

YOUTH IMPACT SUMMIT

**REDEFINING YOUTH CIVIC
ENGAGEMENT IN ONTARIO**
2016/2017 REPORT



studio [Y]



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

STUDIO Y

Studio Y is Ontario's leadership and innovation academy for young people. Today's complex challenges must be solved together. Leaders must work collaboratively over time and across disciplines. Its flagship fellowship is a flexible eight-month program designed to develop leaders through intensive workshops, project work, coaching and mentorship, where 25 young fellows from across Ontario receive guidance from leading experts at MaRS.

MCYS

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services works with government and community partners to develop and implement policies, programs and a service system that helps give children the best possible start in life, prepare youth to become productive adults and make it easier for families to access the services they need at all stages of a child's development.

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I. YOUTH IMPACT SUMMIT EVENT SUMMARY

In preparation for Ontario's 150th birthday, the Youth Impact Summit was held on September 21st and 22nd, 2016 at MaRS Discovery District. This event brought together youth aged 16 to 30 and youth-serving organizations to explore the future of youth civic engagement in Ontario for

the next chapter and beyond. A total of 150 young Ontarians and 25 representatives from youth-serving organizations attended the Summit, while hundreds more engaged with the Summit through social media and an online community.



How can youth civic engagement be redefined in Ontario?

With this question in mind, the organizers designed the two-day Summit to understand what youth civic engagement could look like in Ontario to help promote the next generation of young community leaders. Prominent stakeholders participated as guest speakers and panelists to both inspire and guide young people to think more broadly and deeply regarding civic engagement issues of today and tomorrow.

The first day was designed to understand the present state of youth civic engagement in Ontario, and the second day was designed to explore the future of youth civic engagement in Ontario.



On the first day, participants were invited to explore topics related to current youth civic engagement across Ontario. Summit participants worked through the following set of activities:

- Defining civic engagement;
- Identifying community needs and priorities in Ontario (e.g., barriers);
- Mapping examples of civic engagement organizations and practices; and
- Understanding the most important areas of youth civic engagement.

On the second day, participants applied their ideas from the previous day to design examples of meaningful and useful civic engagement opportunities with the following in mind:

- How each opportunity addresses an important area in youth civic engagement;
- How it resolves a challenge identified by participants;
- If and how success can be measured; and
- The support and resources required to make an idea into a reality.

As a result, the Summit provided new ways of defining youth civic engagement, a glimpse into how young people are currently engaging and being engaged in their communities, a set of challenges young people face when trying to engage civically, an understanding of how young people can overcome these challenges, and a list of ideas that point to what youth civic engagement may look like in Ontario in the next 150 years.

II. BRIEF HISTORY AND A NEW DEFINITION OF YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT



Many youth in Ontario face multiple and overlapping barriers to their well-being (Lovell, Anucha, Houwer & Galley, 2016). In 2013, the Ontario government launched an evidence-based strategy to support youth well-being, “Stepping Up – A Strategic Framework to help Ontario’s Youth Succeed” (Stepping Up Report). This model identifies seven themes and twenty outcomes, as well as related indicators. One of the main themes identified by the Ontario government is to increase civic engagement and youth leadership. The Stepping Up Report discusses the opportunity to harness young people’s “innovative ideas and diverse perspectives”. Outcomes identified in the Stepping Up Report related to civic engagement and youth leadership include: playing a role in informing decisions that affect them; being engaged in their communities; and leveraging their assets to address social issues. The report asserts: “When they are given the right tools and opportunities to lead, they are well positioned to make positive changes in their communities”.

The first priority of the Youth Impact Summit was to expand on the traditional definition of civic engagement. Traditionally scholars have divided this engagement into three main categories: civic, electoral, and political voice. Activities related to civic engagement can include efforts to directly address an issue, work with others in the community to solve a problem together, or interact with the institutions of representative democracy. High levels of civic engagement also represent a sense of personal responsibility to uphold obligations as a community dweller.

BEYOND ELECTORAL ACTIVITY

The past few decades of youth civic engagement promotion has primarily focused on the domains of electoral and political voice amongst young individuals, such as voting behaviors or political activism. In evaluating these specific domains of civic engagement, observed trends suggest that youth are disengaged. For example, only 38.8% of eligible young voters cast a ballot in the 2011 Ontario election, a figure that increased only slightly from the 37.4% rate in the 2008 election (Statistics Canada, 2011). Due to this statistic, youth have been perceived as “politically apathetic” (Public Policy Forum, 2013). Recent studies in the literature confirm that electoral civic engagement in Ontario youth has in fact been low (Public Policy Forum, 2013; McGrane, 2015; Hamel, 2011).

However, scholars of youth civic engagement have advocated for a broader definition of civic engagement (Turcotta, 2015; Samara, 2014; Samara, 2015; Ho, Clarke & Dougherty, 2015), especially given the universal online community. In particular, civic engagement scholars argue that civic engagement should include emerging institutions and activities that achieve the same purpose as larger, longstanding organizations. A reduction of civic engagement trends into small sets of electoral or political behaviors are likely insufficient in capturing the full scope of public involvement.

“Civic engagement means the full involvement of people within a given community that work together collectively to implement social change.”

– PARTICIPANT: AGE 21-25



HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?

The Youth Impact Summit gathered definitions of civic engagement from applicants, attendees, and online participants. What does civic engagement mean to young people in Ontario?

Community surfaced as a key aspect of youth civic engagement. This suggests that many young people in Ontario view civic engagement with a broad, holistic lens where a stronger community or social change could serve as the eventual outcome.

HIGHLIGHTS OF YOUNG ONTARIAN'S DEFINITION OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

■ ***“Civic engagement involves engaging as an active participant in a community or institution. This can be sub-cultural, educational, etc., right up to engaging as a global community. Civic engagement goes beyond formal citizenship (which can be problematic) and can (and should) exist on both micro and macro levels. When people become active in creating and maintaining social structures, institutions, and change, they are participating in civic engagement.”***

– PARTICIPANT AGE: 21 TO 25



■ ***“I define civic engagement as the process of undertaking personal responsibility and agency to forge the betterment of the collective good.”***

– PARTICIPANT AGE: 21 TO 25



■ ***“Civic engagement: when citizens work towards a more just and equitable society. By articulating and working to address the shortfalls of our current systems, we can move our community forward. The process itself can vary greatly, but will certainly involve a great deal of listening, empathy, and collaboration. Individuals will naturally have different perspectives on the problems of greatest significance, as well as the best way to address them. If the collective creates space for diverse viewpoints and experiences, these differences can be understood and resolved in a positive manner.”***

– PARTICIPANT AGE: 21 TO 25

■ ***“Civic engagement means to make a difference in the civic life of our communities by the knowledge, skills, values and motivation. It means promoting the quality of life in a community, through both political and non-political processes.”***

– PARTICIPANT AGE: 26 TO 30



■ ***“The involvement in your own community or country. It means seeing something wrong and doing something about it, helping out when help is needed and doing your best to make a difference in the lives of those you live with. This could be as simple as clean up streets that need to be cleaned or organizing a food bank donation charity.”***

– PARTICIPANT AGE: 26 TO 30

III. HOW ARE YOUTH CURRENTLY ENGAGED WITH THEIR COMMUNITIES?

Youth civic engagement activities can take many forms and occur through many community organizations, especially for the purpose of social change. These organizations may include informal groups, non-profit and for-profit organizations, advisory bodies, and political parties.

Turcotta (2015) suggests that youth aged 20 to 24 are among the most engaged in political activities within the community. Young university students stand out in particular, as they show the highest participation rates within signing petitions and being involved in marches.

WAYS TO ENGAGE

To further understand the different ways in which Ontario youth get civically engaged, individuals at the Youth Impact Summit were asked about the specific organizations and opportunities that they were involved with in the past 12 months, and how they became involved.



LIST OF ORGANIZATIONS MENTIONED

- AIESEC Canada
- Bechange.ca
- Big Brothers Big Sisters
- Boys and Girls Clubs in Kawartha Lakes
- Boys and Girls Youth Leadership
- Building Movement
- Canada Young Leaders and Innovators
- City Youth Council of Toronto
- Civic Engagement and Youth ABC
- CivicAction Fellowship
- Civix
- Die Active Art Collective
- Environment and Climate Change Canada
- Experience Your Life Expo
- Experiential Life Expo
- Front Line Advisory Committee
- FYI
- Global Idea Institute
- Good Shepherd
- Gore Street Café
- Groundforce
- Hamilton Organizing for Poverty Elimination
- Head Start program - King's University
- Healthy Student Initiative
- Healthy Kids
- Indigenous Walks in Ottawa
- Inspirit
- Institute for Canadian Citizenship
- Leading to Reading
- Live Green Toronto
- Living Rock
- London Community Review
- London Youth Councils
- Mayor Youth Leadership Team
- Mindyourmind
- MuslimFest
- NGen Youth Centre
- Open Streets
- Participatory Creative Placemaking
- Pride Niagara
- Prime Minister's Youth Council
- Progressive Conservative Youth Association
- Promotion of Refugee Mental Health
- R.I.S.E. Edutainment (Reaching Intelligent Souls Everywhere)
- Roots to Harvest
- Search Institute Framework
- Skate Park Association
- SoJo
- Spectrum London
- Students on Ice
- The 12 Community Alliance
- Thunder Bay Youth Connections Coalition
- Toronto Public Library
- Toronto Youth Cabinet
- Toronto Youth Committee
- Trinity Theatre Toronto
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission
- Twelve Canada
- United Way Young Leaders
- Ve'ahavta
- Venture for Canada
- Walk in my Mocs
- Willow Springs Creative Centre
- Youth Advisory Councils
- Youth in Office
- Youth Innovation Roundtable discussions with MP Karina Gould
- Youth Opportunities Unlimited
- YouthREX

Looking deeper into the different ways in which Ontario youth have been engaging in civic activities and the organizations they mentioned, it is evident that there is an overall need for a broader interpretation of civic engagement. Some of the participants who identified as being engaged with their community said they were involved in charity organizations and media

organizations, such as school newspapers and social blogs. In addition, engaged youth said they get involved with organizations by donating money, founding or co-founding organizations, and starting initiatives themselves along with the more traditional methods of civic engagement such as volunteerism.

HIGHLIGHTS OF YOUNG ONTARIAN'S METHODS OF INVOLVEMENT



■ **“Volunteering is a great way to engage. Helping students with homework, keeping active to fight obesity and other health related issues.”**

PARTICIPANT AGE: 26 TO 30

■ **“There is an opportunity to help newcomer youth as they settle into their new home. I watch the news everyday and see the trauma that people go through in the conflict regions (Syria etc.) and wonder the emotional stress and repair they need as they settle in a new home, area and country they will now call home. They likely face language, culture and many more challenges when they come here. It is important to provide the youth the necessary support and what better way if they have a peer to lean on without fear of being judged (outside school).”**

PARTICIPANT AGE: 16 TO 20



■ **“I find lots of informal community festivals and gatherings that get people talking to each other, dancing together, trying free food together, can be super heartwarming and bring people together who otherwise may never interact.”**

PARTICIPANT AGE: 26 TO 30

In contrast to the low levels of civic engagement that are typically seen when considering specific sets of electoral behaviors such as voting alone, young individuals at the Youth Impact Summit showed that they do find ways to get involved with worthy causes.

On a related front, youth involvement in media organizations may also better capture how youth are actively contributing their voice in civic activities outside of traditional mediums for expressing a political voice. In student environments, media organizations typically

take the form of student newspapers or student-led online forums and provide many opportunities for youth to participate in their surrounding environment outside of class. These media organizations may be less common or less reachable to new young professionals transitioning out of their student communities.

WHAT ABOUT DIGITAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?

The increasing popularity of technology means that civic engagement activities need to be redefined to fit with a new era of digital citizenship (Anderson, Hilderman & Loat, 2013; Boulianne, 2015; Hamel, 2011; Ogilvie & Eggleton, 2013; Turcotte, 2015). Civic engagement via online activities is nonetheless under-examined. As one scholar explains, internet technology appears to intensify civic engagement for those who are already interested, but it remains unclear if it enables less interested people to get involved (Hamel, 2011).

This is an opportunity to evaluate current organizations that are available to youth and the ways in which organizations promote civic engagement activities both offline and online. Current media channels may need to undergo some changes to engage youth in diverse ways as the community expands via social networks and online participation. Broadening access to media organizations can help young people to navigate systems, particularly during periods of transition, and different types of participatory media may be especially effective for young people as they are forming new relationships with their communities. For example, one civic engagement idea that Youth Impact Summit participants worked on is a youth radio broadcast for 150 days to celebrate 150 years of Canada with the dual aim of being inclusive and showcasing the diversity of different Canadian communities. Presumably, these radio broadcasts can easily be repurposed and distributed as podcasts for sharing through online channels and social networks.



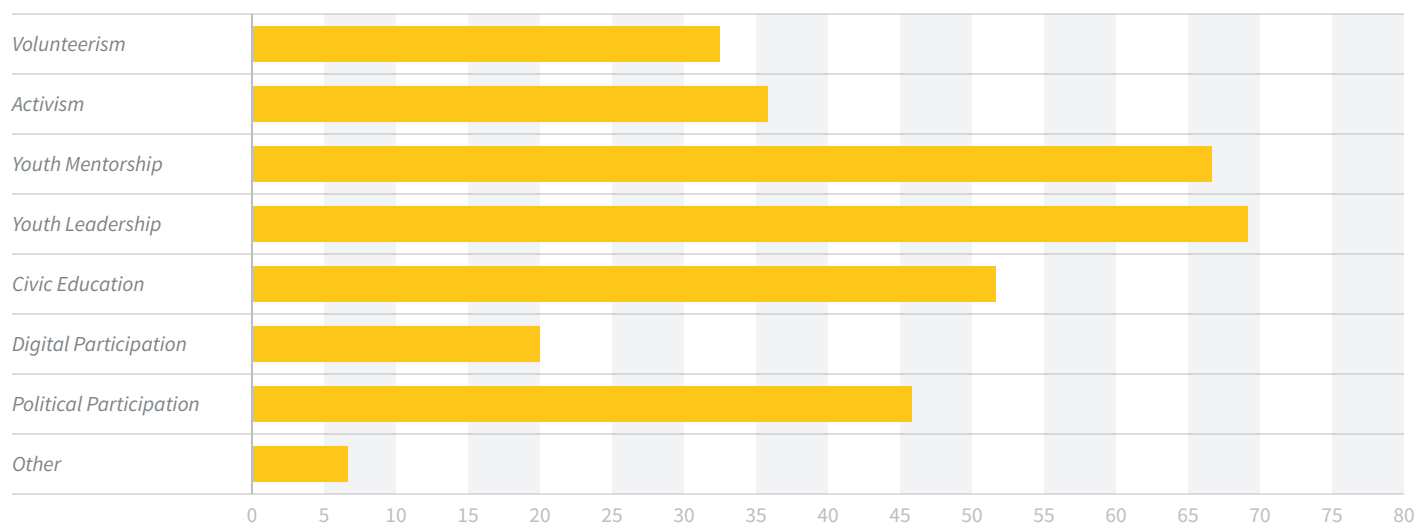
WHAT TYPES OF ENGAGEMENT ARE STILL NEEDED?

Recognizing that current opportunities in the community may not reflect a wide range of civic activities among Ontario youth today, individuals at the Youth Impact Summit were also asked about the types of engagement that are currently missing and are needed in the community. Youth identified two types of civic engagement activities that they would like to see more of in their communities: mentorship and leadership opportunities. These two types of engagement were seen as more necessary than the traditional types of civic engagement, such as volunteerism and political participation.

These gaps identified by youth share the same strategic priorities of key youth sector stakeholders, including the Ontario government. In the next chapter and beyond, it is clear that there should be considerable attention devoted to ensuring that young people have opportunities to grow together with mentors so that they will become the leaders of tomorrow.



One idea that participants at Youth Impact Summit developed was a program called “We Lead!” where youth leaders develop community-based projects with younger students in small groups and act as mentors in order to benefit the community and create change. Ideas like “We Lead!” could be pivotal assets as Ontario aims to change and expand the scope of youth civic engagement.



IV. WHAT ARE THE FRUSTRATIONS AND BARRIERS THAT YOUTH ENCOUNTER?

There are different characteristics in society that are known to shape civic engagement activities in youth. Civic activities like working with others in the community to solve a problem together or interacting with the institutions of representative democracy are not simply mobilized within individuals. There are factors in the family environment, neighborhood, and larger surrounding

community that affect how youth interact with each other and with institutions. Understanding how civic engagement behaviors vary across these different contexts will help reveal the barriers that hinder individual community involvement and inform future initiatives and programs.

WHAT ARE THE ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS THAT AFFECT CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?

Contextual factors in the community and society include educational systems, income inequality, and urbanization. Youth facing challenges with securing adequate employment and the precarious nature of the North American labour market could negatively affect their civic engagement. In a study to better understand these barriers, one-to-one interviews and focus groups were conducted with 36 young adults (between ages 18 and 29) in Toronto, Canada. The findings suggest that the challenges of the labour market can have a lasting psychosocial impact on young people and consequently affect youth's engagement civically and politically (Shier, Graham, Goitam & Eisenstat, 2014).

Other scholars explain that parties need to look at the underlying structural issues that keep youth away from politics, specifically the poor financial state of youth and youth unemployment rates. Canadian youth are following new pathways to adulthood: education and training take longer, home ownership is difficult to attain, starting families is not a priority, and steady jobs are hard to come by. Canadian youth have different preferences and live in a different environment than youth from previous generations and this means they remain alienated from the current system (Lee & Medeiros, 2014).

WHAT ARE THE INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS THAT SHAPE CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?

Individual variables that shape civic engagement activities include age, education level, employment status, community involvement, regional location, lifestyle, cultural roots, personal characteristics and wellbeing. For example, Bastedo (2015) compared youth who graduated from high school to those who did not and found that non-graduates are actually 50% less likely to vote. Young people from Aboriginal communities, language minorities, and new Canadian youth are also less likely than those who have graduated from university to turnout on Election Day (Bastedo, 2015). It was found that youth facing challenges with securing adequate employment struggle with civic engagement.

Previous literature also suggests that views towards community engagement and a consistent interest towards civic activities are developed gradually from childhood to young adulthood and influenced by attitudes and altruistic behaviors of parents as well as other role models (Anderson & Goodyear-Grant, 2008; Astuto & Ruck, 2010; Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Watts & Flanagan, 2007).

WHAT DID YOUNG INDIVIDUALS AT THE YOUTH IMPACT SUMMIT SAY?

Individuals at the Youth Impact Summit were asked to list and explain their frustrations and barriers to community engagement. The Summit provided participants with an opportunity to have free-form discussions in groups and openly share the struggles and challenges they face when attempting to engage at the community level.

Struggles with mental health, poverty, and housing were the top frustrations reported by the Summit participants. When discussing mental health, much of the frustration stemmed from a perceived lack of services/resources. The notions that those suffering from mental health are "stigmatized" and there is a "lack of empathy" from the broader community were particularly discerning. While poverty is a generally well understood concept, some suggested that the issue is "chronic" and there needs to be an "availability of mentorship, low-cost or free programs" for supporting the development of children living in poverty. Housing was very much a frustration linked to poverty and low income. One individual communicated that people would "very rarely" choose to be homeless, and much more could be done to address "homelessness" as a major issue.

HIGHLIGHTS OF YOUNG ONTARIAN'S FRUSTRATIONS

■ ***“Poverty & availability of mentorship/ low-cost or free programs to support development of children living in poverty.”***

PARTICIPANT AGE: 26 TO 30

■ ***“Sustainable housing for people with health/mental health concerns.”***

PARTICIPANT AGE: 21 TO 25

■ ***“Mental Health: access to care, stigma, lack of awareness, lack of empathy, sustained financial commitment, reintegration into the broader community.”***

PARTICIPANT AGE: 21 TO 25



Key barriers reported include time, financial restrictions, transportation, and social-related issues, such as experiencing social stigma, or having lower levels of self-confidence, and inadequate social support from other community members and organizations. Many of the barriers cited seem interrelated. Time was cited as the most common barrier as people must prioritize earning an adequate income, doing well in school, or raising a family over civic engagement. In terms of financial restrictions, much of the discussion centered around affordability. Youth cited that those living in poverty or coming from low income households could barely afford anything beyond bare necessity, with some even struggling “to put food on the table”, so engaging civically is difficult where “membership fees/entrance fees/ dress codes” might be required. Transportation came up as a related issue due to the cost of transit and the amount of time it might take to attend community events. Social-related issues, as described above, were broadly defined and frequently mentioned. Summit participants’ biggest concern as related to social issues was the concept of exclusion. For example, one participant stated that it could be “intimidating getting involved and voicing your opinion in front of people who are not your peers.” While participants wanted to do good for the community, they were also concerned that the community would reject them.

HIGHLIGHTS OF YOUNG ONTARIAN'S FRUSTRATIONS

■ ***“As an Arab-Canadian in a low-income area, there are many people in my community and demographic that struggle to put food on the table. It is impossible to expect people to participate in their communities if they don’t have the time to do so, because they’re spending so much time trying to supply for their families.”***

PARTICIPANT AGE: 26 TO 30

■ ***“Lack of good transportation, especially in the winter. Please, for the love of God, more subways and separated bike lanes (plus cost of transit...plus if tokens are available feeling awkward asking for them).”***

PARTICIPANT AGE: 26 TO 30

■ ***“Seeing as my demographic would include married with children, I would say that the biggest barrier is time. It’s hard for youth like myself with young families to find the time to be civically engaged in a way that others would find meaningful. Even though I consider myself to be someone who is very passionate about civics, I simply do not have the same kind of time that others have to actively participate in civic life. In this stage of my life, I can really only contribute if there’s a way for my children to be involved with me.”***

PARTICIPANT AGE: 26 TO 30

■ ***“Social barriers: Race, religion, lack of social supports, labelling, political affiliations.”***

PARTICIPANT AGE: 21 TO 25

V. HOW ARE YOUTH OVERCOMING BARRIERS?



While many youth have to confront economic and societal challenges and those who reside in more remote regional locations may have fewer opportunities to get involved in their communities, not all disadvantaged youth are disengaged. Some youth have become resilient despite encountering socioeconomic or social challenges. Stories heard at the Youth Impact Summit can help to understand some of the traits and characteristics of those resilient youth. Identifying the traits and characteristics that help these individuals to overcome challenges they encounter in their environments can help promote community engagement in other young individuals.

WHAT ARE THE TRAITS OF RESILIENT YOUTH?

Characteristics like agency or empowerment and life satisfaction have long been known to promote strength and recovery in children and youth who have experienced life changing events or negative circumstances while growing up (Knapp, Fisher, & Levesque-Bristol, 2010; Leung, 2009; Watts & Flanagan, 2007).

Agency or empowerment refers to the capacity of a given individual to act in any environment. Individuals are seen as self-organizing, proactive, self-regulating, and engaged in self-reflection. They are not just reactive organisms shepherded by external events. Agents or empowered individuals are those who have the power to influence their own actions to produce certain results, and embody the capacity to exercise control over their thought processes, motivation, affect, and action.

Those youth at the Youth Impact Summit with greater agency were also more likely to engage civically despite encountering barriers. They have found ways to confront the challenges that tend to occur in certain disadvantaged or marginalized environments, and embodied the capacity to exercise control over these unfortunate circumstances and make change on their own.

Youth empowerment is a process where young people are encouraged to take charge of their lives by addressing their situation and then taking action in order to improve their access to resources and transform

their consciousness through their beliefs, values, and attitudes (Kar, Pascual, & Chickering, 1999). Youth empowerment is different than youth development which is centered on developing individuals whereas empowerment is focused on creating individual capacity for greater community change.

Youth who have become empowered despite facing challenges in their everyday lives show that building a set of strategic skills and investing in leadership development can help enable civic engagement, especially for individuals residing in dynamic and multi-cultural communities. There are a variety of youth empowerment programs that help youth achieve empowerment. Youth empowerment programs are aimed at creating healthier and higher qualities of life for underprivileged or at-risk youth. These programs can be through non-profit organizations, government organizations, schools or private organizations but all have the underlying goal of improving communication among all individuals, and creating a network of support to mobilize the community for change.



WHAT IS A SUPPORTIVE SOCIAL NETWORK FOR CIVIC ENGAGEMENT?

Aspects of community bonding like an internal motivation to bridge ties with peers and members of other cultural groups, as well as having greater trust and reciprocity towards others in the community, may also help foster resilience by creating a strong and supportive network that is inclusive and proactive (Costa & Kahn, 2003; Putnam, 1993; Shah, 1998; Uslaner & Conley, 2003; Uslaner & Brown, 2005). Social networks that are inclusive and proactive can be better mobilized to help members act on their environments and make change together.

Examination of the role of community attachment and youth civic engagement has revealed that community attachment, such as caring for others in the city and feeling like a member of the community is related to volunteering and voting (Boulianne & Brailey, 2014).

Community allies may also impact civic engagement amongst youth. John, Travers, Munro, Liboro, Schneider & Greig (2014) outline how gay-straight alliances (GSAs) work to connect youth with community resources in Waterloo Region, Ontario, Canada. Fifteen individuals (youth, teachers, and a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer [LGBTQ] youth service provider) participated in interviews for this study. The findings show that data GSAs in Waterloo Region decrease isolation by connecting youth with other LGBTQ community members, events, and resources. They also demonstrate that GSAs play a crucial role in connecting youth with others, both inside and outside their respective schools, and provide opportunities for youth to engage with the broader LGBTQ community and community supports, potentially civically and politically (John et al., 2014).

At the Youth Impact Summit, individuals were asked about their views towards forming community bonds with other people in general, other people with similar ethnic or cultural origin, and other people with different ethnic or cultural origin. Those young people who felt that it was important to establish and maintain ties both with other people with a similar ethnic and cultural origin, and with those with a different ethnic or cultural background, were the most civically engaged in the community. This suggests that youth who have adapted to their immediate cultural environment while still remaining connected with their root heritage can help their peers who are still struggling with a multi-cultural identity to better navigate a large, diverse community without abandoning their own ethnic or cultural origins. Cultural empowerment specifically aims to recreate cultural practices and redefine cultural rules and norms for youth.

VI. SUMMARY OF PROTOTYPES (IDEAS GENERATED AT YOUTH IMPACT SUMMIT)

Discussions about current civic engagement activities in Ontario, the frustrations that youth feel towards civic issues, the barriers that youth encounter in their own environments, and the identified gaps that are still in the community, were rounded off with moving ideas for the future. The final activity at the Youth Impact Summit was a group brainstorming

session to generate prototypes illustrating programmatic initiatives that can help promote civic engagement in Ontario youth. These prototypes conveyed the overarching theme of mentorship and leadership, as well as ways to further bridge different communities and the bond between young individuals and the institutions in their society.



► YOUTH-ADULT PARALLEL BOARDS

Youth (ages 14+)

A policy that makes it mandatory for all organizations that involve youth to have youth a Board of Directors to be involved with the Board of Directors of adults. To ensure no decisions are made unless the youth board is consulted. This will encourage youth to be involved and have the opportunity to make a difference. This would go a long way to reducing the token youth that most organizations use for their “youth-friendly” duties. Youth would have an active role in the decision making process that directly impacts them. This would also allow for mentorship as youth would learn how to be on a board and have direct connection with supportive adults. Having a youth board would also be an excellent succession plan for all boards moving forward.

► YOUTH IN CITY PLANNING

Youth in urban communities

A forum to allow for youth to talk with city urban planners about transportation issues affecting their communities as well as other challenges.

► YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL

Youth (general)

A program for amplifying the voice of youth through a specific forum to comment on decisions made. This makes youth lobbying more effective and likely to be listened to when united together. It also creates a sense of community pride when youth are involved in decision making and strengthens the likelihood of future involvement in the formal democratic process by providing them a foundation and understanding of the system early on.

► WE LEAD!

Youth (general)

A program with 18-to-30-year-old youth leaders developing community-based projects with students (e.g., grade 7 to 8) in small groups and acting as mentors in order to benefit the community and create sustained and meaningful change. Small groups engage in civic entrepreneurship to better their communities based on the community needs.

► SHADOW YOUTH COUNCIL

Youth (general)

A program for youth who are interested in governance at the municipal level to be elected.

► REPURPOSING OF SPACE

Youth (general)

An initiative targeting any unused city space. Have youth identify spaces that are not being used properly or at all. Hire the youth to repurpose it to form a space that stimulates a prolonged interaction (e.g., art, garden, bench). The youth would be employed/paid.

► QUEER AND TRANS YOUTH

Youth (Queer and Trans in the Ministry Northern Ontario Communities)

A peer support network GSA that has a program coordinator, remote coordinator of youth mentors, online peer support, regional forums for capacity building, community building, knowledge mobilization, consultation/needs assessment, resource development, partnerships with other LGBTQ2S organizations and connections to granting programs like BeChange.ca and Dare to Dream to help youth ideas to happen.



▶ **Youth (general)**

An interdisciplinary hub that provides growth opportunities for young people. Linkages to government activities that promote engagement and youth voice.

▶ **Youth in inner city**

Access to resources for inner-city youth and their community (as they do not have access to resources as youth from the suburbs). The youth civic engagement initiative with the inner city youth will lead to better and more informed dialogue. After a safe space is created, real change can occur.

▶ **Youth (general)**

After school resume building program for young adults. Program also gives them opportunities to get professionally connected.

▶ **Youth with mental health issues**

An anonymous online chat room for people with mental health illnesses.

▶ **Youth (general)**

The creation of youth focus groups in all ridings in Ontario. The focus group should meet on a monthly basis to provide insight and discuss issues of their communities. The recorded data should then be provided to public services and ministries for future reference and to come up with concrete solutions to solve those concerns.

▶ **Youth in school**

Introducing indigenous language classes to the Ontario (ideally across Canada) on the same level as French is part of the curriculum.

▶ **Youth in poverty**

Fully-funded apprenticeship/training programs targeting homeless and people below and at the poverty line to get back on their feet through joining the workforce and gaining stronger experience towards reaching financial stability.

▶ **Youth in marginalized, rural, remote communities**

A mobile incubator providing maker spaces, labs, tools, etc. Using soup to entice the community to participate and vote on the ideas they want to implement and invest in. Targeting communities that lack access to incubator spaces and funding for initiatives.

▶ **Youth in school**

A three-pronged approach. 1) Civic education especially in grade ten has to include more experiential education. This includes but is not limited to mock elections, group/class volunteering, field trips, participating in council meetings. 2) Careers class has to talk about the potential to work in the charity/non-profit sector. In addition, show that politics is not just about being an elected politician but has a breadth of positions. 3) Students should be provided skill-based volunteering opportunities. That is where students can gain skills specifically in areas where they deem themselves weak.

▶ **Youth (general)**

A curriculum that can be implemented in different schools and community organizations that engage different ranges of youth capacity. The beginning stage is simply engaging youth and understanding their individual desires and goals. Youth workers should then be trained to be able to pick up on passions youth display during the time they spend together and find ways to help them tap more into these passions. An example would be having several mentorship one-on-one conversations with a youth over a long period of time (6 months) and realizing that they care about overall cleanliness. Then encourage the youth to lead or participate in community clean ups. The more they participate in little activities like this, the more they see the changes they can make. These events also provide opportunities for meeting other like-minded people and building their capacity. As their capacity increases, they are further engaged at a higher level.

▶ **General public; homeless youth/people**

An initiative to convert existing telephone booths into mobile stations with basic internet access. Additionally, booths can be used to transmit public Wi-Fi.

▶ **Youth (general)**

A youth radio broadcast for 150 days to celebrate 150 years of Canada. This radio broadcast would be created by youth, for youth, and anyone else interested. It would highlight different youth leaders, youth initiatives, youth talent, etc. all over Canada. The broadcast would take place in different regions of Canada to make it inclusive and to showcase different communities around the nation. This initiative will help youth gain new skills in terms of broadcasting, social media, advertising, etc.

► **Youth in school**

A program for revitalization of the current civic education curriculum, by facilitating civic engagement co-ops within the community, which are focused on youth areas of interest, as well as class based initiatives in the elementary system facilitated by youth leaders. Program would contribute to school credit and mandatory volunteerism.

► **Youth (general)**

An arts program for youth, led by youth. All arts self-expression as a form of community engagement. Targeting all art forms, the program would include food, space, youth leaders, informed and knowledgeable adults, marketing, opportunity to showcase talent, transportation, and volunteer mentors. Some of the needs this program meets include empowerment, confidence building, leadership skills, engaging with larger cross section of community, community belonging, freedom of expression, entrepreneurial skills, and financial needs.

► **Youth (general)**

An initiative of funding grants made available to create a salary position for youth led/youth created non-profit organizations specifically for providing mental health support to employees.

► **Youth (general)**

A program that supports youth by providing them a peer youth to call/lean on inside and outside of school to help them stay focused or make them aware of programs and facilities available to them.

► **Youth (general)**

A youth mentorship initiative which focuses on building the youth up to take the lead on civic engagement.

► **Youth organizations**

A reflective space for youth serving organizations to facilitate knowledge sharing.



Other ideas expressed when asked of prototypes to increase civic engagement:

- ◉ Expanding volunteer opportunities, the knowledge on exceptionalities, and group projects to better the community.
- ◉ Involving youth in the decisions that get made whenever and wherever possible.
- ◉ An Aboriginal specific initiative which focuses on recommendations outlined in the truth and reconciliation report.
- ◉ Focusing on hard to serve and at risk/high risk Youth.
- ◉ An initiative which focuses on education and employment skills building program.
- ◉ Focusing on health and healthy lifestyles.
- ◉ Affordable housing opportunity for Low Income Residents (without long line lists!).
- ◉ Free mental health help (Federal Government Level).
- ◉ Free dental and eye care covered by OHIP.
- ◉ Equitable access to funding opportunities and remove systemic barriers to funding sources for marginalized groups and grass roots organizations.
- ◉ Affordable and accessible transit for youth in rural communities and towns.
- ◉ Creating a movement, amplifying the importance of youth input into their own environments and the necessity of service providers, agencies, and governments finding and meeting disengaged youth where they are at.
- ◉ Free Tuition. Intended audience - the entire nation. This initiative is about investing in the nation's and individual's future social and economic wellbeing.

**Prototype descriptions have been edited by the researchers for clarity and consistency while balancing the original wording/description from youths.*

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