

Youth Environmental Network

www.yen-rej.org

National

MISSION

The Youth Environmental Network's (YEN) mission is to increase the effectiveness of the young Canadian environmental movement, as well as to raise awareness of today's environmental issues, environmental policy, and promote lifestyle changes. YEN is like a support group for other environmentally oriented organizations. If a group needs some advice or some help with something, YEN is glad to help. For example, if an organization needs some help with fund-raising, YEN will organize a fund-raising workshop for them. If they need help writing proposals, or how to get linked with other organizations, YEN provides these groups with support. YEN acts as a disseminator of information and encourages collaboration between environmental groups.

HOW DO THEY ENGAGE YOUTH?

Because YEN has worked with so many organizations and has proved to be a great help to them, word of mouth has helped YEN spread its reputation. They also make use of listservs, posters, newsletters, and their revamped website. YEN is also able to distribute 100,000 dollars worth of microgrants to youth groups who do community-based action projects that the youth develop themselves. YEN has helped support all sorts of projects, varying from climate change and multi-media projects to the one-ton challenge.

“Giving youth the power to create their own project was a great way to engage youth and get them working on a campaign. Doing that really gives them focus, goals, and a motivation that keeps them engaged and teaches them lessons for life.”

-Laura MacPherson, National Director

YEN holds annual capacity building retreats where youth involved are invited to identify what the movement needs to do in terms of expansion and new initiatives. This is a great example of an organization tapping the number one source for information on youth engagement: youth. Knowing what they want will prime any organization to successfully incorporate youth into their work.

The Youth Friendly Guide provides some useful guidelines to follow when putting together a meeting such as the YEN retreat; how to make it real for youth,. It outlines how to make meetings relevant, on topic, swift-paced, effective and fun.

HOW DO THEY PROMOTE THEMSELVES?

YEN has found a great way to promote themselves to youth. Basically, through the supplying of information, expertise and microgrants, YEN allows youth to undertake projects with the YEN name as a partner organization. The trade is great for both sides. Youth get support to launch a project that will be driven by them, and in return, YEN gets recommended to youth by youth. It's one thing to have your organization publicized by radio or television, but the impact is much greater on youth when their own friends come and recommend you to them.

At YEN's retreats, they make sure to keep it open to people from all sorts of movements, and not just the environmental one. Just last year, many people from more socially oriented movements were

invited to participate in discussions and activities. There, they were able to experience and witness the links between the two movements and were able to integrate some elements of each other's work with their own. Thus pointing out the similarities between the goals of your organization and the interests of your target youth can be a useful tool to engage them.

WHAT ADVICE DO THEY GIVE?

“The approach you take on engaging youth is critical. Make sure that you're open to suggestions by youth and are ready and willing to experiment at least a little bit.”

-Laura MacPherson, National Director

Youth like to be involved in projects that are testing new ground and trying out new and innovative ideas. Your organization has to be willing to take a risk on youth and their ideas. Most youth are still quite free-spirited and have a lot of creativity and imagination just waiting to be harnessed and used productively. It's important to remember that just as much as youth can learn from your organization, so can you learn from youth.

“Be open to the lessons that youth can teach you. People talk a lot of about mentorships these days and I believe that mentorships go both ways. There's lots of learning that takes place on both sides of the fence, and creativity, as well as a fresh source of energy can be tapped into by learning from young people.”

-Laura MacPherson, National Director

WHAT THE YOUTH FRIENDLY GUIDE SAYS

The Youth Friendly Guide elaborates on the benefits of including youth in an organization. It reminds the reader that involving young people is not only about the qualitative idea of inclusion. Rather, it is about recognizing that youth can offer measurable benefits to organizations and adults. These benefits include adults gaining a better understanding of youth, a fresh perspective, a link to other youth, and a great source of enthusiasm, flexibility and pro-activeness.

As a final point, it's also important to avoid long-winded documents explaining the details of your projects. If they are absolutely necessary, it's important to have someone patient and approachable to take the time to explain the important details to the young members, so that they're better able to keep up with new developments. Providing complementary papers which contain simplified texts and which clarify concepts pertaining to the main documents are also very useful.