has something they can provide. This is the most quintessential role...it's the building block of problem solving. Youth create efficiency.”

“Youth bring in the purpose and voice that informs the direction of PY.”

“Youth voices keep us on track with what is needed”

“Solutions for youth need to come from youth.”

“Engaging youth will ensure project success/uptake.”

“Sustainability relies on youth caring about the problem and the initiative in the first place -- solving that problem would help to solve many of these sustainability problems.”

“Have youth review the survey and participate in the process.”

“Giv[e] youth survey to redesign around a strengths-based lens and asking youth what they want to know from the survey. Youth knowing that had a say and knowing they won't get bulldozed from adults.

Overarching Principles to Sustain Youth Engagement:

There are three overarching principles that will assist in encouraging youth to show up to a prevention effort:

- Carve out and support roles of young people within initiatives.
- Circle back to young people around the contributions they make and to the community around the impact they have.
- Be curious and flexible around how young people can take part and contribute.

Broken down, working group participants identified **four areas of support and capacity building**:

1. How adults create and connect youth to opportunities within initiatives,
2. Targeted areas for building capacity with adults connected to initiatives,
3. How adults can support and build capacity of youth, and
4. Championing and crediting youth contribution.

By exploring these areas adults can create inroads to and support for more meaningful youth engagement.

1. Creating and Connecting Youth to Opportunities

- Create space for youth to be involved and have an impact

- Keep inviting youth and asking youth how they want to be involved in the project (also an initiator)
- Create and share opportunities by synergizing efforts across youth life domains (e.g., school, home)

Sample Working Group Participant Quotes

“Giving youth more opportunities to have a seat at a table and make their voices heard.”

“Never assume youth don't want to be involved - invite them everywhere to everything and let them decide where their passion and interests are to get involved.”

“Start engaging youth from day 1. Ask them how they want to be engaged. Take the opportunities as they come.”

“Breaking down silos across school/community--more integration to support youth, creating synergies across opportunities.”

“Remember that parents/guardians may influence involvement of youth; providing adequate communication that can be shared at home can help build trust in youths' involvement in [the initiative].”

2. Adjusting Adult Expectations and Building Capacity

- Shift culture and build capacity among adults toward amplifying youth involvement and voices
- Adopt an emergent approach, weaving flexibility throughout project phases
- Keep an open mind to how youth could be engaged, and what their involvement could look like
- Continue to re-evaluate value of youth involvement
- Put yourselves in the shoes of a young person; their interests, passions, perspective, and priorities might be different than adults

Sample Working Group Participant Quotes

“The adults need to 'get out of the way' (stop being the sticks in the mud).”

“It means change (for adults) in the ways of doing things - people resist change.”

“Building capacity [with adults to bring in or value youth voice]-No youth on the steering committee.”

“Understanding the process and points of connection and involvement with youth. Allows for our own reflections into what changes need to happen within

our ecosystem. Opportunities to reflect how your approaching youth engagement and the IPM."

"Starting from scratch trying to engage youth for the project. Based on beginning conversations will dictate next steps. All very slow. :)"

"Be willing to adjust if it's not working."

"Don't assume that they want to participate, don't want to participate, or do/don't want to participate in the ways WE want them to participate."

"Thinking about what our assumptions are re: how young people will show up, how they will or will not contribute -- we make assumptions (they could be correct) but we wouldn't know. Need to be aware of these assumptions and ASK if possible. We can be surprised."

"Re-evaluating if the work is still meeting youth's needs and if there is a different "value add" that would keep them engaged (e.g., started with compensation, now want to co-publish)."

"Put yourself in youth's shoes - value what is important to youth, even if that doesn't seem important to the adult."

"We're launching our social media and really wanting to highlight the way that youth think, what they are passionate about, and what they like. We're hoping it sparks conversations among families/adults to think about youth's passions."

"Listen without judgement. What are youth are going through. A little less pressure, more hope" You don't have to solve the problems, youth just want to be heard."

3. Building Capacity and Supporting Youth Engagement

- Build youth capacity to lead and have increasingly larger impacts
- Early in youth involvement, provide 'micro' leadership opportunities—these can jumpstart leadership
- Connect youth skillsets and interests to relevant tasks or roles
- Provide training, supports, and mentorship to nurture youth growth and involvement (also an initiator)

Sample Working Group Participant Quotes

"Building youth up to take on that leadership role. Get started on the working aspect, beyond the ideas or telling us what they want."

"Provide youth opportunities to take on smaller leadership roles (like being a host in a zoom room vs. setting up the whole event) that provides them an opportunity to be an important part of the team."

"Youth need to find their skills and figure out what they connect with."

"Ask youth if they want or need support and then provide that for them."

"Constantly mentor youth leaders."

"Provide peer support opportunities for youth."

4. Championing and Crediting Youth Involvement

- Champion youth involvement
- Support the community 'trailblazers' who advocate for and support increased youth engagement
- Give credit to youth for their contribution(s)
- Help youth see their impacts, both small and large

Sample Working Group Participant Quotes

"I will continue to advocate for youth involvement from ground zero."

"Leaning on alternative schools as resources; find a trailblazer (a good teacher, guidance counsellor, etc.) to help move things along structurally."

"Getting credit -individually and publicly for the work they have done."

"Celebrate contributions in knowledge products."

"When they can directly see the output of their contributions ... it's not just hypothetical or in ten years, it's immediate!"

Outcomes

While many working participants' initiatives were kickstarted by a pressing need, and the desire to see this problem reduced over the long term (e.g., less alcohol or substance misuse among youth in their community), participants shared back three emerging or envisioned (i.e., participants who were at the outset of initiatives) outcomes by centering youth engagement as a meaningful part of their projects. Overwhelmingly, participants noted an **intergenerational culture shift**, where communities see an increase in belonging and contribution from diverse generations and cultures. Participants also flagged **youth involvement and influence** and an **increased alignment in solutions to the problems youth face** as key outcomes. Explore the overarching impacts of youth engagement in prevention efforts below.

Intergenerational Culture Shift

- Sense of belonging (for youth and adults)
- Connectedness among generations, cultures, and groups
- Increased diversity, synergies, and capacity of youth-adult partnership towards pressing challenges

Sample Working Group Participant Quotes

"How can we change the culture to impact the system?...There needs to be culture change and the reflection of the way the youth are integrated into cultures. ...Maybe the culture needs to change to be that we slow down to incorporate youth voice. (Needing the funding to slow down so that we can incorporate.) The system isn't working."

"[Youth engagement] creates a culture shift in community."

"Increased sense of connectedness and belonging."

"More links between parents and youth across families and cultures."

"Connection between youth and elders in community are more prevalent."

"Communities are better when everyone is engaged."

"Intergenerational collaboration may be utilized in other contexts."

"Prevention is more rewarding working alongside youth."

Youth are Engaged and Their Voices have Influence

- Youth voice and contribution are anchors of prevention efforts and solutions
- Youth contribute to something larger than themselves

Sample Working Group Participant Quotes

“Reinforces that youth should be involved in community strategies and solutions.”

“We need diverse perspectives if we want a successful community.”

“[Youth engagement] demonstrates that we’re serious about youth agency and input.”

“As a youth, I feel like my opinions really matter and that they can make a difference. For example, I gain confidence by helping plan events, speaking up at meetings, or leading small projects in the school or community.”

“[Youth are] feeling proud of their work.”

Better Aligned Solutions that Address Problems

- Improved understanding of lived realities and problems facing young people
- Improved decision-making and implementations around youth needs

Sample Working Group Participant Quotes

“[We] Learn about the lived realities for young people.”

“Adults can understand more about youth and then can help to bring up some more solutions for youth's problems.”

“Has more relevance to the youth we aim to serve.”

“Better designed initiatives that are more aligned with youth needs.”

“Youth needs are being met.”

Mutually Reinforcing Process and Outcomes

Youth engagement in the Youth Shift framework is nonlinear, wrapping around and winding through prevention phases. In part, this is to reflect how youth engagement can initiate or deepen at any point in a prevention effort. Once youth engagement becomes a cornerstone of prevention, youth involvement and contribution colour and shape a project. Process and outcomes reinforce and amplify a culture shift of youth contribution. Like an upward spiral, removing barriers, opening doors, and building capacity for youth to be engaged shifts the current of a project to strengthen intergenerational partnerships and nurture meaningful, sustained youth engagement.

Share Your Feedback

Have additions or comments about Youth Shift? Email: info@studentscommission.ca

References

Pancer, S. M., Rose-Krasnor, L., & Loiselle, L. D. (2002). Youth conferences as a context for engagement. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 2002(96), 47–64.

Rose-Krasnor, L. (2009). Future directions in youth involvement research. *Social Development*, 18(2), 497–509.