

**FUTURE
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a network for youth

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Youth Engagement Toolkit

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 **TAMARACK**
INSTITUTE

Canada

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Introduction

Tip: <<Short and Sweet>>

Keep your audience in mind when creating a youth engagement strategy. It does not need to be 20 pages long to be effective. In fact: the opposite!

Future North is a five-year (2019 – 2024) collective impact strategy, affiliated with the Communities Building Youth Futures Initiative, that aims to address the barriers youth (aged 15 – 30 years old) face in pursuing education and employment opportunities. The District of Sudbury and Manitoulin is one of thirteen communities within Canada that has been chosen to develop a system-wide solution by youth for youth as they build and act upon plans for their future. Working in partnership with Tamarack Institute, Future North will implement its Common Agenda, where its primary goal is to engage youth to develop strategies that allow young people to be engaged in their communities and successfully navigate transitions from youth to adulthood.

The purpose of this document is to provide resources and guidelines Future North adheres to in order to create meaningful youth engagement strategies. Future North recognizes that there is an innumerable amount of resources on youth engagement strategies and therefore this document does not recreate these strategies but highlights some frameworks and best practices for youth-serving agencies.

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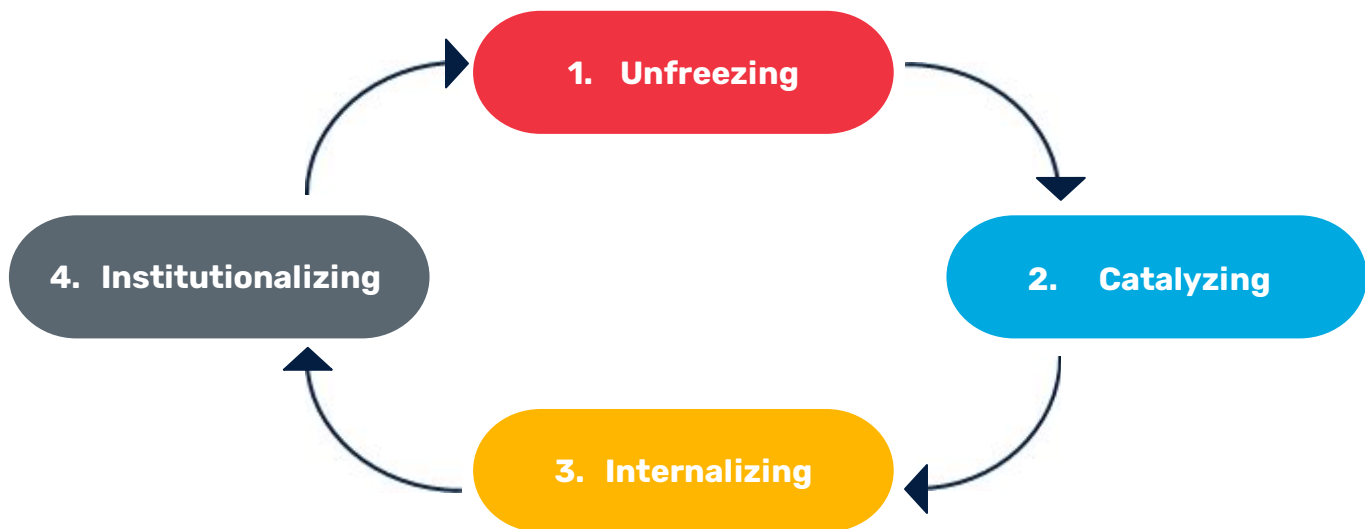
Our Commitment:

“To work side by side with young people in the community to understand their experiences, and to work to influence change, so together we can improve available resources and create opportunities in our community.”

Four Stages of Change

Tip: This work can and should be lead by youth. Hire some youth interns to champion the work!

The following framework is a great tool to understand how to promote youth engagement in an organizational level.



The JCSH Youth Engagement Toolkit defines Kirby’s Institutionalizing Participation Framework as:

1. Unfreezing involves recognizing the need to change and unblocking existing attitudes and styles of working. Both existing beliefs and practices, and external pressure (e.g. government funders, etc.) need to be unfrozen.
2. Catalyzing knowledge into action can be facilitated by establishing “champions” within organizations and systems. 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/system.
3. Internalizing change involves building staff capacity with time and resources for recruitment, training practice, and evaluation, so that engagement becomes sustainable within organizations and systems.
4. Institutionalizing youth engagement into policy and standards is necessary for it to become mainstream practice.

(Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health , 2021, p. 4).

Youth Engagement Framework

Tip: It is OK to acknowledge where we stand on this ladder. Support a co-op student to conduct some research and give them a budget to take your engagement to the next level!

Full Engagement "Youth Partners"

Rung 8: Youth-led projects where decision making is shared equally among youth and adults.

Rung 7: Youth initiated projects with adults only playing a supportive role.

Rung 6: Youth voices are given equal decision making power in adult initiated projects.

Partial Engagement "Youth Recipients"

Rung 5: Youth provide feedback and ideas on adult-led projects. They are informed on how their ideas were implemented, and the outcomes of the project.

Rung 4: Youth are assigned specific roles and responsibilities within an adult-led project.

Non-participation

Rung 3: There appears to be youth representation, however, their voices are not given equal consideration and therefore their participation has no meaningful impact.

Rung 2: The presence of youth is used to bolster their cause (marketing ploy). The project is not truly youth-led, however, it is advertised as such.

Rung 1: Causes are believed to be inspired by youth based on passive participation when it is truly influenced by adults.

8. Youth-initiated, shared decision with adults

7. Youth-initiated leadership

6. Adult-initiated shared decision making

5. Consulted and informed

4. Assigned but informed

3. Tokenism

2. Decoration

1. Manipulation

(Adapted from Hart, 2008, p. 19-30)

Youth Engagement Efficacy Checklist

Tip: Struggling with engagement?

A little Honoraria goes a long way

The Youth Engagement Efficacy Checklist helps identify success indicators of youth participation within organizations.

- Dedicated seats for youth at the Leadership Table/Board of Directors as well as at the action teams.
- Youth voices are given equal consideration. Recognize that young people are valuable partners and key informants who bring a diversity of perspectives and experiences to every area of community work.
- Engage a diversity of youth from different cultures, economic status, geographical locations and experiences to ensure the different demographics within your community are represented.
- Tangible outcomes are achieved based on the feedback and input youth have provided.
- Opportunities for youth-led projects with mentoring and resource support provided by youth allies.
- Report back to youth on how their ideas were implemented within the project/organization.
- There is continuous monitoring and assessments of youth participation in projects to ensure the environment is working towards more youth engagement.
- Strategies are implemented to involve youth in research, program monitoring and evaluation of services.
- An honorarium policy has been established to address some of the practical barriers to engagement and to recognize and value the time, expertise and skills that young people bring to the table.

Assessment Tools

Tip: Assign a student or intern with the task of creating your evaluation questions! OR use honoraria to pay a youth.

Assessment tools are necessary to identify best practices and challenges experienced within a project/organization. Future North recommends using Google Forms as a tool to create intake surveys, receive feedback on project ideas, evaluate projects implemented and individual experiences, and execute community-based research.

Below is an example of questions asked in one of our evaluation surveys used to understand youth experience in participating in committees.

Rate how well the organization does the following:	1 = Poor	2	3 = Average	4	5 = Excellent
Create opportunities and space for you to share your thoughts and ideas	1	2	3	4	5
Offer opportunities to develop and take action on ideas	1	2	3	4	5
Create opportunity for skill development and professional development	1	2	3	4	5
Create an environment where you felt comfortable approaching the staff with questions and concerns	1	2	3	4	5
Rate your overall experience	1	2	3	4	5

The following are short/long answer questions:

What skills were you able to develop or improve during your time?

What are areas of improvement for our organization?

What are some of your positive experiences with the team?

Youth Engagement Strategies (Y.E.S)

Surveys, Questionnaires and Focus Groups

Tools used to determine service needs, conduct community outreach and evaluate project outcomes.

Youth Participation in Committees

Youth representation at the Leadership table and Action Teams. Youth provide constructive feedback on project proposals and how they reflect the needs of youth in the community.

Guest Speakers

Create opportunities for youth with lived experience to share stories that will help service providers understand the barriers youth face in pursuing education and employment opportunities.

Youth Led Projects

Create opportunities where youth are designing, leading and implementing project ideas with mentorship and resource support.

Mentorship

Connecting youth with adult allies and creating opportunities for skill and knowledge development.

Pillar	Navigation Connecting youth to opportunities, pathways and supports that align with their future goals	Education Turning hands-on community projects into co-op credit and employment for youth	Partnership Working together to test innovative ideas and bring youth to the table	Advocacy Working from within the system to transform the youth experience
Overview	Address service navigation challenges that youth face in the community	Utilize community development projects as alternative education programs	Utilize collective impact model to share responsibility of system change	Highlight and address the barriers that youth face to education, employment and civic engagement
Goal	To increase accessibility to existing supports on a Municipal, Provincial and Federal level	To increase the number of co-op students, interns and alternative education students through the Future North network	To work in partnership with youth, community agencies, businesses and political leaders to move the work of the initiative forward	To increase communication between youth-serving agencies; research and report on barriers and advocate for youth to participate in their community
Y.E.S Implemented	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth-led focus groups and surveys used to gather information from youth in the community on how to design and create the Technology Hub. Youth-led Project: Youth interns designed and implemented a financed project. Youth-led trainings and webinars. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth are allowed to explore their carpentry skills with the build of the arbour, providing tangible, hands-on experience. Youth are involved as evaluators and researchers by gathering feedback from other youth to analyze quality improvements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Designated seats for youth at the Leadership table and action teams. Youth and adults join together as equals to be a part of a shared decision-making process. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Youth Expert Panel: youth provide ideas on how to support young people within the community, as well as provide constructive feedback and insight on proposals and how they reflect the needs of youth. Youth attend the Leadership Table as Guest Speakers to advocate for their needs.

Meaningful Collaboration with Youth

1. Use Continuous Feedback Loops
2. Meet Youth Where They Are at
3. Develop Trust
4. Be accountable
5. Recognize the value of lived experience
6. Communicate on the same level
7. Affirm the work and contribution of youth as equals
(Tamarack Institute, 2020)

Conclusion

Tip: There are thousands of resources out there about engagement. Don't get caught up in research for too long, start testing your strategies and making gains with youth engagement!

Part of Future North's commitment to youth engagement is to utilize a collective impact model, advocate for the importance of youth involvement and support other organizations to do so as well. If your organization has any further questions or would like more information contact our Community Engagement Coordinator.

Additional resources Future North recommends youth-serving organizations to explore are:

The Tamarack Guide of Meaningfully Engaging Youth; Elaborates on how and what meaningful collaboration with youth looks like.

YouthREX Website; provides various resources such as youth-related research, training opportunities, toolkits, etc. Link: youthrex.com

References

1.

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2.

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Canada



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