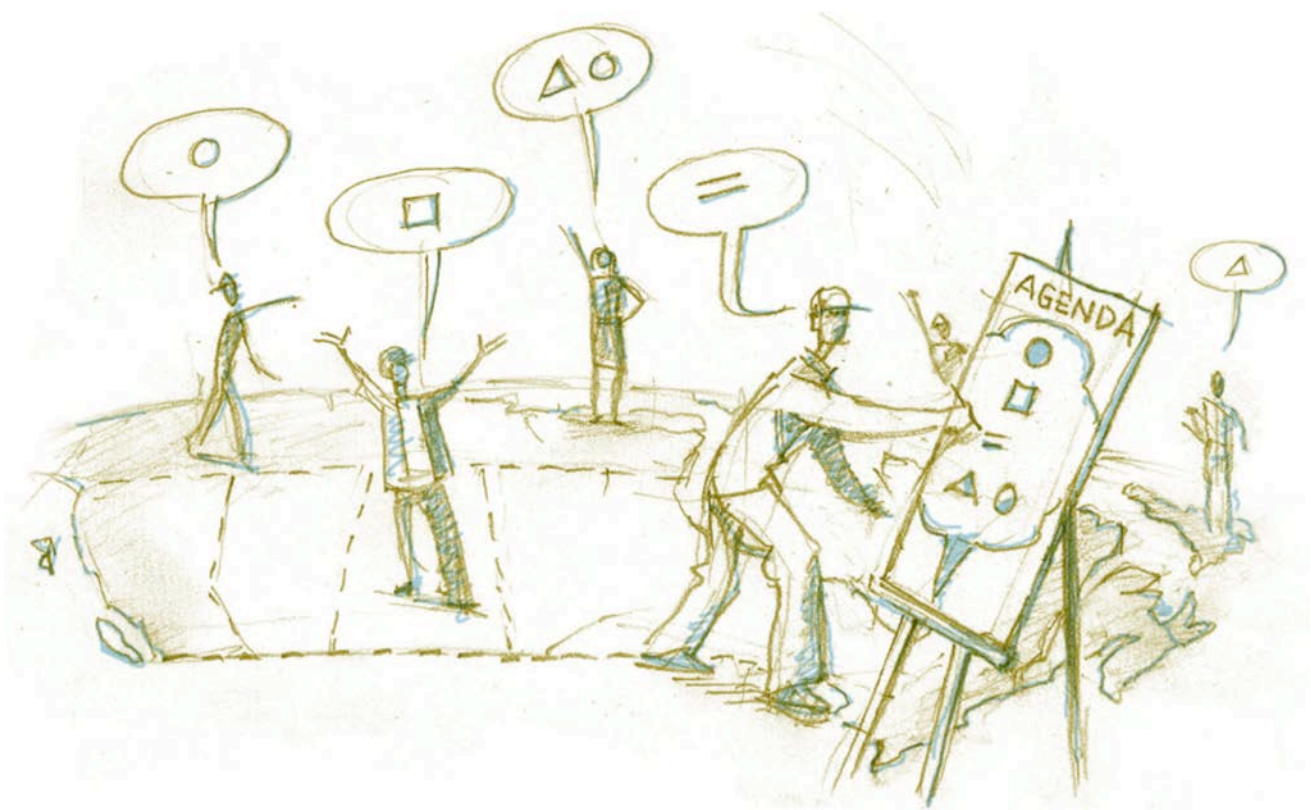


# A Model for Engaging Youth in Evidence-Informed Policy and Program Development



The Students  
Commission  
Centre of Excellence for  
Youth Engagement



La commission  
des étudiants  
Le centre d'excellence pour  
l'engagement des jeunes

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## **Why a model and tool kit on youth engagement in policy and program development ?**

### ***Policy makers and researchers say:***

I've learned that youth have a lot to teach policy makers and researchers. That they have valuable opinions.

It is a very challenging science to communicate complex scientific ideas in a simple manner to a youth audience.

I learned about youth's perceptions on several health related issues. I also learned that the youth are very knowledgeable, regarding the topics and have very deep and meaningful opinions.

### ***Youth participants say:***

I learned that the government of Canada is interested in the opinions of young people and that everyone has different and valuable opinions.

I feel comfortable because people shared ideas about how to overcome the obstacles and it makes me feel good because I have problems with my mother and my family, personal issues.

I will use it back home and I will teach other people who have similar problems.

The above quotations are from participants at the Healthy Advice Consultation in March 2011 that brought together 15 youth from across Canada, researchers from the Health Behaviours in School Aged Children study from Queen's University, and policy makers from the federal government of Canada.



**The Students Commission** is a charitable organization that, since 1991, has been dedicated to providing positive opportunities for youth and supporting them as equal Canadian citizens. We believe that youth engagement and youth-adult partnership can drastically change a young person's life. Research has shown that young people who are engaged in meaningful activities, not only build skills, but broaden their understanding of issues, develop new perspectives and gain valuable experiences.

Such opportunities not only create beneficial health and social outcomes for the young person, but impact their family, peers and/or social group. With supportive adult allies, youth are better enabled to initiate change in their communities, their schools, and beyond. Using our knowledge of youth engagement and guided by our Four Pillars: Respect, Listen, Understand and Communicate™, we have been able to encourage and sustain partnerships between youth and organizations as we all move forward.

# A model for engaging youth in evidence-informed policy and program development

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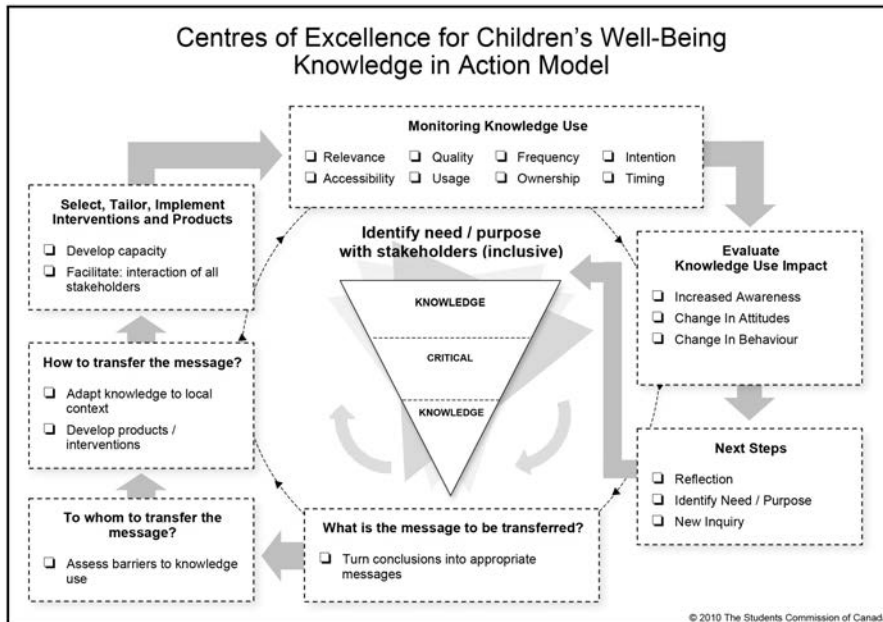
## *Introduction*

The following document describes a model for youth engagement in public policy and program development. The model engages children and youth in examining and applying research through the lens of their own experience to public policy and program recommendations. It draws upon several pilot youth engagement projects of the Public Health Agency of Canada, plus 20 years of experience of The Students Commission of Canada, and 10 years of research from the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement. It provides a template for single event engagement, rather than a continuous advisory mechanism, although the two can be combined.

## *Knowledge in Action*

This toolkit has been validated through two separate partnerships with provincial governments in Ontario and in Saskatchewan. Project partners emphasized the importance of working with an agency that has experience and expertise in youth engagement, and that can facilitate the process of applying the theory and practices outlined in these pages. While the toolkit was a guide throughout the process, they learned considerably from the Students Commission's overview of the toolkit, and ongoing support to connect theories, techniques and practice. As we know from the evidence based Knowledge in Action Model, the role of this type of facilitator in knowledge uptake is key. In addition, the Knowledge in Action Model is based on evidence that the closer the participant is to the generation of knowledge, the higher the uptake of that knowledge. This was validated by project partners in both provinces who emphasized the importance of doing, experiencing and producing best practices for youth engagement in order to truly understand the frameworks introduced in these pages. To that end, it is recommended that this toolkit be used alongside the support

of an agency that has expertise in youth engagement, and can help create connections between theory and practice.



## Background

### The Governance Context

Youth engagement may occur in various contexts for a variety of purposes. This model focuses its application in the area of governance, broadly defined, and the importance of involving youth in decisions that affect them. The Institute on Governance offers the following description of governance, which provides the context in which governments seek the input of youth stakeholders.

“Governance determines who has power, who makes decisions, how other players make their voice heard and how account is rendered.

“Ultimately the application of good governance serves to realize organizational and societal goals.

“One simple definition of governance is ‘the art of steering societies and organizations.’ Governance is about the more strategic aspects of steering, making the larger decisions about both direction and roles....

“(However), governance is also complicated by the fact that it involves multiple actors, not a single helmsman....

“These multiple actors articulate their interests; influence





YOUTH



ADULT



PARTNERSHIP

how decisions are made, who the decision-makers are and what decisions are taken.

“Decision-makers must absorb this input from these (actors or) stakeholders into the decision-making process. Decision-makers are then accountable to those same stakeholders for the organization's (department's) output and the process of producing it...

“Governance is also a highly contextual concept. The process and practices that will apply will vary significantly given the environment in which they are applied. Governance in the public sector needs to take into account legal and constitutional accountability and responsibilities.... When working in the field of governance, one is operating in an area where one size does not fit all.” — *Institute on Governance* -<http://iog.ca/en/about-us/governance/governance-definition>

### Why Youth Engagement in Policy and Program Development?

Youth engagement injects youth as a stakeholder and actor into the governance process. Scholars have identified three common rationales or initiating factors to engage youth in governance (Zeldin et al., 2003). The first is concerned with ensuring social justice and youth representation – a rights-based approach systemically upheld by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC outlines in articles 12, 13 and 14, the right of children under 18 years of age to fully participate in decisions that affect them, to be able to express their ideas and concerns in any way that is appropriate for them, and to have access to full information about situations that affect them. Article 17 identifies the responsibility of adults to provide children with access to information. This perspective on youth involvement in governance is enacted mainly through consultation with young people, but does not address power imbalances very well. At the systemic level, Green (1999, p. 205) suggests that three key conditions need to be in place for children and youth to participate in governance (Treseder & Crowley, 2001):

- 1) Cultural attitudes must encourage youth participation;
- 2) Political, legal and administrative structures to ensure rights to participation; and

### 3) Economic and social conditions that enable people to exercise their rights.

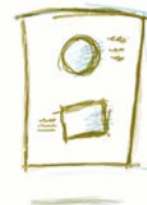
The second rationale is rooted in promoting youth development – that involving youth in governance is a way for young people to actively participate in their own learning and therefore, a pathway for a young person’s healthy development. This outcome for youth is good and demonstrated by research; however, sometimes this focus on individual development may reduce the outcomes for organizational, community, and/or departmental development. This happens if initiatives that engage youth view the activity as ‘practicing’ organizational or community governance *until* youth are perceived to be adequately prepared to do so and/or until they are adults. This may devalue the input of youth in the present moment in the eyes of adult stakeholders and youth themselves. This perspective builds upon the notion of graduated opportunities, wherein once youth are successful in one governance function, they successively participate in new roles that require higher-order skills or responsibilities (Zeldin et al., 2003). As such, in order to provide a good fit, a variety of options and opportunities for involvement should be available to young people so that they can each find a good fit (Zeldin et al., 2000).

The third rationale or initiating factor for organizations and departments to involve youth in governance is based in building civil society, or balancing individual rights with responsibilities to contribute to the common good. In general, this rationale is based upon the notion that communities work better with diverse stakeholders that bring various valuable perspectives and competencies. This perspective emphasizes partnership models typically involving youth in adult-created institutional structures, and working together in more equitable power dynamics to influence decisions and outcomes (Zeldin et al., 2003).

As seen above, these factors each have limits and/or may overlap and strengthen one another. Developing a common vision for youth involvement and understanding how one’s organization/department is positioned within and/or across these rationales is a crucial step to initiating and sustaining youth involvement in governance.



Lessons shared...



## Lessons from others

The Youth Leadership Initiative identifies several lessons from their work (Libby et al., 2005):

Prior to youth and adults working together, they recommend that three components be met:

1. Institutional commitment to youth involvement in governance: reflected in policies, goals, and in resource allocation.
2. Training/orientation for both youth and adults: training sessions that generally involve self-reflection as well as leadership skills (facilitation, decision-making, etc.).
3. Established mechanism for ongoing support: for example, informal check ins, and/or a subcommittee to ensure that concerns can be raised easily.

These conditions are echoed in a study by Zeldin (2004) that looked in depth at eight organizations with at least five youth in key governance roles and at least 1 year of experience with youth involvement in organizational governance. Young people identified four main areas at the individual, social and systems levels that motivated them to engage in governance:

1. *Demonstration of respect for youth voice and competency by the organizations:* Specifically, this involves listening to young people; a belief that young people bring valuable expertise/perspectives; avoiding tokenism; walking the talk (e.g. visibility of how youth are already part of the organization); and seeking to facilitate more opportunities for youth voice.
2. *Balance of power and relationships with adults:* Young people identified that they were motivated by high expectations, support, encouragement and guidance.
3. *Feelings of belonging and importance to the organization:* These feelings are supported by the ways in which adults welcome youth to new roles, provide orientation, and highlight the importance of their introductions to adults in the organization.
4. *Importance of youth contributing on their own terms:* Youth reported being initially interested in organizational governance due to the focus outside of themselves to



contribute to something larger than themselves and give back to their communities.

In addition, the literature suggests that social activities (Treseder & Crowley, 2001) as well as money incentives and remuneration are compelling initiating factors for young people, especially those who require personal income because of their life circumstances (Borisova, 2005). In addition, personal contact and a personal invitation are crucial (Treseder & Crowley, 2001). Opportunities to travel, meet other youth, stay in hotels, function as incentives for youth of all economic brackets, provided that parents/youth are assured that psychological safety issues will be addressed.

### System and Organizational Readiness Conditions

#### *Readiness and Change*

A number of findings and models exist for enhancing youth engagement. For example, Kirby, Lanyon, Cronin, and Sinclair (2003) have described four stages in promoting youth participation.

1. *Unfreezing* involves recognizing the need to change and unblocking existing attitudes and styles of working, challenging both existing beliefs and practices and external pressures from government and funders.
2. *Catalyzing* knowledge into action can be helped by establishing “champions” within organizations. Catalyzing needs to be supported by senior management and involve youth early in the process, as the vision for youth engagement is set against current culture and politics in the organization/department.
3. *Internalizing* change involves building staff capacity with time and resources for recruitment, training, practice, and evaluation, so that engagement becomes sustainable within organizations/departments.
4. *Institutionalizing* youth engagement into policy and standards is necessary for it to become mainstream practice. As could be expected, these stages are complex and non-linear.



Benefits youth  
at all levels:

INDIVIDUAL

SOCIAL

SYSTEM

## **Benefits and Outcomes of Youth Engagement**

The model presented here builds upon a general framework for youth engagement developed by the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement, which is described in the next section. This framework suggests that true engagement of youth in governance requires a balance between positive outcomes for youth at the individual level (e.g., personal skills, healthy choices, sense of identity), their relationships and interactions at the social level (e.g., stronger connections with friends and adults, a larger support network), and system level outcomes (e.g., greater civic engagement, policies and programs responsive to the needs of young people, new and creative ways to govern) in terms of changes at the policy level and/or in communities.

Several large studies identify outcomes of youth involvement in organizational governance as described below. Although there is a significant body of literature pertaining to outcomes for young people, there is considerably less in the area of impacts on adult allies and on organizations themselves. It is hoped that the uptake of this model may be systematically documented to help address this gap.

### **Impacts on young people involved in organizational governance (individual and social level outcomes):**

- Personal growth and identity development (Dworkin et al., 2003; Finn & Checkoway, 1998; Pancer et al., 2002)
- Skill, knowledge and capacity building (Finn and Checkoway, 1998; Cargo et al., 2003; Checkoway, 1998; Conrad & Hedin, 1982; Matysik, 2000; Roker et al., 1998)
- Positive health benefits including a reduction of negative risk behaviors (Agnew & Peterson, 1989; Jenkins, 1996; Komro et al., 1996) and positive academic outcomes (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2003; Eccles & Barber, 1999).
- Broadened social networks (Dworkin et al., 2003)
- Strengthened relationships with social networks (Dworkin et al., 2003; McGee et al., 2006)
- Networking and learning from adults about their communities and accessing resources (Dworkin et al., 2003; Jarrett et al., 2005)

### **Impacts on adults in governance roles (individual and social level outcomes):**

- Overcoming stereotypes about youth and greater recognition of youth diversity and strengths (Zeldin, 2004; Zeldin et al., 2000)
- More energy, passion, optimism in governance activities (Zeldin, 2004)
- Enhanced sense of personal efficacy and belonging (Zeldin, 2004; Zeldin et al., 2000)
- Enhanced sense of collective purpose and feelings of commitment to the organization (Zeldin, 2004; Zeldin et al., 2000)
- New perspectives in decision-making (Zeldin, 2004)
- Increased feelings for connectedness to others within the organization (Zeldin et al., 2000)

### **Impacts on programs/services:**

- Improved responsiveness of programs and services to changing needs (Kirby et al., 2003; Sloper & Lightfoot, 2003)
- Improved service/program development (Kirby et al., 2003)
- Increased use of services/programs (Kirby et al., 2003; Sloper & Lightfoot, 2003)





Finding a way forward...

- Increased participatory practice (Kirby et al., 2003)
- Improved staff abilities to meet young people's needs (Kirby et al., 2003)
- Increased program evaluation (Treseder & Crowley, 2001)
- Better information sharing with young people and formalized processes for youth input (Sloper & Lightfoot, 2003; Treseder & Crowley, 2001)

### **Impacts on the organization:**

- Improved accuracy and relevancy of decisions and the likelihood that they are implemented (Sinclair, 2004)
- Increased overall efficiency (Zeldin, 2004)
- A culture of inclusion (Treseder & Crowley, 2001)
- Increased influence on policy-makers outside the organization (Treseder & Crowley, 2001)
- Strengthened connections between organizational governance and programming (Zeldin, 2004; Zeldin et al., 2000)
- More entrepreneurial, innovative governance and organizational openness to change and debate (Zeldin, 2004)
- More focus on diversity, representation, and better outreach and advocacy due to broader insights into youth needs (Zeldin, 2004; Zeldin et al., 2000)
- Embedded youth involvement principles in the organizational culture (Zeldin et al., 2000)
- Greater clarity in and focus on organizational mission and vision (Zeldin et al., 2000)
- Increased credibility and appeal to funders (Zeldin et al., 2000)

## ***Background Models and Approach***

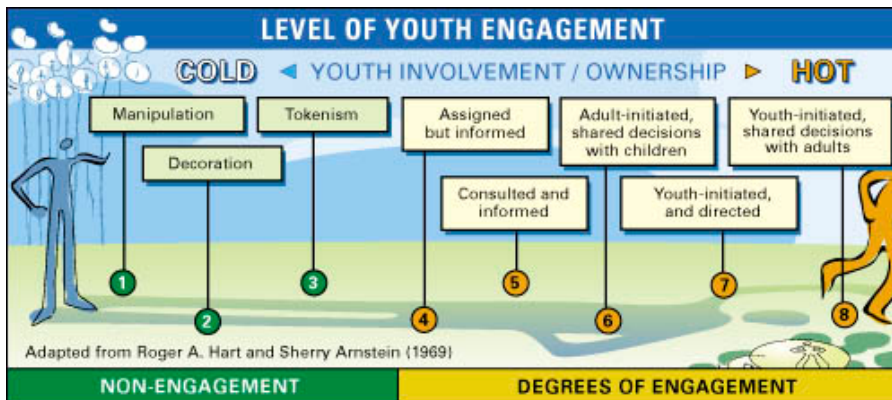
### **Definition of Youth Engagement**

The CEYE defines youth engagement as the meaningful engagement of a young person in an activity with a focus outside of the self. It has cognitive (head), affective (heart), behavioural (feet) and spiritual (spirit/connectedness) aspects. Participation is the simple act of showing up; engagement occurs when head, heart, feet and spirit are involved.

### **Levels of Youth Engagement**

The spectrum of youth engagement is a useful way to identify where your organization/agency is starting from and where you

want to be. In planning, it is useful to come to a shared understanding of where your event will be positioned. The spectrum distinguishes between non-engagement and engagement. It also illustrates that there is always potential for moving towards stronger and more genuine levels of youth engagement, increasing young people’s involvement and ownership. In turn, moving towards higher levels of youth engagement leads to increased benefits and outcomes for youth and adult allies.



### Distinguishing between engagement and focus groups

The question is often asked: why not just hold a focus group or a public consultation? What is the difference between a focus group and a youth engagement event? Focus Groups are designed for a one-way flow of information from the participants to the researcher or consultation host. They are often critiqued by youth and other marginalized populations as not providing direct benefit to the participants, who never hear or know what happened with the information they gave.

A youth engagement event is relationship-based, it sets up a reciprocal exchange of information and learning between adults and youth in a positive youth development context that advances child and youth rights in the area of governance related to issues and decisions that affect them.

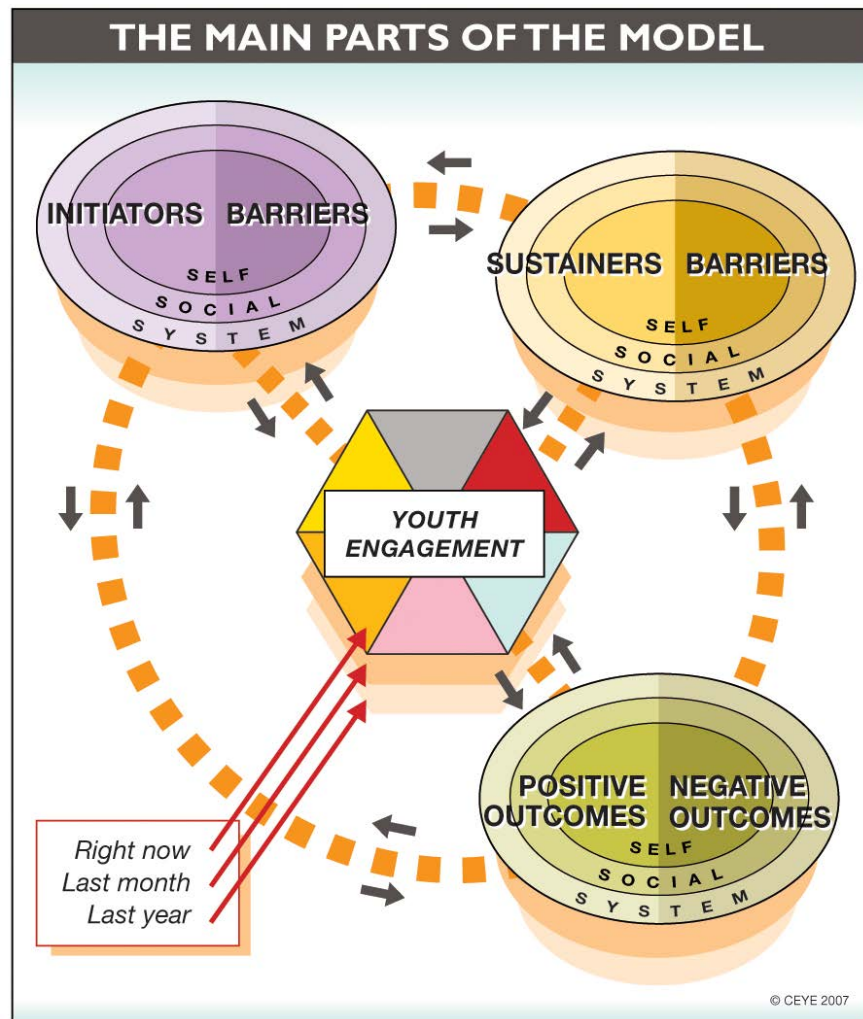
### Centre of Excellence Youth Engagement Framework

The Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement’s Youth Engagement Framework (Rose-Krasnor et al., 2007) provides a way to conceptualize youth engagement in a variety of youth activities (see Figure below). To date, most of the research related to youth engagement has been focused on the “act” of





being involved in governance activities, such as the type of activity, number and frequency of involvement over time. However, youth engagement is more than just doing certain kinds of activities: process matters. This framework depicts the complexity of qualities and factors that lead to and support meaningful youth engagement and positive outcomes. The framework is designed to take into account the three levels in which engagement happens: 1) Individual, 2) Social, and 3) Systems. These levels are illustrated by the three layers of each bubble.



The Model for Engagement of Children and Youth in Public Policy and Program Development presented in the following section uses this framework to structure, describe and monitor the process, before and after the youth engagement event. The components are:

- the initiating factors and activities,
- the youth engagement activity and its qualities in the centre of the framework,
- the sustaining factors and activities,
- and the outcomes.

Ideally, the framework is applied over time and the impact is measured over time at all three levels. During the youth engagement event itself, which is represented by the centre hexagon, the process, agenda and activities are structured based upon The Young Decision Makers Model, developed by youth who are members of the Students Commission.

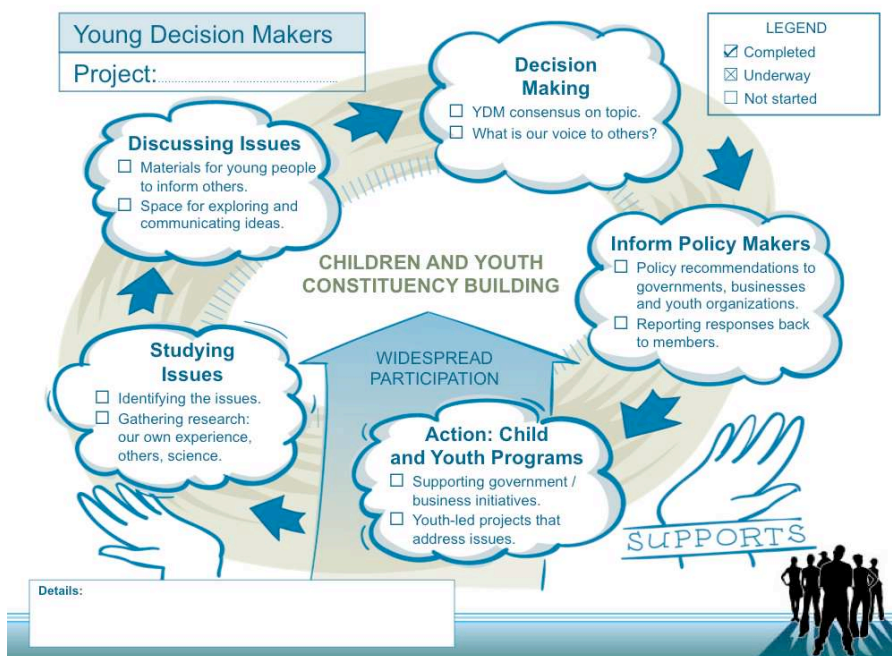


Youth Initiated Action

### Core Youth Engagement Activity: The Young Decision Makers Process Model

The Young Decision Makers Model outlines a process of inquiry, which provides a simple set of steps for young people and their adult supports or allies to follow when exploring public policy issues. It provides the specific outline of the process for the core youth engagement activity in the centre of the youth engagement framework.

As youth tend to be action-oriented, the model begins with initiating actions from child and youth programs at the start of the cycle illustrated below and sustains youth engagement through action-oriented links to child and youth programs at the end of the cycle.





This model was developed through a three-year process which engaged young people in researching models of youth decision-making from around the world, researching opportunities and models of youth decision-making in Canada, conducting a series of workshops and discussion groups across Canada, as well as surveying young people about what the key elements and principles should be in a decision-making mechanism. The principles and process were validated at a face-to-face meeting of 60 youth and adults representing various organizations, with the principle of accountability being added at that meeting.

#### **YDM Principles**

- Inclusivity
- Youth-led<sup>1</sup>
- Participatory
- Adult Partnerships
- Accountability
- Representation
- Young Adult Support
- Informal Structure

## **A Model for Engaging Youth in Policy and Program Development**

### ***Initiating the Public Policy Activity***

The CEYE Youth Engagement Framework provides categories (e.g. Initiators, Sustainers, Activity and Outcomes) for exploring the factors and components involved in the activity, which is engaging children and youth in public policy and program development using the YDM process to structure the activity. The figure below presents the framework, integrated with the YDM model, so that factors in each category can be placed visually. Initiators will occur at individual, social and system levels, as will sustainers. Be deliberate about making sure that consideration is given to the factors at all three levels. In the initiating stage, it is important to strive to be aligning key factors that operate at all three levels, particularly in the area of values/principles and common objectives. During the engagement activity itself, there

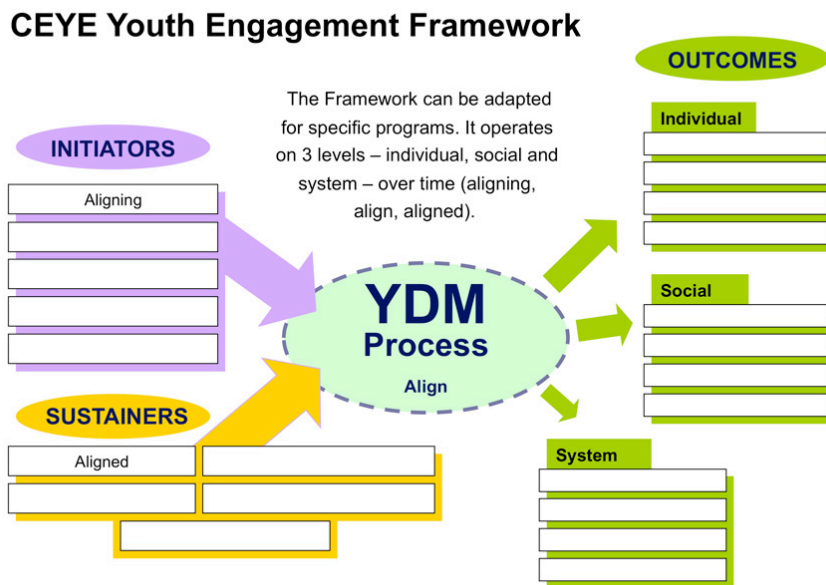
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<sup>1</sup> Note: Youth-led in the YDM context does not mean youth alone, it means youth in leadership roles in partnership with adults.

is opportunity to align and solidify congruency on key factors at all three levels, which if aligned will help sustain the efforts after the event. The alignment process happens over time, with aligning occurring during the initiation phase, alignment being solidified during the event, and that alignment helping sustain the follow-up activities and relationships.



Shared values



### Setting the Foundation: Objectives, Principles, Values

It is likely that there will be one or two stakeholders who initiate the activity. In an evidence-informed engagement activity related to youth policy and program development, there are likely to be four key stakeholder groups: policy makers and program developers from government, youth, academics/experts, and youth serving organizations. Any one, or combination of these stakeholders, may initiate the activity.

The initiating stakeholders identify the key members of their team who will work together as a committee and set out its key objectives for the activity and then identify the appropriate partners for achieving the objectives.

Once recruited, the committee members from the core partners/stakeholders should review the objectives, checking assumptions and ensuring that the objectives mean the same thing to each stakeholder in the organizing committee. This process would include identifying and adding mutual and

complementary objectives of partners. An efficient method of having youth voice involved at this stage is to be working with an existing advisory group or youth organization that is regularly engaged with youth that can facilitate youth involvement in the process from beginning to end.

The next step is to define the principles and values by which the organizing committee will operate for its work and the youth engagement activity. Assumptions need to be checked and clarified: is there a common understanding of the terms being used, what they mean and what their implications are. The principles, values, and objectives provide an ongoing frame of reference that helps decision-making and execution throughout the process.

For instance, researchers may want to gather youth input and perspectives on data findings as they begin to prepare reports and recommendations for policy makers. They may be looking to find additional questions to ask of data sets, to help them interpret findings. Policy makers and program developers may be looking for recommendations on ways to address the issues illuminated by the data and for recommendations on communication strategies. They may be looking to connect youth to government initiatives. Participating youth organizations may be looking for opportunities for their youth that build skills, enhance learning and bring back learning to their organizations. Different stakeholders may need different outputs or products as results of the event. It is important to define what these are for each participating group.

Setting principles around the event and selecting youth engagement practices such as “youth and adults working together as equals” or “youth-led” helps planners discuss meaning, identify assumptions, clarify distinctions and make decisions on a common understanding in order use the right practice to achieve the desired outcome.

In order to develop a set of shared principles, goals and objectives, a youth advisory group is one method that may be appropriate.

Meeting on a regular and frequent basis is important to define the tasks to achieve objectives, to collaborate on task execution and make and review decisions as required. If partners have not worked together before, ideally, there is a face-to-face meeting early on in the planning stage. After that, regular contact and



decision-making can readily occur through conference calls and online communication of various types.

Ideally, at the planning stages, one is looking to generate alignment between partners and between the levels of the framework. Setting out the values and principles permits the communication of those values and principles to youth, adult participants and policy makers, to their parents, teachers, coaches, youth workers for recruitment, and to the department systems organizing the event. For instance, if a principle is to hold a “youth friendly” event, then material prepared by researchers needs to become youth friendly and researchers supported to make it so. Adult participants may be asked to wear casual dress. The “system” will support the principle by providing an extra day of programming for orientation and community building among the youth participants, before bringing adults and youth together.

### Considerations

In planning the event, there are considerations and decisions to be made related to its size, the age of participants, the criteria for participants, the duration of the event, and the program or agenda. The available budget usually provides boundaries for many of these decisions.

#### Participant criteria

Do not underestimate the capacity of children and youth, when adults are actively listening, to provide important insights to policy makers. Children as young as five and six helped inform Ireland’s national indicators for child health by drawing pets in their representations of their “ideal” home.

The criteria for youth should be determined by the task: if it relates to living with a disability, it makes sense to recruit youth with disabilities. If the task is about making school environments better for youth with disabilities, it makes sense to recruit youth with, and youth without, disabilities to collaborate together.

The Students Commission is most frequently asked by policy makers to recruit a diverse group of youth representative of the Canadian youth population, ensuring that certain populations are represented (Aboriginal, francophone, visible minorities, geographical regions, and lived experiences related to issues being explored) We will also, in most cases, strive for socio-economic diversity and diversity in terms of academic



Coming together

VS



Driving away youth...



performance. There is sometimes a belief that needs to be challenged among researchers and policy makers that youth not doing well in school will not be interested in this work. However, it is often these youth who are most affected by the issues under review and who have the most to offer. In terms of the models, the initiating appeal to these youth is about “heart” and interest or connection to the issue. It is about setting up the qualities of the event and the program so that it is a safe and learning environment for all, not about limiting the opportunity by the pre-determined assumptions and participant criteria.

Our research, both qualitative and quantitative, has demonstrated that the more diverse the experience of an engagement event, the more positive the outcomes youth report. This applies to all types of youth. Youth, researchers and policy makers all benefit when diversity is prioritized in the criteria and recruitment.

#### **Size**

The size of an event is most frequently determined by budget. Effective events can range from 10 to 400 or 500, as long as the program design is appropriate for the size. The key with the larger events is to understand and design for a process-driven event, using a knowledge inquiry and exchange process like the YDM model, rather than an information delivery conference format.

In the smaller events of 10 to 20 youth, evaluation comments from youth and adult participants alike frequently indicate that they wish there had been more youth in attendance to provide more diversity of voice and experience. There is a certain economy of scale to be realized here because the preparation and recruitment efforts for an event of 10 or an event of 50 are not significantly different, and so the increased costs are in the hotel, travel and accommodation.

#### **Age**

With the appropriate program design, children and youth of any age are capable of providing important insights to researchers and policy makers. Consulting younger children, 10-12 and under, is more easily done in their own communities, where issues of caregiver/parental consent and involvement can be resolved.

The rationale for youth engagement in policy and program development includes the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). It is appropriate, and part of Canada's UNCRC obligation, to engage youth of the age that the policy or program affects. For instance, researchers and policy makers for the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) study brought together 15 youth ages 13 to 15 to review initial findings because that was the age group that the study surveyed. The capacity of the 13-year-olds to work with the data and the graphs surprised many of the adults: "I learned that young people are smart, insightful and creative thinkers. I will see our data in a different way."

Too often, policy makers avoid engaging those youth (children in the language of UNCRC) who least have a voice, those under 18, that UNCRC advocates for, because of the increased logistics related to parental consent forms and unaccompanied minor travel arrangements for younger youth.

It is important to note that young adults, particularly those 20 to 29, are developmentally very different from 13 to 16-17 year olds, and do not in most cases effectively represent them, because developmentally they are busy with very different priorities.

#### **Length of Time**

If bringing together a diverse group from across the country, it is important to hold a program that makes the most out of the investment for the participants and for the departmental system investing in the event. There should be enough time to ensure that the quality of the program provides the "head, heart, feet and spirit" of engagement and creates the qualities of a positive youth development environment — room for fun, safety, learning, belonging, efficacy and contribution. It is beneficial to have time for the youth to get comfortable with each other and the agenda before youth and adults collaborate together. It is also useful to orient the adults as well, before meeting with the youth. Youth events are often scheduled for a Friday travel day, Saturday engagement, Sunday return travel day. This works, but an extra day or two provides significantly more effective program time. Week-long events, can provide extraordinary results.

#### **Adult/Youth Ratio**

This too is influenced by the objectives of the event; in general the guideline is to ensure that there are enough youth to ensure

diversity of youth voice, as well as a sense of collective youth voice.

If only a small number of youth can be present, the agenda and the preparation of the adults can be shaped to prioritize youth voice and presence.

If the objectives of the event include youth and adult collaboration and exposing as many policy makers/researchers as possible to the process and experience, then a 50/50 youth adult ratio (or slightly higher youth to adult) helps implement those principles in a visible way. The larger the number of adults you have present, especially if there is not much time to orient them, the more challenges exist in implementing a program agenda that sustains meaningful and reciprocal youth/adult dialogue. Adults may often be very well-intentioned, but unaware of their behaviours and language that disengage youth in this type of activity.

### **Collaborator Roles and Preparation**

The collaboration team should include those with expertise and requirements related to a specific policy or program development task, those with the research and content background related to the task, those with expertise in youth engagement, and youth (which may be provided from the youth engagement experts.)



The team should work collaboratively, not independently, to clearly identify the objectives and principles, and assign tasks to implement the objectives. Draft task deliverables should be shared and reviewed by the team, to ensure that the expertise each is bringing to the process informs the work of the others. For example, that a youth engagement process does provide the deliverables required by the research team, or that the content materials prepared are presented in the most effective language and style for the youth participants.

### **Participant recruitment, selection**

Recruit youth as appropriate to meet the criteria and to achieve the task and objectives.

The recruitment phase should include the preparation of material to explain the event and what youth would be doing at it. There should be direct telephone, email and Facebook contact with youth and their organizations or adult allies to answer

questions and encourage participation, particularly from youth who might not normally participate in such activities. This preparation work in terms of person-to-person contact is very useful in recruiting youth who normally who not see themselves being selected or enjoying this kind of experience. “Shoulder tapping” and word-of-mouth recruitment and support are very important tools.

Application and recruitment materials can encourage youth to think about and define some of the key concepts to be reviewed and discussed at the meeting. Youth can be prompted to begin thinking about the topic they are coming to provide input on. This is also useful for participant selection, providing an additional basis to identify differing perspectives on the topic that ensures diversity of thinking and experience at the event. Youth can be selected based upon criteria to ensure representation of points of view arising from geography, age, Aboriginal perspectives, diversity of life experience, urban and rural experiences, economic status, and a variety of academic performances among others. If large numbers of youth are recruited, the planning team can design a point-system grid to identify the top candidates and then review those applications in greater detail, with some discussion, to select the final participants. Selecting participants is about a collective balance of diverse experiences rather than an individual-focused competition.

### **Participant Preparation**

Depending on the timeframe and budget for pre-event activities, it can be useful to have a pre-event online survey as part of the application and review results with selected applicants, either prior to the event or during it, as part of the engagement activities prior to the event.

Another potential activity is to ask youth to survey friends or family prior to the event and bring the results with them.

Activities like these help with the concept of “constituency” building and representative voice, encouraging youth to think about the similarities and differences between their own experience and the experiences of other youth.

Pre-engagement activities prior to an engagement event may also be a deterrent for some youth, either because it seems too much like school or too much work. At this point, these youth are unmotivated by the personal contact, relationships and



Building Community





*I've learned  
that youth have a  
lot  
to teach policy  
makers and  
researchers.  
That they have  
valuable opinions.*

Adult Participant

supportive environment of the event that will make them some of the most powerful participants. The contact with adult allies in supporting organizations pre and post-event helps improve outcomes and diversity of participation and discussion with these adult allies will tell you whether the activity is a deterrent or not for potential participants.

Youth recommend that content prepared by policy makers and researchers for youth should contain visual representations that are simple and clear. Graphs should have simple headings that translate research concepts like “domain” into the real world equivalents, like “home” or “school.” Graphs and charts should have short descriptions of how to read them (what the y axis is, for example) and a brief (1-2 sentence) description of what it means.

Bold colours, highlighted and bold text, text presented in bullet form, rather than paragraphs and sentences, are other recommendations from youth about effective ways to communicate research information to them. Creating connections and relevancy to their lives and between topics is important. Use of video and video clips is also recommended.

Adults are also participants and communicating to them clearly about the participation of youth, the rationale for it, and their role as adults prior to the event is also important. In some cases, it can be useful to prompt their thinking and self-reflection by having them fill out parallel pre-engagement quizzes, surveys, permission forms, similar to requests being made of the youth.

### **Initiating Activity Checklist**

- Generation of shared objectives, purposes, values and principles re youth engagement. Consult and include research and expertise re youth engagement.
- Youth advice and youth engagement in planning the event through youth advisors or youth consultants as part of the event planning team, youth leadership and involvement in planning parts of the program.
- Identification of background questions, research, and questions for which policy and program developers seek youth input.
- Preparation of youth friendly materials and processes for the activity in collaboration with facilitation experts,

youth advisors and content experts.

- Recruitment and preparation of youth for participation through youth organizations, youth networks, schools, tribal councils.
- Recruitment, preparation and orientation of adults for participation.
- Logistical support, criteria and support for recruitment.
- Collaboratively design and review the processes and purposes of the activity to ensure partner buy-in and shared team approach.
- Pre-event preparation, engagement of participants, if appropriate.

### ***Executing the Activity***

The event should have elements of head, heart, feet, and spirit, and it should meet the criteria presented below of effective positive youth development environments.

Its core elements need to include:

- Community builders to create a safe and positive environment, to encourage relationship building.
- A process of inquiry and knowledge exchange, such as the YDM cycle.
- Visible methods that record youth voice and contributions and display them as the event unfolds.
- Physical, fun and interactive activities to address different learning styles and pace “head” or mental activity with “feet” and physical activity. Fun is an important ingredient of learning and engagement.
- A facilitating team with experts in youth engagement and content experts.
- 24-hour supervision and support for youth.
- Sightseeing and “outside” opportunities for youth who have traveled.

- Opportunities to code and analyze results, to prioritize and make recommendations and/or a product in order to leave with a sense that something concrete has happened or been produced.

*I found the small  
group discussions  
the most  
"connected."*

—

Adult Participant



It is important too that participants in a process have a sense of the big picture, the purpose of the activity and the expectations. Involving them in reviewing and brainstorming expectations, guidelines and objectives is valuable.

Depending upon the selection criteria, events can successfully be conducted in multiple languages. This is about designing the program appropriately and staffing it appropriately. Translation can either be through formal translation booths and interpreters or without formal translation, through bilingual and unilingual youth connecting and working together with the support of bilingual supports and facilitators.

Different methods can be used to record youth contributions. It is important that the principles of youth engagement and the recording of their contributions be concrete and visual — that the space itself is a visual representation of the principles of effective engagement. Use sticky notes, quote cards, maps, drawings, posters made by youth and get them up on walls. If the report is to go to a particular government figure who cannot attend, have a picture of that person on the wall. Make it personal, create a relationship. Have an open space where interactive games, informal discussion circles on the floor, can take place.

All these methods are ways of making “abstract” concepts related to government, policy and research, concrete and real. Wherever possible try to create a visual or physical representation of the concept that can be seen and manipulated or processed by the youth. Engage them in moving key points around physically on a wall under headings, or physically ask them to vote on issues by moving about a room, and then hold a discussion about what the results reveal as they are standing there. For example, “most of the adults voted one way, most of the youth another. Why do we think this occurred?”

### **Qualities of the Activity**

Work by the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement has described the elements of head, heart, feet and spirit as psychological engagement, and important to the quality of the activity as perceived by youth. “It was fun” and “I was listened

to” are some of the recurring themes from youth evaluations of successful youth engagement activities. Combining the fun, with the meaningful opportunity to learn, contribute and be challenged is the art. Generally, the literature describes the importance of a youth-friendly atmosphere for any youth engaging activities – these are qualities that extend to youth involvement in governance. According to Eccles and Gootman (2002) and Spano (2003), some important qualities of engaging and positive developmental settings are:

Qualities of Youth Engagement:

SAFE

POSITIVE

*Physical and psychological safety*, including holding programming in locations that are free from violence and unsafe health conditions, and taking the necessary steps to employ practices that reduce the probability of unforeseen threats. This also includes employing practices that encourage and increase healthy and safe interactions and decrease unsafe or confrontational interactions among youth.

APPROPRIATE STRUCTURE

SKILL BUILDING

EFFICACY

*Positive Social Norms, with respectful atmosphere and practices*, such as being non-judgmental and inclusive, and having inviting atmosphere and practices. Include high expectations of youth, (and, we might add, adults as well) particularly in terms of expectations and rules of behavior, ways of doing things, and values and morals, based on an expectation that each individual will exhibit their strengths and best efforts most of the time in the right atmosphere.

SENSE OF BELONGING

MEANINGFUL INCLUSION

*Appropriate structure*, which includes ensuring there are boundaries, expectations, consistency, adult support and oversight as required.

*Opportunities for skill building and learning*, developing increased competencies, confidence, self-esteem and fuelling interest and curiosity.



*Opportunities for belonging and meaningful inclusion* for youth of all sexual orientations, genders, ethnicities, abilities, and peer crowds. This also includes providing young people with opportunities for social inclusion, social engagement, and integration. Moreover, this involves encouraging cultural competence and opportunities for sociocultural identity formation.

*Support for efficacy and mattering* including engagement and empowerment practices that encourage young people to be autonomous and make a difference in their communities—to contribute outside of themselves. Further, this involves

employing practices that are challenging and require youth to take on responsibilities, as well as those that focus on growth and improvement.

*Integration of efforts*, which create and draw upon community synergy and provide connection to community and various stakeholders, broadening the breadth of the experience and exposure for the young person and the depth of the program and opportunity.

### **Roles of adults at the event**

Adults are often unsure of their role at a youth engagement event and preparation and guidance for them is important. Ideally, adults are neither too directive or too withdrawn. The research literature is beginning to describe the concept of “youth/adult” partnerships, which conveys the notion of youth and adults working together, as collaborators, working towards a common goal. The concept of partnership and collaborators, with mutual respect for what each collaborator brings to the discussion table, supersedes concepts of mentorship, youth-led, leadership development, coaching. Non-participation by adults who are trying to give space to youth voice in this context is often perceived as non-interested, distanced, or uncaring and unsupportive. Adults are there to learn from youth and share knowledge and power. Youth are there to learn from adults about power and knowledge and share their own knowledge and power.



### **Some tips for guiding adults and youth in their roles:**

- ✓ Ask adults to be your “listeners” — ask them to record significant points and comments made by youth on quote cards or forms and post them. (Adult points can be similarly recorded in a different colour.)
- ✓ Ask adults to ask questions, rather than make statements to avoid the automatic assumption of authority conferred to adults. If something a youth is saying is inaccurate, use questions to prompt critical thinking. Give room and permission for other youth to make the point that you as an adult might want to make through your use of prompting questions.
- ✓ Be “you.” In day-to-day interactions, authenticity and honesty are the qualities youth most respect in adults, not “coolness,” humour or celebrity status. Share as appropriate and comfortable who you are and what you do. Personal stories work: for youth and for adults.

### Qualities of adult allies

In a recent evaluation by the Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement for the YMCA of Greater Toronto, the qualities of adult leaders for whom youth reported the most positive outcomes did the following: they asked youth what they wanted to do before planning activities, they checked their negative assumptions about youth, and they explained right away to youth when activities that the youth wanted to plan were inappropriate.

### Qualities of the Engagement Activity Checklist

- Community builders to build safe climate for diverse youth to exchange and share input, for youth and adults to collaborate as equals.
- Focus on building sense of safety and belonging among all participants (physical, social, emotional); greeting and caring for all participants, confidence with names and roles for youth and adult, awareness of process and common purpose for all
- Development of meaningful roles, ways of participating for all participants, adults and youth
- Diverse strategies of communication and contribution: discussion, writing, art, games, role playing. Integrating physical and mental modes of connecting adults and youth.
- Clear ongoing demonstration of learning that is occurring throughout. Opportunities to reflect and demonstrate learning (adults and youth).
- Clear demonstration by adults of the value of listening to youth.
- Clear, visible recording and participant processing of the ideas, opinions and information being generated.

Doing the above will mean that you achieve the following in your activity for youth and adult participants:

- Physical and psychological safety
- Appropriate structure
- Skill building and learning
- Belonging and Inclusion
- Efficacy and mattering
- Connection to community, family, school, work efforts

### Outcomes of the Activity

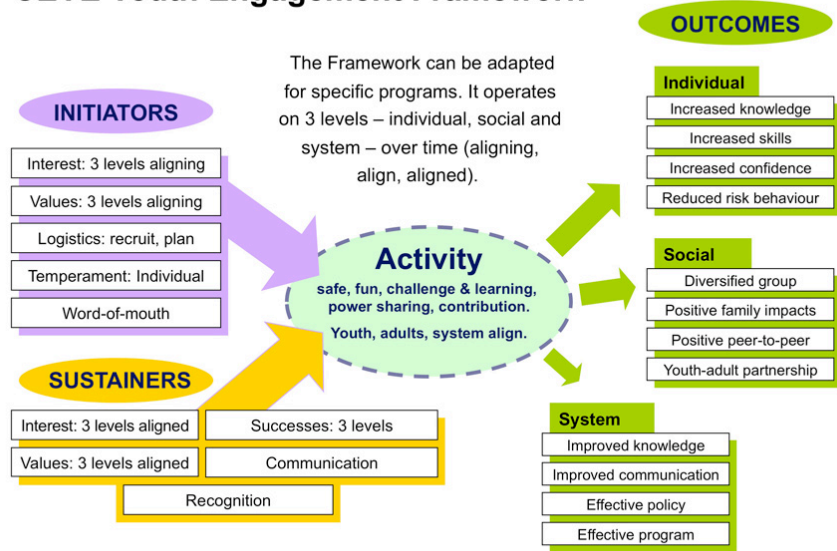
The outcomes that can be expected will occur at three levels: positive benefits for individual participants, both youth and adults, in terms of increased knowledge and insight, and





increased confidence and skills related to youth/adult collaborations and civic engagement. At the social level, for youth they will have diversified their peer group and their capacity to broaden their peer group upon their return home, and often their behaviour with family and friends reflects their increased confidence and knowledge when returning home. At the system level, policy makers, program developers, and researchers are able to apply youth insights into improving data interpretation and analysis, into improving policy and programs and into improved communications with youth. Government and society gain because youth who participate in events like this report feeling more connected to government, with a greater belief that being involved can and does make a difference, and are more likely to sustain civic engagement in other ways once back in their communities.

### CEYE Youth Engagement Framework



Here are some reported outcomes from a recent youth engagement event.

### Reported Outcomes from Adult Policy Makers, Researchers

“Youth are full of great insight and can challenge the perceptions you hold and consider issues in great depth.”

“I felt there was a lot of great discussion. I think more youth would be great as some young people had little experience with subject discussed. Might have been helpful to talk to adults about expectations, making sure youth voice is prioritized.”

“I will take what I have learned (especially about the influence of support networks) back to work to see how we can use these networks to share information with youth.”

“I have learned that youth have opinions, a lot of them. They are aware of the world they live in.”

“I will think more of how to portray information to youth, to consider getting their opinions throughout work/research.”

“I found the small group discussions the most "connected." Some youth were great to talk to and get their opinions. They provided so much insight without being prompted.”

“That youth consultation really brings important insight to research and reporting process.”

“Report back to my teammates about the benefit of this sort of consultation.”

“It is a very challenging science to communicate complex scientific ideas in a simple manner to a youth audience.”

“Easily connected with francophone youth and other youth and researchers. The topics from HBSC created a good basis for discussion.”

“I've learned that youth have a lot to teach policy makers and researchers. That they have valuable opinions.”

“I learned youth's perceptions on several health related issues. I also learned that the youth are very knowledgeable regarding the topics and have very deep and meaningful opinions.”



Building Community

## **Reported Outcomes From Youth**

I learned that the government of Canada is interested in the opinions of young people and that everyone has different and valuable opinions.



I feel comfortable because people shared ideas about how to overcome the obstacles and it makes me feel good because I have problems with my mother and my family, personal issues.

I will use it back home and I will teach other people who have similar problems.

“I feel good and confident about today. I'm glad that we got a lot done too. It also feels good to hear things from other people's opinions. It's hard to realize the harsh reality that's going on in our community.”

“There were two things that stuck with me today. Number one was when we were having a debate in my group and I realized how stereotyped boys were. Number two was the question of which comes first, emotional leading to obesity, or obesity leading to emotional.”

“I feel very important after today. I will take it and share it with my friends.”

“I will use this with people I know and I will teach other young people.”

“I learned a lot more than what I said ... especially when we talked about bullying because that brought memories when people used to bully new kids that came to school. What I have learned today is I'm gonna take it back and share it with my community and with the people of Mama Wii.”

“I have learned that the government appreciates my opinions, I have learned that (too much) computer causes (affects) emotional well-being, I have learned that you don't have to hit a hacky sack very hard to make it fly.”

“Take it home, share it with family and use it.”

“I feel that we will be help and use in the study. I feel they will listen to us.”

“I feel good because I was able to be a part of this.”

## ***Sustaining Engagement, Following-Up***

It is important to share feedback and a report after the event with youth.

Other follow up may occur through Facebook links, the sharing of reports with youth for their comments and revisions, and ongoing support from their organizations to link the motivated youth into future activities and engagement of the issues, particularly in terms of recommendations and ideas they have generated for action. At the close of the event, youth may be encouraged to write a letter to themselves, 3 or 6 months in the future, which the organizers keep and mail back to them. Youth can be instructed to leave it open if they choose to for organizers to read and use for evaluation purposes, or seal it, if it is private.

At the close, organizers should also encourage interested youth with suggestions for ways that they can personally get more involved in activities in their community if they have become motivated during the event.

If appropriate, the event may form the basis for the start-up of an ongoing advisory group, linked through email.

### **Sustaining the activity checklist**

- Space for developing action ideas
- Space for developing and sharing opportunities for staying connected
- Partners whose mission and mandates are to support and engage youth, who will continue to provide connection and support for youth motivated by the event and connect them to future opportunities (or lists of resources that will provide the same, if as a government department, you are unable to)
- Follow-up thank-you letters, certificates to participating youth acknowledging their contribution
- Volunteer hours accreditation letters
- Opportunities to participate in evaluation activities and recommendations for next steps, new activities.



## Appendices

### Sample Task Plan

The attached is a sample work plan or statement of work. The number of days required for tasks is variable, depending upon the size of the event, the pre-event time available for recruitment and preparation, and the age of participants.

Tasks/Activities	Deliverables /Milestones	Time Schedule	Outcomes
Initiate Activity: Identify and prepare youth/adults			
SW1: Identify potential youth who would be interested and able to attend the meeting, by creating program description, an application form and criteria to be used to select youth. Ensure national representation and diversity in participating youth. Distribute recruitment information and promote through appropriate networks: (web application, fax, paper). Use word of mouth and existing relationships with adult allies to recruit diverse youth. With representatives of partners, including youth representation on selection committee, select youth.	Up to xx youth attendees confirmed.	By XXX date	<i>Interested, representative youth attendees.</i>
SW2: Develop preparation program and event program in collaboration with partners.	Program Agenda, Preparation Tools for Youth	By XXX date	<i>Effective use of face-to-face time.</i>
SW3: Implement Preparation Program. This will include working with youth to plan aspects of the event, seek their input. It may include some fun activities, which would introduce concepts related to research and policy. This could take the form of online games, scavenger hunts etc., or webinars or phone conversations. Research indicates youth who think that they have helped plan an activity report higher outcomes.	Preparation Activities Completed	By XXX date	<i>Open transparent, participatory process for youth input into meeting. Engagement of youth attendees and</i>



<b>Tasks/Activities</b>	<b>Deliverables /Milestones</b>	<b>Time Schedule</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
Depending on timelines and numbers and types of youth to be engaged, it may also include preparatory on-line surveys, facebook group, advance materials for youth to review.			<i>skill development.</i>
SW4: Coordinate and facilitate the provision of medical, safety, information and consent letters for travel from youth and guardians. Book travel, hotel accommodation and all logistics for youth.  Book, arrange and prepare meeting space, supplies, training requirements, audiovisual requirements, all meeting logistics	Completed Forms received with parental consents.  Confirmed hotel, travel and meeting space, with all event requirements in place.	By XXX date	<i>Safety and legal responsibilities executed.</i>
<b>Event Activity: Facilitate, Support, Logistics</b>			
SW5: Arrange all necessary pickup and delivery to and from airport. Provide 24-hour support for the youth participants while at event. Ensure that youth have a meaningful role; support with language should it be deemed necessary; supervision during any planned activities; and, regularly check in with youth for security and well-being purposes. Use established protocols and checklists for staff to follow.	Successful engaged attendance at the meeting.	By xxx date	<i>Safe, meaningful experience for youth participants.  Smooth logistics.</i>
SW6: Working with youth and partners together, youth analyze data, discuss findings and write initial recommendations.  Work with youth and government officials at the event to draft framework & toolkit re next steps for engaging youth on findings/dissemination. (Adjust this task and event according to your objectives and expected results).	1) Youth input to HBSC study 2) Draft toolkit with next steps document re HBSC findings 3) Draft	By xxx date	<i>Skill development. Feedback. Better prepared youth delegates</i>

<b>Tasks/Activities</b>	<b>Deliverables /Milestones</b>	<b>Time Schedule</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
<p>Circulate draft report to appropriate parties, again depending on objectives. Submit report, revise and circulate to all those who participated.</p> <p>Work with youth and partners on defining action items and follow-up strategies for connecting if desired after the event.</p>	Action Plan for how to reach youth re National Child Day		
<b>Sustain Activity: Event followup</b>			
SW7: Follow-up with youth to de-brief on the process and evaluate the outcomes of the meeting and their involvement in the consultation throughout. Provide report.	4) Evaluation summary		<i>Ensure feedback, measure results.</i>
<b>Throughout Project</b>			
SW8: Manage Project, Senior Oversight, Financial Management and Records	Quality Deliverables, on Time, On Budget, Financial Records	Upon Award of Contract to its completion	<i>Federal Leadership in Youth Engagement which can be showcased internationally.</i>





## ***Logistics Checklist***

# Who, when and where?

## Assembling your planning committee

### Call an initial meeting

- Use your proposal to generate interest for an initial meeting.
- Also, use word of mouth, posters, notices and a PA announcement.
- Recruit people from a broad range of groups in your school.
- At the initial meeting, gauge support and, if the idea of a conference and your topic is approved, get ready to take some basic decisions.
- Student organizers: recruit a teacher-advisor for your project.
- Teacher organizers: recruit eager students for your committee.

### Assemble a planning committee

- Identify people willing to take on specific jobs and get things done.
- Everyone on your committee should have a specific job, with someone taking responsibility for the following kinds of things:
  - conference facilities
  - program and speakers
  - student participants
  - facilitators and volunteers
  - accommodation and meals
  - fund-raising and community support
  - translation and interpretation
  - Conference Kits and registration
  - advertising and media relations
  - sponsorship
  - VIP program

### Set a date and decide on a venue

Once a preliminary decision has been taken to host a conference on the broad outlines contained in your proposal, two important basic decisions must be taken: when and where will the conference be held?

- Check your school calendar for a time that will not interfere with other school activities (like exams!). If you are inviting students from other schools, check their calendars too.
- Make sure the facilities you need for your conference (auditorium, gym, classrooms) are available at the chosen time and that you have approval to use them.
- **BOOK THE ROOMS!** Ask for written confirmation of the booking. (See also Section 9: “What kind of space do you need? Finalizing conference facilities.”)

# Who will come to the conference?

## Finding participants



### Call an initial meeting

How far you have to search for student delegates depends on what kind of conference you are hosting, but your work will be much decreased if you invite groups of students through a number of central contacts – that is, a single individual at your school, or at each of the other schools.

### **SINGLE SCHOOL, one-day conference**

- Ask to make a presentation at a staff meeting.
- Ask teachers who wish their classes to participate to register with you.

### **REGIONAL, one- to three-day conference with local and regional schools**

- Students: ask your teacher-advisor or school principal for names and phone numbers of potentially interested teachers in the region.
- Use your word-of-mouth, student pipeline to reach students in other schools. Ask student contacts in other schools to find a teacher to act as a coordinator for that school and to give you that teacher's name and phone number.
- Ask your student council for support and for contact names and phone numbers in other schools.
- Ask all teachers who wish their students to participate to register with you.

### **INTERPROVINCIAL, three- to six-day conference**

- Students: ask your teacher-advisor or school principal for names and phone numbers of potentially interested teachers in schools outside your province. Your history teacher might be a good person for contacts.
- Call the Students Commission in Toronto, and we will put you in contact with Student Commissioners from other provinces whose schools are interested in participating in interprovincial exchanges.
- Contact suggested teachers to see if they are interested.
- Send interested teachers your proposal and conference program.
- Ask all teachers who wish their students to participate to register with you.





## Where will participants stay and eat?

### Making arrangements

Set up a list or database of all participants so that you do not get yourself into a really big mess! A database lets you prepare name tags, arrange appropriate billeting, organize your discussion teams, etc., in an efficient and coordinated way.

### Transportation

- Ask participating teachers to arrange transportation for their own group to and from your conference.
- Confirm transportation arrangements with each participating school, and when they are arriving so you can meet and greet them.
- Make sure you send each group a map of how to get to the school or conference facility (including the address and phone number).
- If you have out-of-province schools participating, find some parents or volunteers to meet them at the airport, train or bus station (with a sign!).

### Billeting

The least expensive way to provide accommodation for participants is to billet them with students or teachers from your school. You might also ask a local service club to help find you billets. Many Canadian Optimist Clubs actively support the Students Commission and could be approached for help.

- Develop a list or database of all participants, indicating which ones need accommodation.
- Make a list of the people who might be willing to billet.
- Contact potential billetters and confirm that they are willing to lodge a participant. Get all the information you need about them (names, addresses and phone numbers).
- Match participants to billets.

- Confirm the arrangement in writing, letting each billeter know the name of their billet and your expectations in terms of lodging (dates), meals and assistance with transportation.
- Provide each billeter with information on the participant they are looking after and a copy of your conference program, so that they will know what meals and transportation they are responsible for.
- Inform each participant, on arrival, of his or her billeter (name, address, phone number).
- Write thank-you letters to billetters after the conference.

## Meals

Billets provide breakfasts and dinners for their charges. You need only arrange for lunches and snacks during the conference.

- Using your conference program, make a list of the lunches and snacks you will need to provide. Include times and locations for each.
- Make sure you have a place set up as a lunch and snack room where people can sit, stand, mingle and eat. You will need a few tables for serving.
- Find out how much it will cost to get simple foods delivered for your meals (e.g., sandwiches and fruit, subs and burgers, etc., for lunches, and doughnuts, juice and coffee for breaks).
- If you have a budget for your conference (from your school or from fund-raising), make sure you have enough money to cover the cost of the meals you are going to provide. If not, you may have to ask participating schools to pay a registration fee to contribute to the cost.
- Order the food ahead of time, making sure the delivery people have your name, address and phone number at the conference site. Remember to inform the office staff of the school or facility that the deliveries are coming.
- Arrange how to pay for the food when it arrives: cash on delivery, pre-paid or by invoice.

**TIP :** Book even more space than you think you will need. It is easier to cancel one or two classrooms than to try to find additional ones later!

# What kind of space do you need?

## Finalizing conference facilities

You made your initial bookings early in the process (see Section 3). Now, as arrangements for the conference evolve and solidify, you should compare your conference program with the preliminary arrangements to make sure you still have enough space for all your activities. Also, check that you have arranged for the necessary furniture and audio-visual equipment and that someone has taken responsibility for production of signage (bilingual) for all relevant rooms and doors.



### Room Checklist

- Large gymnasium or auditorium with:
  - room for all delegates during Open Forums;
  - chairs for all delegates;
  - a head table at the front of the room or on a stage, with chairs for the conference chairperson and speakers (four to six people);
  - P.A. system with microphones for those at the head table and one or two mics for questions and discussion from the floor.
  
- Small classrooms:
  - one for each discussion team;
  - with tables and chairs for team members.
  
- Break/Lunch Room with:
  - room for all participants;
  - serving tables as required;
  - chairs and tables to accommodate at least some people on a rotating basis.
  
- Control Centre: a classroom or office that conference organizers and volunteers can use as a working and information centre (a place for answering questions, preparing and posting notices, greeting special guests, briefing the media and working on the report. It should have:
  - tables and chairs;
  - a bulletin board;
  - computer equipment for report writing.



## What materials do you give participants?

### Preparing Conference Kits

Prepare a kit or an information package to give participants when they arrive. This information will answer most of their questions and help to orient them. Putting all the material in a folder, envelope or binder helps participants “keep it all together”!

#### Kit Checklist

- conference program
- name tag
- list of conference participants and what school, city and province they come from
- list of teams and facilitators
- map of area showing the conference facility or school, with address and phone number
- list of billets and their guests
- emergency numbers



## What do you do when they arrive?

### Arrivals and registration

Once participants have arrived and met their billets, you need to register them officially at your conference. This will help you to confirm who is participating and make sure you have everyone's name and address right.

#### Registration Checklist

- Set up a table and chairs in a central location close to the arrival point and furnish it a sufficient number of Conference Kits ready to hand out.
- Ask two or three people to be responsible for registration.
- Welcome each participant to your conference, city and school.
- Ask each participant his or her name and check it off on your list.
- Ask them to check that you have their names, addresses, etc., right and make corrections if necessary.
- Give each participant a kit.
- Ask them if they have any questions.
- Tell each participant where to go next.

**TIP :** Have a copy of your database or participant list ready in the registration area so you can check off arrivals and make corrections to your information.



## How does the conference start and end?

### Welcome, Opening and Closing Ceremonies

#### Opening Ceremony

Your conference should open with all the participants gathered in your large room to be addressed by one or more of the conference organizers. This helps to make the students feel welcome and later gives them a few faces to remember (yours!) when they have questions.

If you wish, you can have a special guest speaker address them at this time. (Short speeches only!)

#### Opening Ceremony Checklist

- Welcome participants and thank them for coming.
- Quickly summarize your reasons for having a conference on the selected topic or topics.
- Explain briefly what you will be doing for the next few days or hours.
- Make any necessary announcements (e.g., the location of the washrooms!).
- Introduce guest speakers. Thank them when they have spoken.
- Start your conference!

#### Closing Ceremony

Your conference should end with all the participants gathered together to review their experiences and say goodbye.

#### Closing Ceremony Checklist

- Thank the participants for helping to make the conference a success.
- Quickly summarize what you have accomplished together.
- Explain briefly what you will be doing to stay in touch after the conference.
- Distribute any thank-you gifts to participants (e.g., t-shirts, pins, certificates).
- Make any necessary announcements about departures.
- Say goodbye!



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